

TEACHER TALKING TIME VS. STUDENT TALKING TIME: MOVING FROM TEACHER-CENTERED CLASSROOM TO LEARNER-CENTERED CLASSROOM

Asst.prof. Bisera Kostadinovska-Stojchevska, PhD

Faculty of Education-Bitola, University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Macedonia

E-mail: k_bisera@yahoo.com

Lecturer MA Ivana Popovikj, PhD candidate

Faculty of Philology "Blaze Koneski". Univeristy Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Macedonia

E-mail: ivana.popovikj@yahoo.com

Abstract. Teacher talking time refers to the amount of class time the teacher spends speaking to the class, either as part of a lecture or in discussions. Particularly in ESL classes, more time needs to be given to students so they can speak more—foreign language learners improve more rapidly when they are able to practice what they've learned more often. Some EFL/ESL researchers say that students should speak for 70% of the lesson. Teachers should speak for 30% of the time. Of course, some lessons may require longer explanations on the part of the teacher. Or other lessons may only require a minimal amount of explanation, and 90% or more may be devoted to conversational activities. But this 70/30 figure works well as a goal in most classroom situations.

The aim of the paper is to show whether this percentage is true and achievable and whether this percentage is applicable for both literature and linguistic content. The results will be achieved through a research conducted with the teachers of English in both elementary and high schools in Bitola, who will answer a series of questions regarding how much they talk in class and how much time they dedicate to Q&A sessions.

Keywords: *Teacher talking time, student talking time, ESL/EFL.*

© 2019 IJALSC. All rights reserved.

1. INTRODUCTION

The English language has come to be the second most spoken language in the world in terms of native speakers and speakers as second language (BBC, 2013). Most of this uncontrolled spread of and necessity of communication among people from all over the world has been possible due to the different technological inventions created in this advanced era, also named as Globalization¹. Communicating across the globe has become essential in order to develop international economic and political relationships, and even though the geographical barriers have been left aside by technology, language barriers can only be successfully overcome by a common language. The English Language has become the representation of progress in a variety of aspects related to communication. The concept of 'global language' (also named as 'lingua

franca') has emerged to play a relevant role in the way in which English language functions and also the influences it makes on the rest of the globe. David Crystal (2003) considers that a language can be named as 'global' when it can be recognized all over the world (p. 3); moreover, stating that "the statistics [...] suggest that about a quarter of the world's population is already fluent or competent in English" (p. 6).

The development of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method brought with it a methodology which emphasized communication in the classroom, pair and group activities and student involvement in the learning process. Teacher Talking Time (TTT) often means that the teacher is giving the students information that they could be finding out for themselves, such as grammar rules, the meanings of vocabulary items and corrections. Teacher explanations alone are often tedious, full of terminology and difficult to follow. There may be no indication of whether the students have understood.

On the other hand, if the teacher takes the dominant role in classroom discourse in terms of initiating the topic, allocating turns and evaluating comments, the student's role is only that of respondent. Opportunities for developing the speaking skill are therefore severely limited. If the teacher is constantly

Corresponding Author

Bisera Kostadinovska-Stojchevska, PhD. Faculty of Education-Bitola, University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Macedonia. E-mail: k_bisera@yahoo.com



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license. The article is published with Open Access at www.alscjournal.com

dominant and controlling, the learners take no responsibility for their own learning but learns what the teacher decides and when. Student autonomy is thus limited.

At the simplest level, teacher talk time (TTT) refers to how much the teacher talks during a lesson. However, this will vary according to the stage of the lesson. For example, the teacher needs to speak more when providing explanations of and examples for the target language early in the lesson. Elsewhere he/she may speak less as students need ample opportunity to practice the new material. Overall, however, the teacher should roughly limit his speaking to 20% to 30% of the class time, with the remainder devoted to speaking/use of the language by the students.

On the other hand, Student Talk Time (STT) should be around 80% during the course of the lesson. Their use of the language should further promote qualitative thought. For example, this means that oral drills, substitution drills, and other exercises remain important because students need these activities to become familiar with and absorb the target language. However, too many drills or other, similar activities result in students who switch off their brains. They fail to critically observe, analyze, and practice with the new language.

Active use of the target language (further referred to as L2) by students is considered to be an integral part of the language acquisition process (Nunan, 1999: 241). An effective learner-centered L2 classroom, therefore, should provide an environment in which students can contribute to learning activities and maximize their use of the language (Van Lier, 2001: 103). In an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) classroom, in particular, the opportunities to practice verbal communication outside the classroom are often significantly limited (Paul, 2003: 76).

