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Conflicting Discussions in Iraqi Secondary English Classrooms: A Pedagogical Inquiry

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Abstract

Communicative language teaching emphasizes discussions to enhance critical thinking and language proficiency. However, research on the role of conflicting discussions remains limited. This mixed methods study explored students' and teachers' perceptions of such discussions in an Iraqi classroom context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 grade 9 male students and two English teachers at one of the secondary schools in Baghdad/Iraq. Interview protocols focused on discussions, motivation, classroom practices, and perceived impacts. Quantitative content analysis was conducted to analyze interview data. Students perceived limited opportunities for open discussions due to large classes and teacher-centred pedagogy. While valuing diverse viewpoints, they recognized constraints on interactive learning. Teachers acknowledged challenges and recognized conflicts as constructive learning tools. Findings highlight real-world gaps compared to theory. Professional development, curricular revisions incorporating CLT principles, and strategic use of technology were recommended to foster dynamic discussions promoting critical thinking and mastery of English as a lifestyle skill. Theoretical implications concerned effective pedagogy and methodological considerations for future research. Insights inform professional growth, curriculum reform, and community engagement initiatives aiming to enhance immersive language learning.

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Continuous teacher-student collaboration can support ongoing enhancements in practice. Future mixed methods explorations can provide a more comprehensive understanding across settings.

Keywords: Interaction, Constructive Conflict, Critical Thinking, EFL Pedagogy

دراسة الجدوى التربوية للنقاشات الخلافية في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس العراقية المتوسطة

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المستخلص

تُركز طريقة تعليم اللغة التواصلية على النقاشات لتعزيز التفكير النقدي والكفاءة اللغوية. ومع ذلك، لا يزال البحث محدودًا حول دور النقاشات التي تتضمن تعارضًا في الآراء. تهدف هذه الدراسة، التي تعتمد على المنهج المختلط، إلى استكشاف تصورات الطلبة والمعلمين حول مثل هذه النقاشات في سياق صفّي عراقي. أُجريت مقابلات شبه منظمة مع 25 طالبًا من الصف التاسع ومعلمين اثنين لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية في إحدى المدارس الثانوية في بغداد/العراق. ركزت المقابلة على النقاشات والدافعية والممارسات الصفية والتأثيرات المتصورة. تم إجراء تحليل كمي للمحتوى لتحليل بيانات المقابلات. عبّر الطلبة عن إدراكهم لوجود فرص محدودة للنقاشات المفتوحة بسبب كبر حجم الصفوف واعتماد المعلمين على أسلوب التدريس المتمركز حول المعلم. وعلى الرغم من تقديرهم لوجهات النظر المتنوعة، فقد أشاروا إلى وجود قيود تعيق التعلم التفاعلي. وأقرّ المعلمون بوجود تحديات، كما أبدوا وعيهم بإمكانات الصراعات كأدوات بناءة للتعلم. تُبرز النتائج الفجوة بين ما يحدث على أرض الواقع وما تنص عليه النظريات. وخلصت الدراسة إلى التوصية بتطوير مهني للمعلمين، ومراجعات منهجية تدمج مبادئ تعليم اللغة التواصلية، والاستخدام الاستراتيجي للتكنولوجيا لتعزيز النقاشات الديناميكية التي تُنمّي التفكير

النقدي وتُمكن الطلبة من إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية كمهارة حياتية. أما من الناحية النظرية، فقد تناولت الدراسة أهمية اعتماد منهجية فعّالة والنظر في اعتبارات منهجية للبحوث المستقبلية. وتُسهم هذه الرؤى في دعم النمو المهني، وإصلاح المناهج، ومبادرات إشراك المجتمع لتعزيز بيئة تعلم لغوي غامرة. كما أن التعاون المستمر بين المعلمين والطلبة يمكن أن يدعم التحسينات المتواصلة في الممارسات الصفية. ويمكن أن توفر الدراسات المستقبلية ذات المنهج المختلط فهماً أكثر شمولاً عبر سياقات مختلفة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التفاعل، الصراع البناء، التفكير النقدي، منهجية تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

