

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Exploring dialogic teaching in Malaysian higher education: Enhancing interaction in the Malaysian classroom

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Abstract – This study explored the use of dialogic teaching to enhance interaction skills among Malaysian university students learning English as a second language. Driven by national initiatives such as the English Language Roadmap and CEFR, this research focuses on instructors' perspectives and the challenges they face in implementing dialogic teaching strategies. Three instructors from a government university received training and integrated dialogic pedagogy into their undergraduate proficiency classes. Through systematic classroom observations and comprehensive video-stimulated recall interviews, this study captures authentic dialogic teaching experiences. The findings demonstrated that instructors valued dialogic teaching and believed it increased student participation and assisted in language acquisition. However, challenges such as students' limited vocabulary and hesitation to engage with peers have hindered the effectiveness of group discourses. This study makes a substantial contribution to expanding dialogic teaching research in Malaysian tertiary ESL contexts which is underrepresented in the existing field while highlighting the critical need for continued investigation in tertiary-level ESL environments particularly within Southeast Asian educational contexts.

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1. Introduction

Employers prioritise hiring graduates who can communicate effectively in English given their status as a global language in professional settings (Zainuddin et al., 2019). In an effort to reform English language mastery among Malaysians, the teaching of the English language has transitioned through three changes that started in 1982 with the KBSR, with the integration of the English Language Syllabus for primary schools and progressed into the implementation of the English Education Roadmap 2015-2025 (Abu Bakar et al., 2021). With these evolving pedagogical landscapes, dialogic interaction rooted in dialogic teaching pedagogy has emerged as a promising approach for enhancing conversational skills with the aim of fostering purposeful exchanges among speakers (Alexander, 2020). This enables educators to offer opportunities to interact in their second language, which enhance language learning (Myhill and Newman, 2019; Varcasia and Atz, 2024). Dialogic interactions occur when instructors and students engage in meaningful discourse (Gillies, 2014). In the context of university education, there is growing recognition of the need to move beyond the conventional Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern, as it tends to constrain student participation and limit dialogic engagement (An & Thomas, 2021). Adopting dialogue teaching allows for more active and meaningful student involvement in the learning process. To support the implementation of dialogic teaching to engage students in group discourses and develop interactional skills, three English Proficiency 4 instructors at Sultan Idris Education University voluntarily participated in this study. This study examined how instructors interpret and apply dialogic teaching in the classroom and explored their perceptions in facilitating group discourse.

1.1 Undergraduate ESL Competence and Dialogue

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has consistently emphasised efforts across all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, to enhance graduates' employability. Graduate Employability (GE) serves as a critical metric in higher education institutions, often influencing their ranking. A higher GE ranking attracts academically outstanding students and positions the institution more competitively within the academic landscape (Côté & Furlong, 2016; Ma'dan et al., 2020; Souto-Otero & Enders, 2017). Malaysian undergraduates encounter numerous challenges in securing employment, and one of the primary factors is their weak mastery of the English language (Zainuddin et al., 2019). One such initiative is CEFR implementation through The English Language Education Roadmap, established by the English Language Standards and Quality Council (ELSQC), which aims to cultivate learners who are proficient and independent users of English (Mohd Don, 2014). Mastering interaction is essential for university undergraduates, particularly because it is a critical skill for employability. However, engaging in conversation is a standard in today's competitive landscape. Instead, engaging in purposeful and meaningful dialogue is value-added, with dialogic interaction serving as an effective framework for achieving this goal (Skidmore, 2000). For a discourse to fall under the paradigm of dialogic interaction, it must fulfil the criteria proposed by Alexander (2018) as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Key features for dialogic teaching by Alexander (2018)

Features	Remarks
Collective	A process in which the educator and students attempt the learning task together
Reciprocal	An approach where educator and students engage with each other by discussing ideas and exploring different perspectives
Supportive	Participants feel comfortable expressing their ideas openly without fear of embarrassment over providing incorrect answers, and they collaboratively support one another in achieving shared understandings.
Cumulative	Participants expand upon their own contributions as well as those of others, linking them together to form cohesive lines of thought and understanding.
Purposeful	A talk which is organised to achieve specific aims