Teacher talk time (TTT) within the EFL classroom has been critically evaluated in the process to increase students' L2 practice time (Willis, 1990: 57; Paul, 2003: 137). Much research on TTT has focused on its quantity (amount) and/or quality (effectiveness). These studies have provided new insights into the ways EFL teachers teach in the classroom. Research has shown that the most common classroom exchange has three 'turns': (1) teacher asks, (2) learner answers, (3) teacher evaluates the answer. This sequence is repeated thousands of times a day in classrooms all over the world. It is what passes for teaching and learning. Morgan and Saxton question this assumption: "The classic concept of learning is

that it occurs when the teacher asks the questions and the students can answer them, but the reality is that learning does not occur until the learner needs to know and can formulate the question for himself." (1991:75).

Teacher talking time is the time which teachers spend while instructing, lecturing, managing or/and organizing the lesson.¹ However, the amount of talk time the teachers use in a given lesson is not the same, it varies depend up on both the specific goals of the syllabus adopted and their pedagogical principles (Nilton, 2005). For instance, introducing new topic may require much more time than summarizing the lesson. On the other hand, Student Talk Time (STT) is the amount of time student use while in classroom interaction. A lot has been said so far regarding the teacher's talk time. For students, the most effective use of their time occurs when they are actively using the target language (Darn, 2007).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Negative effects of teachers talking for an excessive amount of time have been observed in a number of studies. Allwright (1982: 10) claimed that teachers who 'work' too much in the classroom were not teaching effectively. He commented that a good language teacher should be able to 'get students to do more work' in the classroom. Ross (1992: 192-93 cited in Nunan, 1999: 209) also indicated that constant teacher talk during the lessons did not significantly improve students listening comprehension and communication skills. These studies suggested, at least indirectly, that the amount of TTT might be inversely correlated to the degree of students' active learning opportunities, i.e. the greater the amount of TTT, the less the students get to practice L2 in a classroom and therefore, the less the effectiveness of the lesson (Paul, 2003: 76). In order to further explore such a relationship between TTT and the student's learning process, various TTT analyses have been conducted (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). Many of the studies have highlighted that the amount of TTT predicted by the teachers prior to the

1 Nilton, H.(2005). Teacher Talking Time in the EFL Classroom. Profile Issues in Teachers' Professional Development (6) pp 97-106)Colombia: Universidad Nacional de Colombia . Retrieved from: <http://redalyc.uaemex.mx/src/inicio/ArtPdfRed.jsp?iCve=169213801009v>

analyses alarmingly differed from the actual measurement. As a result of these studies, a number of teaching techniques and approaches have been proposed to curb excessive TTT and to optimize the balance between TTT and STT in EFL classrooms. These techniques and approaches include:

a) Management of error correction (Willis, 1990: 61-62; Allwright and Bailey: 1991; Richards and Lockhart 1994: 191-192),

b) Management of responses and elicitation (Chaudron, 1988; Skehan, 2001; van Lier, 2001: 94-95),

c) Student pair work and group work (Richards and Lockhart, 1994: 153; Long, 1976 cited in Nunan, 1999: 54; Paul, 2003: 41-42; Willis, 1990: 60),

d) Sufficient wait-time after elicitation (Richards and Lockhart, 1994: 188; Paul, 2003: 19), and

e) The clarification of instructions and expectations for the students (Rosenshine and Stevens, 1986; Mercer, 2001: 255).

Here, it is important to note that although excessive TTT in the classroom has been criticized by many researchers, they usually do not advocate minimizing TTT as an objective (van Lier, 2001: 104). Instead, a number of studies have emphasized the quality or effectiveness (contents) of TTT rather than the quantity (Paul, 2003; Ellis, 1984; van Lier, 2001: 104). TTT should be allocated to relevant interactions between the teachers and students. At the same time, teacher's utterances need to be explicit and level-appropriate for the students in the classroom. Only by doing this, can listening to the teacher's authentic L2 potentially become a significant impetus to L2 acquisition (Allwright, 1982: 8; Willis, 1990: 63; Rost, 1994: 141-42 cited in Nunan, 1999: 200; Paul, 2003: 71). There are many different variables which could affect the amount of TTT in the classroom (e.g. level, experience, and number of students) and TTT can vary among classes of the same teacher. However, Richards and Lockhart (1994) argued that individual teachers should become more aware of their TTT by measuring and analyzing it in a specific class, which in turn, may help them assess the effectiveness of their teaching approach in general.