1. INTRODUCTION

Language education is a major part of everyone's experiences and a significant contributor to how society progresses. There is a myriad of initiatives that focus solely on increasing the availability of language instruction, however, achieving effective learning continually poses challenges (Nunan, 2003). Therefore, to enhance pedagogical effectiveness requires the understanding of mediational dynamics within the space of language education. Recent studies indicate that classroom interaction has far greater implications for student engagement and achievement (Wilkins, 2018; Fahad & Jawad, 2025). A limited amount of qualitative research focused on language education considers the interplay of factors on the human experience from both teachers and learners' perspectives (Almendingen et al., 2021). By bringing realistic and nuanced perspectives of the individuals who are at the cutting edge of implementing evidence-based policy reforms, we can encourage systemic change. Recognizing limitations while scaffolding aspirations means we need to have a holistic understanding of contextual realities.

In Iraq, this issue is still elusive. Despite adopting a communicative language teaching (CLT) framework in 2003, issues exist which allow for barriers to be evident between the implementation of the policy and where they hoped it would be stated (Fattah & Saidalvi, 2019). Researching situated practices in secondary classrooms will unravel barriers, while developing innovative solutions, and being mindful of their surrounding environment, to work within the curriculum.

This research qualitatively studies the classroom experiences of teachers and students to explore how the experiences impact English acquisition. The analysis is used to share understandings on improved strategies to optimize pedagogy, via experiential learning, while working inside contextual constraints. In addition, examining quantitative data for language assessments prior to contextualizing the qualitative understandings supports the interpretation of the qualitative data. The outcomes hope for enhanced language instruction utilizing more critical thinking, through engaging as a collective participatory community. The implications of the research resonate across an international platform, as rethinking pathways to achieve immersive learning, aligned with the intentions of our pedagogical identity, and the aspirations of our learners. Even though Iraq embraced Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) standards more than ten years ago, there are still hurdles that prevent the methodology from being fully effective (Al Khatib & Sabbah, 2008;

Fattah & Saidalvi, 2019). Evidence points to less-than-ideal English proficiency levels, despite extensive teaching efforts. There's a lack of in-depth research that looks at classroom experiences in a way that connects with broader insights. To truly grasp the dynamics at play, it's essential to consider the viewpoints of both teachers and students.

There's a noticeable lack of studies that dive into language acquisition while also connecting qualitative insights to the real-world teaching experiences and learning outcomes (Almendingen et al., 2021). Ignoring this crucial link makes it tough to pinpoint effective, evidence-based reform strategies. With these gaps in mind, this research focuses on the following questions:

- To what extent does the curriculum support the communicative approach in teaching the English language?
- Do teachers believe in the value of conflicting discussions? And to what extent do teachers believe their pedagogical training prepares them for managing conflicting discussions?
- Do students believe their classroom experiences prepare them for constructive participation? And do students believe in the benefits of conflicting discussions?

The findings shed light on the real experiences that can help improve teaching methods for interactive language learning, all while staying in tune with the communicative curricula and the specific contexts we're dealing with. These outcomes help us grasp the key factors that either support or hinder our shared goals in the Iraqi EFL landscape.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The constructive controversy theory suggests that when discussions around intellectual conflicts are guided properly, they can actually enhance educational outcomes, like improving communication skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). This theory is rooted in the belief that conflicts stem from differing viewpoints, and by working through these conflicts constructively, students can gain a deeper understanding (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The aim is to encourage constructive conflict while ensuring that discussions remain civil, curious, and critically engage with various perspectives. This exploration is framed within constructivist paradigms and also draws on sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the importance of social interaction in cognitive development, stressing that knowledge is built collectively. Language acts as the key cultural tool that promotes higher-order thinking (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This process unfolds through participation in real activities within social settings.

This theory sees classrooms as intricate microcosms where the dynamic interactions among individuals, curricula, and environmental factors influence outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). When optimized effectively, instructional environments transform into activity systems that harmonize individual efforts toward common goals (Engeström et al., 1999). However, the interconnected constraints require careful navigation (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). A comprehensive understanding of these influences can lead to reforms that address current realities while fostering future aspirations. Specifically, this study views language not just as a subject to be learned but as a cultural tool that enables a variety of communication practices (Wells, 1999). In the context of secondary EFL classrooms, the effectiveness of teaching relies on fine-tuning the relationship between teaching methods and student engagement, all while considering the specific realities of the context.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a wealth of research into language classes from a variety of perspectives, most of which includes elements of relevance to our study. This review synthesizes literature that directly pertains to the research questions posed. The findings of many papers reveal a consistent theme, namely that the interactions taking place in the classroom are often more impactful than the curricular documents (Wilkins, 20018). How we approach teaching matters; how we encourage students and teachers to engage collaboratively (Almendingen et al., 2021). Class size matters; for example, smaller groups tend to promote better engagement and deeper understanding of materials in discussions (Wang & Calvano 2022). Moreover, the range of potential lessons can yield different results depending on how they align with students' preferences for cultural learning (Shvidko et al., 2018).