1.1.1 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in dialogic teaching frameworks of Alexander (2018), Bakhtin (1981) and Young (2011) to examine student-led dialogic interactions in Malaysian tertiary ESL classrooms. These models, while rooted in different theoretical traditions, are used in complementary ways to explore how dialogic teaching fosters interactional competence. Alexander's framework provides the pedagogical foundation, emphasising that effective classroom dialogue should be collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. His model guides the study's understanding of dialogic pedagogy as a means of enabling deeper student engagement and critical thinking. Nystrand's (1997) model contributes a sociocognitive perspective by conceptualising dialogic interaction as a dynamic process in which meaning is co-constructed through mutual influence and authentic engagement. His emphasis on students' ability to build on and respond to one another's ideas shapes the interaction.

To examine how these dialogic interactions unfold in practice, Young's (2011) model of Interactional Competence is employed as an analytical lens. This model enables a fine-grained analysis of how students draw on interactional resources such as turn-taking, topic management, role negotiation and repair strategies. By integrating these three frameworks, the study positions Interactional Competence as both a pedagogical goal of dialogic teaching and an observable interactional skill that students develop through group discourse. This triangulated framework offers a comprehensive understanding of how dialogic teaching can be adapted to support ESL learners in multilingual, higher education contexts and provides practical insights for advancing dialogic pedagogy in second language acquisition.

1.1.2 Dialogic Teaching in Facilitating Group Discourse

The concept of dialogic teaching originates from Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Bakhtin highlighted the importance of social interaction in which interlocutors engage in dialogue by exchanging and building ideas through dialogic speech. Such learning involves cooperative efforts from both instructors and students who collaboratively generate and refine ideas through questioning techniques while examining concepts through their personal understanding, perspectives and lived experiences (Teo, 2019). Previous studies on the use of dialogic teaching have advocated group discourse as a means of supporting learning and mastering thinking skills (Ramasamy & Zainal, 2023a; Sanchez & Athanases, 2023; Yang & Brindley, 2023). Through active participation in dialogic discourse employing reciprocity, students are afforded opportunities to acquire language in a socially situated context (Bai, 2024).

Dialogic teaching has been researched in many aspects, particularly in science classrooms because it encourages students to think and interact meaningfully (Howe, 2017; Kumpulainen & Rajala, 2017; Molinari & Marneli, 2010). These studies underscore the potential of dialogic teaching in cultivating inquiry-based learning in language classrooms. In the Malaysian higher learning context, Shaari et al. (2018) revealed that autonomy granted by the lecturer shapes the success of sessions. While these studies collectively underscore the pedagogical potential of dialogic teaching as an instructional approach, comparatively less attention is given to how its principles are enacted through moment-to-moment classroom discourse.

Recent studies have begun to address this gap by examining the enactment of dialogic teaching within classroom interaction. However, this emerging body of work reveals important tensions between theoretical ideals and their practical realisation. Dialogic teaching can be operationalised through extended dialogic chains that foster relational meaning-making, and such sustained exchanges remain relatively rare and are often contingent on highly supportive classroom conditions (Maine, 2025). Similarly, Šed'ová et al. (2025) argue that the enactment of dialogic principles is mediated by contextual affordances, yet institutional constraints, curricular demands, and teacher beliefs frequently limit the depth of dialogic engagement, resulting in partial or surface-level implementation. At the micro-level of discourse, Boyd (2023) identifies key markers of a dialogic instructional stance, including speculative language, responsive uptake and the creation of dialogic spaces that validate multiple student perspectives. While these features offer valuable analytical lenses, their presence does not necessarily ensure epistemically productive interaction, as classroom talk may remain procedurally dialogic without facilitating substantive knowledge construction. It is also reported that dialogic teaching

increases student participation and motivation following shifts in teacher discourse practices, but the extent to which such participation translates into deeper cognitive engagement and sustained knowledge building remains underexplored (Sedova, 2021; Sedova et al., 2025).