There is less previous research which uses the quantitative observation method than qualitative method in order to see classroom observation. Many studies focus on types of teacher talk, for example, types of questions, which are referential or display questions, or yes/no, either/or, or Wh-questions. Of great

interest to classroom researchers is the question of how teacher talk is distributed, that is, how it differs in function. Whereas researchers tend narrowly to investigate teachers' linguistic and pedagogical production, learners have been viewed in a slightly broader perspective (Chaudron, 1988). As to amount of teacher talk, Chaudron (1988) reviews that 'research in first language classrooms has established that teachers tend to do most of the talking about 60 % of the moves'. J. D. Ramirez et al.'s (1986) study found teacher and student utterances are attributable to program type, grade levels and the teacher.

Research on Classroom Talk²

What follows next are some of the most notable research conducted in the field of classroom talk, Teacher talking time and Student talking time, which present the backbone and guidelines for the research conducted for the sake of this paper.

One such research is the Paideia Model presented in From Mindless to meaningful (Billings, L., & Roberts, T. (2014)). Using the Paideia model is one way teachers can effectively increase the amount of meaningful student talk in classrooms. Successful whole class discussions include "three important features: text selection, questioning strategies, and ongoing assessment of speaking and listening skills" (Billings & Roberts, 2014, p. 60). In Paideia discussions the text can also be an artifact or other source document. What is important is that the text or item can generate several layers of questioning, usually prompted by the teacher, who serves as a facilitator. Before, during, and after, the students are able to set and assess goals related to speaking and listening.

With the advent of Common Core, (Ripp, P., 2014), teachers face the challenge of meeting standards without minimizing student participation. In fact, "some feel that a standards-driven curriculum stifles creativity" (Ripp, 2012, p. 12). Student-driven projects, lessons around problem-solving, and student input on learning plans are all ways to increase both student engagement and student talk in a standards-driven classroom. Also, setting the tone of discussion and participation expectations early in the school year will provide all students enough time to transition to a more collaborative learning environment.

2 <https://sites.google.com/a/csluglobal.edu/carolyn-levi/otl-560-facilitating-learning-and-transfer/teacher-talk-vs-student-talk>

Student-led discussions can provide an active learning environment and even increase retention in learning. However, good discussions take work and effective facilitation, and not all students are ready to lead discussions. Furthermore, student-led discussions often fall prey to the two most common problems in any discussion-which hardly anyone participates, or, one individual monopolizes the conversation. In this research, Soranno (Soranno: 2010) describes ways to conduct productive student-led discussions. She suggests structure for student-led discussions, how to select discussion items (like literature or other sources), setting discussion goals, setting clear assessment criteria, and how to evaluate the effectiveness of the discussion. When these factors are considered, Soranno notes a wealth of positive outcomes--better participation (which means better student talk, as opposed to excessive teacher talk), greater student motivation to learn beyond what is expected, consistent student preparation, and that students demonstrated a higher investment in their own learning.

3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The aim of this research is to examine the TTT in the classroom among English language teachers who teach English as a foreign language in Macedonia. Here, we shall raise the first expectation: The teacher will talk more than the students in the Listening class, while the students will talk more than the teacher in the Speaking class. And the second expectation is TTT and STT will vary by different kinds of tasks or stages. The instrument or the questionnaire was consisted of both open end questions and multiple choices. The answers given by the professors and teachers will be given in the analysis.

The questionnaire was distributed via email to the teachers; it did not require name, age, sex. The email addresses of the teachers were retrieved from the websites of the elementary and high schools in Bitola. The time for collecting the answers was two months, that is, from the time that the questionnaire was sent, it was closed or the answers were read and analyzed two months after the initial sending date. The time of the sending of the questionnaire was in the middle of the first semester of the academic 2018-2019 year that is in the period of September until November 2018. The answers were collected right after

the ending of the time and analyzed in the month of December 2018.

The teachers whom the questionnaire was sent were teachers of English in the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grade elementary school and teachers who taught in the four years of high schools. Excluded were the teachers who taught English from the first until the fifth grade. Another important factor is the years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. The teachers that received the questionnaire all had over 10 years of teaching experience that could be seen from their CV attached on the school website.

The questionnaire was sent to 50 teachers that were required to answer the following questions. 43 of them responded.

3.1 How much time do you spend in talking in class? Please assess yourself.

3.2 How much time do the students talk in class? According to Your experience.

3.3 How much time do you spend in frontal work?

- 50% of the time of the lesson
- 10% of the time of the lesson
- Very rarely
- Often
- Other...