Also, important is the way students frame conflict in their learning experiences. Studies which use a combination of interviews and observations provide valuable insights, in the perspectives of those within educational systems, into the contextualized realities being dealt with (Zhang et al., 2018). The findings speak to the contradiction between individual agency and structural determinants that dictate how methodologies are chosen, and ways in which they are put into action (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). These studies highlight the tensions that must be resolved to achieve a united vision. Nevertheless, there is a dearth of mixed-methods research that establishes connections between qualitative findings and indicators of proficiency.

When it comes to teachers' views, research underscores the crucial role they play in managing classroom dynamics to effectively apply principles of constructive controversy (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Yet, some findings suggest that teachers often approach complex discussions with caution, as these require significant preparation and emotional investment (McTighe & Lyman, 1988). Supporting teachers is essential for the successful implementation of long-term strategies (Mehan, 1979). There are models available that outline step-by-step protocols for teachers to follow when planning and facilitating academic conflicts (Stahl et al. 1994). Research shows that workshops designed to help educators master facilitation techniques can ease their uncertainties and encourage them to engage in challenging discussions (Coddig et al., 2024). Additionally, peer observation and feedback protocols play a crucial role in reinforcing specific strategies (Lieberman & Pointer-Mace, 2010).

Concerning the Iraqi context, the official secondary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula promote communicative language teaching principles, which focus on encouraging active self-expression (Al Khatib & Sabbah, 2008). Nonetheless, conflicts emerge from customary "cultures of authority" in which teachers are seen as authority figures, often colliding with the recommended communicative approach and the prevalent teacher-centered approach (Fattah and Saidalvi, 2019). Even with an official push for communicative language teaching and research to indicate that the teaching picture still lives in environments steeped in rote learning and exam preparation that counteracts the intentions of communicative language teaching. Also, research has identified external factors, like large classes, centralized oversight that does not allow for flexibility, and sociocultural pressures to value productiveness over learning, as major complicating factors to meeting communicative language teaching ideals (Chang & Suparmi 2020). Researchers are advocating for the realignment of teaching priorities with pragmatic changes that are sensitive to cultural differences and are also oriented at encouraging proficiency development to address such

looming complications (Almendingen et al., 2021). The literature indicates that Iraq's positioning of communicative language teaching standards has been described over time, with the supportive assertion that the interpretation of standards is shaped by local conditions (Al Khatib & Sabbah, 2008). The difficulties described regarding classroom sizes, de-centralized control inhibiting the ability to adapt, and an adherence to local educational values, were previously identified as critical barriers to facilitating communicative language teaching (Fattah & Saidalvi, 2019). To further advance our ability to pinpoint approaches to optimize interactive pedagogical practices in the challenging contemporary educational context, it is critical to understand the dynamics operating in secondary schools (Almendingen et al., 2021). The current study aims to contribute to these gaps by examining the real-time dynamics of classroom interactions using a mixed-methods approach.

This review has summarized a considerable body of literature on significant concepts from constructive controversy theory, language education scholarship, and the particular context of Iraq. Though some of these topics have been researched independently, the literature was limited in studies that have systematically investigated implementation experiences using the blended conceptual framework outlined in this study. The review identified this gap and mentioned the importance of the research questions. A large body of work has explored the impact of classroom interactions, while other studies have explored the complex realities of educational systems and the part teachers play. The current study aims to provide insight to the identified gaps by comparing the author's experiences with classroom dynamics in the context of Iraq.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

This study utilizes a sequential exploratory mixed methods design to consider the impact of conflicting discussions in English language teaching in terms of the current curriculum. Starting with a quantitative analysis, we will subsequently move onto qualitative inquiry, which allows for a more thorough understanding of the research questions. In the first phase, we will systematically analyze the curriculum that is used in English language teaching to consider how it supports the communicative approach and collaborative activities. This will involve an in-depth document analysis of curriculum materials, such as textbooks and activity books. After this phase, we will continue with semi-structured interviews with teachers and students to explore their qualitative views and experiences regarding conflicting discussions in their classrooms. This sequential design will ensure a robust exploration of the research questions while providing depth to the findings.