In ESL contexts, Zhang et al. (2024) observe a gradual transformation from monologic delivery to more dialogic and co-constructed interaction. Nevertheless, this progression is neither linear nor uniform which is often characterised by hybrid discourse patterns in which authoritative and dialogic voices coexist. This suggests that dialogic teaching is not a fixed pedagogical model, but rather a dynamic and context-sensitive process of negotiation. Collectively, these studies indicate that while dialogic teaching holds considerable promise for facilitating meaning-making and interactional competence, there remains a critical need to examine how specific discourse practices move beyond surface-level interaction to enable genuine co-construction of knowledge, particularly within under-researched contexts such as Malaysian ESL classrooms.

1.1.3 The Role of the Instructor in Dialogic Classroom

Instructors play a substantial role in facilitating student group discourse and creating an environment that allows students to engage in meaningful dialogue (Fomin, 2024; Ramasamy & Zainal, 2023b). English language instructors are usually trained in various second language teaching pedagogies to improve students' communicative skills, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). However, dialogic teaching facilitates the meaning-making process through thinking with the language (Mercer & Howe, 2012a). Training instructors enables them to empower students through scaffolding and open-ended questions to construct meaning cumulatively (Alexander, 2018). Such training can contribute to the effective implementation of dialogic teaching practices by instructors (Hennessy et al., 2018; Ramasamy & Zainal, 2023b; Vasalampi et al., 2021). While this approach has been extensively studied in the UK using Alexander's (2018) work, which aims to improve teaching quality and foster engagement, its application in higher education remains limited (Hajhosseiny, 2012; Heron & Wason, 2025). University classes, particularly in a non-Western context, continue to be characterised predominantly by Initiation-Response and Feedback, which restrict opportunities for critical thinking through interaction among peers and instructors (Teo, 2016).

In the Malaysian context, as a measure to equip students with classroom interaction, professional training in dialogic teaching was delivered to secondary school instructors under a program known as OPS-English. This was administered by the English Language Teaching Centre, an organisation under the Ministry of Education that is responsible for the training of in-service English instructors (Ramasamy & Zainal, 2023b). Similarly, in Singapore, the implementation of dialogic teaching in secondary schools has demonstrated a shift in the discourse that provided more opportunities for students to build on information through exploratory talk (Lee, 2016). However, even in these contexts, dialogic teaching is more commonly implemented at the pre-tertiary level, with pre-university instruction still largely reliant on instructor-led pedagogy (Teo, 2016). Despite its established theoretical foundation, there remains a notable empirical gap in how dialogic principles are enacted within ESL university classrooms, particularly in non-Western educational settings, such as Malaysia (Shaari et al., 2018). This underrepresentation signals a contextual gap, as much of the existing literature tends to concentrate on Western primary and secondary educational systems (Cui & Teo, 2021; J. Hardman, 2019). Given that dialogic teaching has been predominantly studied outside tertiary ESL environments, its implementation within university-level language instruction remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by bridging the theoretical constructs of dialogic pedagogy with practical classroom applications. It further acknowledges the need for professional development among university educators, who must be equipped not only to facilitate interaction but also to design group discourses that stimulate critical thinking and promote interaction among the students. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the instructors' perceptions of the role of dialogic teaching in facilitating group discourse?
2. How do instructors employ dialogic teaching to facilitate classroom group discourse?

2. Methodology

This descriptive case study applies a pure qualitative research design because it allows researchers to understand a situation comprehensively (Creswell, 2017). This study aimed to examine instructors' perceptions of dialogic teaching in aiding group discourse and to explore the strategies employed by instructors to facilitate the discourse in the classroom.

2.1 Data Collection

The instructors at Sultan Idris Education University were invited to participate once they were assigned a course to teach for the semester. Three instructors were chosen purposively because they were assigned to teach the English Proficiency 4 course, a subject offered to final-year undergraduate students, and they had a minimum of five years of teaching experience. The English Proficiency 4 (EP4) course includes a speaking component that requires students to participate in group discussions as part of the course assessment. Therefore, the group discourse activities observed in this study were not externally introduced for research purposes but were embedded within the existing course syllabus. However, the integration of dialogic teaching principles was supported through a structured professional development intervention conducted in Week 4. This training equipped instructors with dialogic strategies, which were subsequently applied during naturally occurring speaking activities between Weeks 11 and 14. This study examined the enactment of dialogic teaching

within an authentic instructional context rather than as an isolated or experimental activity. The demographic profile of the participating instructors is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2