3.4 What type of content requires more Teacher talking time?

- Linguistic content
- Literature content

3.5 How much time do you wait for students' answers?

- not long
- one minute
- two minutes
- 1 minute and 37 second
- I elicit the answer
- I supply the answer almost immediately

3.6 Which of these types of questions are more present in your class?

- yes-no questions
- open-ended questions

3.7 According to you, which approach should prevail in the classroom?

- student-centered
- teacher-centered

3.8 Which approach increases students' motivation?

- student-centered
- teacher- centered

3.9 Which approach enables the teacher to monitor students' progress?

- student-centered
- teacher- centered

3.10 Which approach increases the im-

mediate retention of information?

- student-centered
- teacher-centered

3.11 What is your belief about students' expectation concerning this issue? Do students expect the teacher to present the new information most of the time or do they expect to be actively involved in the classroom activities?

- They expect the teacher to be the one who presents everything
- They expect to be actively involved in the classroom activities
- Other

The questionnaire was distributed anonymously via email and it was supposed to be answered anonymously. Target groups were teachers of EFL from both elementary and high schools. So it can be said that the population was deliberately chosen. As said before, no other variables were included like age, sex and number of years of experience.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis was conducted by reading through the questionnaires and given answers. No software tool was used. According to the analysis most of the teachers stated that they spent around one third or less of the class time talking. By analyzing this question it could be stated that the approach is student centered. This approach emphasizes the importance of the student talking time and the significance of communication in class. Methods such the communicative approach are based on the idea that communication and interaction are crucial in second language acquisition. More precisely, people use the language to express certain idea or meaning (such as persuasion, arguments, promise, etc.). This implies that speakers adapt the way they express themselves according to their emotional state and their relation with the co-speaker (Andersen 1990, Richards and Rodgers 1986). Larsen-Freeman (1986) suggests that minimal teacher instruction is crucial in the second language acquisition process as the student should be the one that is involved in meaningful interaction. Approaches which emphasize the importance of student talking time define the teacher a class mediator. This implies that the teacher is the initiator of most of the in class activities (Klein 1986). Essential for this method is that the students are those who communicate with each other during the class. In addition, the teacher, who has the role of advisor and moderator, answers questions and monitors stu-

dents' success. The pupils, however, have the goal of transmitting the message. Moreover, they have to indicate that the received message has been successfully or unsuccessfully received. In other words, students learn how to communicate through communication. For this purpose, it is desirable for the teacher to plan activities in which authentic (everyday) language is used.

In most of the cases, teachers who stated that they spent less than one third of the class time talking, have also reported less than 15% frontal work. As previously stated, the approaches that place emphasis of student talking time, underline the importance of minimal instruction (Klein 1986, Pinker 1994). Similarly said, teachers who believe that they should spend as little as possible time in frontal work are believed to be willing to promote communication and linguistic competence. Thus it can be concluded that reducing the teacher talking time reduces teachers' frontal work and thus requires the students to be actively engage in class (Ellis:2014).

In most of the methods that promote student-centered approach, it is expected from the teachers to try to elicit students' answers. By doing this, the student is encouraged to use the target language and become independent from the teachers (Flege, 2002). Contrary to this statement, the analyzed teacher's answers have indicated that the majority of them (85%) do not provide enough time for their students to answer the question. Even though the same teachers have indicated that student-centered approach prevails during their classes, not enough answering time is evident in their classroom. From the survey it is also evident that those teachers who allow for most students talking time also tend to elicit students' answers. As stated in the literature the student-centered approach is usually accompanied by open-ended questions (Flege:2002).

On the other hand, it is interesting to note that 3 teachers reported the highest teacher talking time in their classes, or more that 70% of the time of the class, and they also stated that they spend half of that time engaged in the frontal method. It can be assumed that the teachers place greater importance on instruction than on meaningful interaction. This belief originates from traditional approaches in which the teacher is the one that orally present the material in front of the class. This approach defines students as passive learners who are to receive the grammatical input and are immediately expected to produce correct output. The teacher is the authority in the class

and decides which linguistic structure is correct and accurate. In case of errors, the teacher supplies the accurate form. The teacher during the whole teaching is the one who speaks the most. The students answer only the given questions and do not participate in interaction (Pavlov 1927, Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Students accustomed to this approach also expect the teacher-oriented approach. Moreover, such a belief is evident in the teachers' answers. Most of the teachers believe that the students expect the teacher to be the one who presents new information. Since two of three teachers, who promote teacher-talking time, answered that teacher-talking approach enables monitoring of the students success, it can be assumed that they are promoting traditional teaching approach. In the traditional approaches formal instruction is essential while students' progress is evaluated by the frequency of their mistakes (Odlin:1989, Krashen:1987).