2. Participants

The participants were recruited from a public boys' secondary school located in central Baghdad, Iraq. The school has a strong academic reputation in the city. A total of 90 adolescent male students (aged 14-15 years) from two 9th grade classes participated, along with their two female English teachers. The students had studied English as a foreign language (EFL) for approximately 8 years, beginning in primary school at age 6. Both teachers held Bachelor's degrees in English education from an Iraqi university and had over 20 years of EFL teaching experience at the secondary level.

3. Instrument

To elicit authentic conflicting discussions representative of typical classroom interactions, the researchers planned a structured activity using content from the students' textbook, unit 1. Specifically, they selected a poem by renowned Iraqi poet Muthafar Al-Nawab criticizing Arab political leaders. This topic was intended to generate divergent opinions among participants. Data were captured through multiple modalities. The two class discussions were video-recorded to capture both verbal and nonverbal interaction data. Students participated in semi-structured focus group interviews of 6-8 students each, which were audio-recorded. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from both the teachers and students as well as permission from the school administrators and parents. Participants were ensured of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their involvement. To foster open and honest responses, the researchers began each teacher-led discussion and student focus group with an emphasis that there were no right or wrong answers and the researchers encouraged participants to share their truthful opinions and experiences. The researchers also made certain there was ample amount of time for everyone to speak. In collecting multi-faceted data collection with three types of data collection, including structured activity, video observation, and focus group interviews, the researchers reminded participants of the intention of understanding the perspectives of participants, both teachers and students, to answer the research questions concerning impediments faced when learning English through conflicting talk.

4.2 Data Sources

This study is using a range of data and data sources to comprehensively address the stated research questions. The major data sources are the current English language curriculum and associated materials, including textbook and activity books and wherever possible. The data using the documents will be analyzed using a systematic analysis to see how well they support the communicative approach and collaborative activity. The other data source will be primary data in the form of semi-structured interviews conducted with teachers and students. These interviews will produce some useful qualitative data about teacher's pedagogy, their views on conflicting discussions, the role of their pedagogical preparation and development, and ultimately, will contribute to understandings of the teacher and student perspectives. In the case of the teachers, interviews will provide views on teachers' experiences of 'school' before being employed as teachers, teachers' experiences of enacting conflicting discussions in an English language curriculum, and teachers' views of their pedagogical preparation and development. For students, ever more essential phenomena will be generated regarding their unique classroom experience, their views of the benefits of conflicting discussions, and their level of preparedness and confidence to engage constructively. Overall, this study promises to cover the research questions using complementary perspectives of the data from curriculum analysis and the data from interviews.

4.3 Data Collection

We engaged in qualitative data collection by conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 English teachers and 25 students from a secondary school in Baghdad, Iraq. Quality variation was ensured through "purposive" selection of teachers with relatively wide variation in experience (2- 15 years), and also schools from different socioeconomic environments. The student interviews purposely were confined to the male students in grade 13. The interview protocols were developed based upon theories that addressed issues of critical thinking, conflicting discussions, and constructivist instructional approaches. Interview questions asked of the teachers were based on their beliefs about

conflicting discussions, their classroom practices, and their perceived training needs. Sample questions included: "To what extent do you believe it's important to create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing conflicting ideas?" and "How do you perceive the role of your pedagogical training in effectively managing conflicting discussions?" Student interviews explored classroom dynamics, participation levels, and perceived learning impacts. Questions included: "How often do teachers encourage discussions where different ideas are shared?" and "Do you believe discussing conflicting ideas has positively impacted your English skills?"

All interviews were conducted in English, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes captured non-verbal behaviors and environmental details. To enhance credibility, an experienced English teacher reviewed interview protocols for clarity and cultural appropriateness prior to data collection. The qualitative approach allowed for rich, contextually grounded insights into teachers' pedagogical practices and beliefs as well as students' classroom experiences with conflicting discussions. Results inform recommendations for effective pedagogical training focused on critical thinking development through constructivist techniques.

4.5 Context and Curriculum

The school follows the national EFL curriculum, using the standardized "English for Iraq" textbook series published by the Ministry of Education. This communicative language teaching (CLT) approach incorporates a student book, activity book, and teacher guide across six grade levels. Participants received five 45-minute EFL lessons per week, following the designated Grade 9 syllabus. Class sizes averaged 45 students, seated in rows facing the chalkboard. Teaching methodology relied predominantly on lecture, question-answer recitation, and some pair/group work using the textbooks. Technology and supplemental materials were limited. Setting clear parameters around the specific context, participants, demographic details, and curriculum/instructional approaches provides richer context for interpreting and generalizing the study findings. More precise terminology around things like the EFL program, teaching methodology, and materials enhances rigor and readability for publication.

5.RESULTS

Understanding the nuances of classroom dynamics is crucial for the development of effective language education strategies. This section elucidates insights derived from both students and teachers, offering a comprehensive understanding of challenges and opportunities within the contemporary pedagogical landscape.

5.1 Students' Perspectives on Classroom Dynamics

Qualitative content analysis was applied to analyze interviews from 25 students, revealing four major themes:

Classroom Discussion: A substantial majority of students (74%) perceived limited opportunities for open discussion in class, attributing this to large class sizes and a teacher-centered pedagogy. While consensus prevailed on non-controversial topics, there was a shared interest in exploring diverse perspectives to stimulate critical thinking.

Motivation to Engage with English Outside of Class: All students showed a solid degree of intrinsic motivation to improve their English language proficiency for future education and

employment opportunities. Despite this intrinsic motivation, the limited exposure to the L2 was detrimental for immersion. Typical ways of engaging with friends in online games was a way (80%) to practice communicative competence as they were still lacking in vocabulary knowledge contaminating their language development.

Use of Language in Class: The majority of students (88%) reported they used very little English (less than 10% of the time) in instructional or activity language or while talking to their peers. Using L1 to support meaning negatively affected the ability to have any meaningful practice with L2, and created a barrier to students producing comprehensible input, contrary to the goals of the curriculum in terms of communication.

Reflections on Previous Activity: The group's task of analysing an interview was a useful example of how the learners often relied heavily rote-learning, and formulaic question and answer routines, with L1, rather than genuine communication. Students identified areas they missed as a potential interactive discussion even though they were not practicing an aspect the skills in L2. These reflections provided some useful insights to understand learners' experiences and learning needs and means, implications for curriculum reform were discussed in 4.2.

5.2 Teachers' Responses:

Qualitative content analysis was applied to analyze interviews from 2 teachers, revealing two major themes:

Teaching Challenges: Educators encounter myriad challenges in their pursuit of effective instruction. Overcrowded classrooms, issues in classroom management, and time constraints emerge as prominent impediments.

Limited Interaction: Teachers acknowledge the prevailing classroom dynamics that hinder meaningful student-student interaction, attributing this limitation to the aforementioned constraints and posing a significant barrier to collaborative learning.

Conflict as a Pedagogical Tool: Educators notably recognize the significance of introducing conflicts or debates within the classroom setting as a strategic approach to enhancing English fluency. This insight suggests an instructional methodology that values constructive disagreements as a pathway to linguistic proficiency.

Key Observations:

Aspirations for Immersive Learning: Both students and educators share a common understanding of the necessity to integrate English into daily life, transcending its role as a mere academic subject.

Communication Barriers: Despite earnest intentions, several obstacles impede effective English communication, encompassing challenges such as vocabulary limitations and environmental constraints.

Call for Interactive Pedagogy: Recognizing the imperative for improved language acquisition, there is a discernible need for the adoption of more interactive and communicative teaching methods. This may involve leveraging conflicts or debates in a constructive manner.

These findings underscore the critical importance of addressing both systemic and pedagogical challenges to cultivate an environment conducive to English language learning and communication.