However, it is interesting to note that besides the predominance of the traditional approaches in their classes, the same participants are aware that student-centered approaches increases students' motivation and therefore increases the language acquisition levels. Even though they have stated that students-centered approach should prevail in the English classroom, their belief does not coincide with their teaching practice. The discrepancies between teachers' belief and practices indicated the need of a survey on teachers' metalinguistic abilities.

When it comes to students expectations of teaching grammar most of the teachers believe that students are accustomed to the traditional approach in which the teacher is to instruct and explicitly explain the grammar rules. Only 4 of the teachers indicated that students "expect to be actively involved while presenting new information". It is interesting to note that no correlation between teachers' belief about students' expectation and teacher vs. student talking time and required time for students answer can be provided. As the teachers talking time in these cases varies from 20 minutes to half of the class, there is also a variation in the belief about students' expectations. Similarly, there is no clear indication if the survey presents correlation between the belief about students' expectations and the preferable teaching approach.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The teacher's responsibility is to create atmosphere favorable for learning. The student-centered approach requires minimal teacher talking time which allows for students to become active participants in the classroom. Eliciting students' responses and promoting activities that encourage communication allows students to integrate the foreign language with their personality and to feel more secure while using the language. Also, students should have the opportunity to decide for themselves how to express and communicate the given idea. At the same time, speakers should be given the opportunity to develop strategies for interpreting the language. In this way, students are given the opportunity to choose which grammatical form they will use depending on the social context in which the speakers are at that particular moment. The speakers through a series of negotiations should be able to successfully deliver and understand the main message of communication. The teacher's role in this process is to monitor and guide the students in achieving meaningful interaction but in the meantime he/she should avoid adapting the role of a frontal speaker (Ellis:2014). As previously mentioned, the aim of the survey was to present the percentage of the teacher talking time. Even though the survey indicates that most of the participants' answers demonstrate that student-centered approach prevails within which the teacher talking time is leveled down to a minimum, the subsequent questions reveal that this belief is not evident in their teaching methods. This implies that teachers' answers of which approach should prevail in the classroom is not justified by the subsequent answers. Besides the opinion that the class should be student-centered, teachers lack the awareness that open-ended questions, minimal frontal work and allocated answering time. The discrepancies between the chosen approach and its core principal indicate that there might be a lack of knowledge of the main teaching methods. Moreover, these discrepancies could indicate that there are other factors that influence the teachers' behavior in class. To understand the teachers' beliefs and how the same are reflected in the teaching practice it can be concluded that a further research in the field of teacher's metalinguistic abilities is required.

REFERENCES

- Andersen, R. W. (1990). A rational analysis of human memory. In: *Varieties of memory and consciousness: Essays in honor of Endel Tulving* (H. L. I. Roediger, F. I. M. Craik, eds.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 195-210.
- Billings, L., & Roberts, T. (2014). From Mindless to Meaningful.
- Ripp, P. (2014). Cultivating Passionate Learners in Common Core Classrooms
- Ellis, N. C. (2014). Implicit AND explicit learning of language. In: *Implicit and explicit learning of language* (P. Rebuschat, ed.). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.
- Ellis, R. (2010). *Second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gass, S.M., Nehney, J., Plonsky, L. (2013). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Klein, W. (1986). *Second language acquisition* (Rev. ed., Bohuslaw Jankowski, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klein, W. (2003). *Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 8th edition.
- Krashen, Stephen D. (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall International.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., (1986). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., Anderson, M. (2018). *Techniques and principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lightbown, M. L., Spada, N. (2013). *How languages and learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ripp, P. (2014). Cultivating Passionate Learners in Common Core Classrooms. *Education Digest*, 80(4), 11.
- Odlin, T., (1989). *Language transfer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ourtega, L. (2009). *Understanding Second language Acquisition*. Hodder Education.
- Pavlov, I.P. (1927). *Conditioned Reflexes: An investigation of the physiological activity of the cerebral cortex*. Retrieved from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Pavlov/lecture6.htm>.
- Saville-Troike, M. (2012). *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press
- VanPatten, B., & Williams, J. (2015). *Theories in Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction* (Second Language Acquisition Research Series). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Billings, L., & Roberts, T. (2014). From Mindless to Meaningful. *Educational Leadership*, 72(3), 60.
- Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Soranno, P. (2010). Improving student discussions in graduate and undergraduate courses: Transforming the discussion leader. *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*, 39(1), 84-91. Retrieved from http://www.soranno.fw.msu.edu/documents/Soranno_2010_JN-RLSE_000.pdf
- Termos, M. H. (2013). *The Effects of the Classroom Performance System on Student Participation, Attendance, and Achievement*. *International Journal Of Teaching And Learning In Higher Education*, 25(1), 66-78. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1016534.pdf>