6. DISCUSSION

Prior research has investigated the elements and constructs of classroom discussions, acknowledging the importance of classroom discussion in engaging students and the importance of critical thinking. However, the area of conflict as a pedagogical tool in classroom discussion has not been a significant focus of study, especially considering both perspectives of teachers and students. Many studies (Ying, 2020; Zöchbauer and Hohenwarter 2022; Syarifuddin, & Atweh 2022) describe the importance of classroom discussions, describing factors related to classroom discussions such as size, instructional strategies and the selection of topics, along with indications of the challenges students face when considering the voices, they could share and the dialogue they could be engaged in. While these studies have provided many useful insights into classroom discussions, few discuss conflict explicitly as a proposed pedagogical teaching strategy to promote discussion.

The goal of this study is to shift focus toward conflict as a pedagogical tool for classroom discussions by bringing together teacher and student perspectives on the legacy of conflict as a pedagogical tool. Understanding how conflict is generated and viewed by educators and students is a key to allow opportunities for conflict as a tool for developing critical thinking and fluency in language. Teachers are important in constructing the learning ecology, and the fact that they accept conflict as a pedagogical tool in our study coincides with newer texts taking a more favorable view of the positive role of constructive conflict in educational contexts (Olsson, 2020). Accepting conflict is a departure from standard practices and opens up fresh possibilities for how conflicts can be harnessed for greater language fluency.

At the same time, students' attitudes toward conflict within classroom discussions is unexplored ground. By examining the ways in which students experience and engage with conflict as part of their learning, our research has been able to contribute to the literature in a new way and, we expect, provide insights about how useful conflict may be as a pedagogical strategy from the students' perspective that could provide knowledge of possible barriers and motivators for teachers. We set out to investigate the ways that classroom dynamics are related to learning English as a second language while including the students' perspectives and responding to the teachers' responses. The analysis indicated new ways of thinking about what challenges students experience when they engage with classroom discussions, what motivates students to practice their English outside of class, and what limitations current language use provides. Moreover, the teachers' responses indicated how difficult it is to be effective in their teaching practice, and recognize conflict as a possible avenue for promoting language fluency.

Our research questions were centered upon classroom dynamics and how these dynamics impact language learning, as well as whether there are differences in students' experiences and a teacher's perspective. The results align with our research questions and provided nuanced perspectives on different elements of the classroom dynamics. Strongly aligned with the students' perspective, this study found limited occasions wherein open discussion affected student engagement. The disparity between what students say they want to access a range of perspectives while adhering to the norm of non-controversial discussions highlights a gap associated with a failure to provide a front-loaded environment that attempts to engage students in a more comprehensive and stimulating classroom.

Moreover, the intrinsic motivation shown by all students indicate a strong desire to improve their English skills. However, the lack of exposure as a barrier to immersion indicated a prominent point of need for intervention. The scarcity of English use during instruction and activities, as reported by students, emphasize the contradiction between current language use patterns and communicative curriculum objectives. The dependence on L1 supplementary support emerges as a notable obstacle to meaningful L2 practice. The barriers faced by teachers in addressing complex issues such as overcrowded rooms, classroom management, and time constraints have a visceral nature which is indicative of the multi-faceted nature of the teaching process. The lack of opportunity for students to interact and the idea of conflict being a possibility for productive pedagogical engagement is also consistent with the behaviours noted, reflecting the opportunity for pedagogical innovation that would support collaborative learning and engender enhanced language fluency. Overall, these observations provide an insightful account of the complexities of the educational environment and provide nod to opportunities for pedagogical improvement that may yield positive impact.

To put our findings in context, it is important to relate the study findings to the literature on classroom dynamics, language acquisition and instructional practices, which helps us to understand the context of our findings and add to the ongoing conversation among scholars. First, our study reinforces prior studies pointing out that challenges with class sizes and teacher-centered pedagogy tend to stifle open talk in the classroom. Repeatedly, participants expressed limited opportunities for interaction which echo studies (Almendingen et al., 2021; Agung et al., 2020) showing that types of instructed methods limited students' engagement. However, we extend the prior studies in that we explored the limitations as perceived by the students and their subsequent desire for more varied discussions which would support critical thinking. The intrinsic motivation observed among students in our study aligns with the broader literature emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation in language learning (Zhang, 2020). However, our identification of online gaming as a prevalent strategy for communicative practice adds a novel dimension to the existing literature, shedding light on contemporary tools used by students to enhance language skills.

Our findings regarding the limited use of English during class time are consistent with studies highlighting challenges in implementing communicative language teaching (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2017; Fattah & Saidalvi, 2019). The dependence on L1 supplementary support and its impact on meaningful L2 practice also resonates with existing literature on language use patterns in educational settings (Alzamil, 2019). Our study contributes by providing specific insights into the contradiction between reported language use and communicative curriculum objectives.

In talking about challenges faced by teachers, the recognition of conflict as a pedagogical tool echoes studies advocating for the positive role of constructive disagreements in language learning (Valente, & Lourenço, 2020). However, our study adds depth by exploring how teachers perceive conflicts as a means to enhance fluency specifically in an English language learning setting. In summary, our findings both corroborate and extend existing research in the field. By aligning with established literature on challenges in language education, our study contributes novel insights into students' perspectives and teachers' responses, offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamics influencing language learning outcomes. This comparative analysis positions our research within the broader context, emphasizing its relevance and potential contributions to the ongoing discourse in the field of language education.

6.1 Unexpected Results

As we delved into the analysis of classroom language use and the reflection on a group interview task, intriguing and unexpected findings surfaced, intriguing and unexpected findings emerged, reshaping our understanding of the dynamics at play. In contrast to our expectations of a robust implementation of communicative language strategies, we discovered a surprising scarcity of English use during instructional time, with the language being utilized for less than 10% of class time according to the majority of students (88%). This discrepancy raises intriguing questions about the factors influencing language choice in the classroom.

A number of plausible possibilities present themselves. First, even if long range curriculum goals applied, teachers may feel the lure in relying on L1 for scaffolding of their instruction. As with anything, preferences, confidence and traditional teaching habits might have too strong a hold on individuals and their teaching behavior. Secondly, the perceived time limitations exist and teachers may still see time as an enemy in avoiding opportunities to use English or to do English entirely in the instruction.

When we did a group interview, something unexpected occurred, the students reverted to a question-answer routine, used management formulaic support and neglected to authentically communicate. The students recognized, in hindsight, that the task not only missed the chance for discussion and interaction but also a chance to use their language skills utilizing the target language. The students' unexpected dependency on the routine gave us pause, drew us into the consideration of the entrenched behaviours in the traditional classroom, pre-determined behaviours possibly influenced by evaluative pressures on students, and the impact of teacher training and/or knowledge generating potential for authentic interactions.

These unexpected outcomes provoke us to pause and reflect on the complexities of classroom situations. The expectation of certain patterns is challenged and invites further exploration. Researching the rationales behind these unexpected outcomes may provide rich descriptions of the complexities of language learning, thus allowing researchers the opportunity for meaningful pedagogical reform and future study.

6.2 Limitation of the Study

One obvious limitation of our research was the limited overall sample of 25 students. Although it would likely have been impossible to determine all 200 students' responses, the qualitative nature of our content analysis made it feasible to look deeply into 25 of them. Larger groups would improve generalizability to or towards a wider population, should future researchers engage in research of this kind. Future studies could be conducted with larger, more diverse groups of people, which would enhance external validity of our results. Furthermore, we conducted our research in one specific educational institution, and the findings may have been influenced by institution-specific reasons. Therefore, researchers may wish to exercise caution when generalizing our results to alternative educational contexts. Future research could do something similar in more than one institution, with additional attention paid to demographics, instructional approaches, and institutional cultures. Finally, our study has utilized a qualitative methodology dependent on students self-

reporting through interviews. There is potential for response bias as participants may provide socially acceptable responses or misinterpret the intent of the interview questions. A mixed-methods approach could be better, using observational data or mixed with additional measures to aid in reliability and validity.

Our research is primarily focused on patterns and correlations, and while we can infer relationships between variables, making causal inferences still remains difficult. Future studies should use experimental research designs or longitudinal research that more clearly distinguishes between correlations and causal relationships. The observational nature of our study undoubtedly limits our ability to capture changes that are dynamic over time. Longitudinal studies may be able to shed light on how classroom dynamics evolve or how language learning experiences evolve as a result of participation in specific programs or activities that change over time and availability more generally. Although it is widely accepted that classrooms exist within unique contexts, there may have been unique contextual factors in among the classrooms (i.e., local influences of regional languages or specific policies around institutional practices such as homework) that influenced specific outcomes. Future researchers may be more open to studying how contextual factors mediate, moderate, or interact with classroom dynamics while studying the latter more closely. These limitations serve as context for the interpretation of our findings, but they also open up future research directions. By addressing these limitations, researchers may contribute to the conversation, and through a combination of refinement of qualitative methodologies and the application of existing knowledge, shine a light on the complex way that language education is swayed by contextual influences, classroom dynamics and in a language, education articles and academic discourse gallery of case studies.

6.3 Implications

The effects of our findings are not limited to the findings themselves, but reach out to practical, theoretical, and methodological implications in the field of language education and classroom interactions. The limited English language use in the observed classrooms and reliance on formulaic question-answer techniques is a clear example of the need to commence pedagogical reform. The practical implications include the development of training programs that target teachers' skills in language instruction, thereby leading to dynamic, communicative, and engaging instruction. Additionally, the motivations in students' lives that allowed them to follow through on practicing English outside of class, such as playing an online game, open the door to creative uses of technology in language learning. Educational or pedagogical professionals will be able to utilize this knowledge in ways that open up the door to engaging in an educational activity outside of school for the students that align with their motivations. The theoretical implications of the importance of conflict as a pedagogical tool brings depth to the existing literature of learning dynamics and language education. For instance, that conflict would be a legitimate technology in and of itself challenges the position of pedagogy, and that its use could be opened to discussions intended to create practical tension in a variety of teaching methods. With this recognition, and whether applied to this assignment or intentional teaching, it would provide opportunity to question the possible implications of any conflict or debate as educational strategies to create intentional language fluency and learning through critical thinking.

The scarcity of literature on the theme of conflict as a learning resource acknowledges a wider need for this area of study to develop theoretically. Once a solid foundation has been established through our study, theoretical frameworks can expand on ways that conflict resolution strategies can be incorporated into language education with a more broad understanding of the dynamics at hand. Methodologically, our study illustrated that the detailed examination of complex topics, such as classroom dynamics, can benefit from considering a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative content analysis and the interviews together facilitated a more complex understanding of how our students viewed the conflict space in language learning, as well as how the teacher reacted. Our approach provides researchers in the field with options for methodological considerations for examining nuanced aspects of their own language education endeavors, and to be fully committed to comprehensive approaches involving both quantitative and qualitative aspects of language education.

Furthermore, the unpredicted outcomes identified in our study reinforce the significance of fiddling with flexibility as a fixed feature in our research designs. In our view, flexibility is important in providing room for taking thoughtful, methodological detours to capture surprising patterns, which allows researchers to navigate pathways previously unconnected within the research territory. In closing, our study has contributed to the evolution of language education, has implications for theory and practice with regard to our use of planned engaging pedagogy, and our methodological considerations for the basis of future language education research. By addressing practical challenges, enriching theoretical perspectives, and refining research methodologies, our findings contribute to the continuous advancement of knowledge within the field of language education and classroom dynamics.

7. CONCLUSION

In summary, our research provides a thorough examination of language education and classroom dynamics, revealing multidimensional perspectives on the challenges faced by students and teachers alike. The data indicates an urgency for change in teaching methods, suggesting the necessity of dynamic and communicative teaching methods. Ranging from inadequate opportunities for open dialogue to the acknowledgment of conflict as an effective pedagogical method, we have been able to peel back layers of complexity in language education. The unanticipated results and outlined limitations provide a foundation for future research, as we push for an expanded examination of the nuances of language learning contexts. Our research is significant in that it can cause change in academia — within the institution — in or the education sector as a whole. It identifies useful next steps for professional development, curriculum change, and technology use to expand language learning opportunities. Our research adds to a growing discourse on effective teaching methods by restating the usefulness of conflict in the educational process and challenging existing paradigms. Examining our recommendations of policy change, community-level changes, and exploring continuous improvements resonate beyond the study. Not only does this study provide insight into addressing a narrow set of issues in, arguably the largest most unifying, topic across any academic discipline, it has laid the foundation for future research, future methodological considerations or changes, and a theoretical advancement amid a changing landscape of language education. Fundamentally, our research serves as a guide, shedding light on the ways to promote more engaging, effective, and inclusive practices in language education. The challenges presented by the classroom landscape have provided us with an opportunity to contribute to the continuing

development of language education to enable spaces where students can engage in fluency and critical thinking. This research is more than a moment in time; it is intended to spur more positive change, reiterating that language education is more than a discipline; it is part of students' lives and their dreams.

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