Instructors profile

Instructor	Gender	Experience of teaching English	Qualification
Instructor A (TA)	F	15 years	B.Ed. (TESL) Masters in Mass Communication
Instructor B (TB)	M	7 years	B. English with Interaction (Hons) M.Ed. TESL (Hons)
Instructor C (TC)	M	10 years	B.Ed. (TESL) M.A in Applied Linguistics

The student participants were between 22 and 25 years of age, including students from various faculties and academic disciplines. Each class consisted of 30 to 40 students representing diverse cultural backgrounds and varying levels of language proficiency. This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Research Ethics approval was obtained from the University Malaya Research Ethics Committee (UMREC) with the reference number [UM.TNC.2/UMREC]. The participants were furnished with concise information about the purpose, aim, method and ethical considerations of the research. Written consent was obtained in prior to the data collection, and they were informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Two classes for each instructor were chosen for data collection, and the classes were randomly selected based on the instructor's permission. In Week 4, these instructors underwent a two-day training session led by an expert from the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) focused on the methodologies and implementation strategies of dialogic teaching. During this six-hour session, instructors were introduced to dialogic teaching techniques and strategies designed to foster dialogic interaction while integrating interactional resources into their practice. Following this formal training, the researcher conducted bi-weekly follow-ups with the instructors prior to the speaking activity to review the instructional materials and the application of dialogic teaching methods. Thereafter, the instructors were tasked with preparing their students for the speaking activity in the form of a group discourse. This was conducted between weeks 11 and 14, where students were organised into groups and assigned topics to be discussed for approximately fifteen minutes. During this process, the instructor played the facilitator role to promote interaction among the students through turn-taking, repairs and topic development through dialogic principles.

2.2 Instruments

Video-stimulated recall interviews were used to provide instructors the opportunity to explain the employment of dialogic teaching to enhance interaction skills among students, and the possible reasons for the strategies were discussed using semi-structured interviews. Video-stimulated recall was chosen to explore instructors' views of dialogic teaching as a tool to enhance interaction skills, as it allows instructors to reflect and focus on certain teaching strategies that resonate with their practice (Consuegra et al., 2016; Martinelle, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2013). The speaking lessons of these respective instructors were observed and video-recorded over four weeks for each respective class, and the dialogic principles in the recordings were used as stimuli to assist instructors in recall. This approach could capture instructors' reasoning regarding their actions and serve as a springboard to further discuss dialogic teaching in speaking classes during the second phase of the interview.

Each lesson lasted approximately 1 h and 15 minutes. These lessons were video recorded using a Sony camera, and a tripod was placed behind the classroom to ensure that it did not disrupt the instructor. Subsequently, the video recordings were transferred to a laptop and clips that focused on dialogic strategies were shown to the instructor. Early observations were conducted at the descriptive level, and interpretive analysis was conducted after interviews with the instructors. Each instructor was observed for one to two weeks after their lesson, and the clips were shown to the instructor while requesting that they reflect on and justify the principles implemented. When the researcher paused the video, participants were prompted to reflect on their thoughts and feelings at that moment. They were also asked to articulate the reasoning behind their chosen method, especially why they concentrated on that aspect when various other options were available. Lastly, they were encouraged to discuss why they believed that specific approach or strategy was employed.

Semi-structured interviews formed the second phase of the data collection. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed prior to coding. The interview included open-ended and closed questions related to dialogic interaction to gain insights into instructors' perspectives towards dialogic teaching as a tool to facilitate group discourse. Some prompts were shuffled and repeated to ensure their reliability. This exploratory method was applied to obtain in-depth data and findings (Mashuri et al., 2022). These instruments were aligned with the research questions of the study. Video-stimulated recall and semi-structured interviews were primarily used to address Research Question 1, as they captured instructors' perceptions and reflections on the use of dialogic teaching. Classroom observations and video recordings, on the other hand, were used to address Research Question 2 by providing direct evidence of how dialogic teaching was enacted in practice during group discourse.

2.3 Data Analysis

Following the completion of all interviews, the data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVivo 14. An initial coding scheme was developed and subsequently reviewed by a PhD candidate trained in qualitative analysis to enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis. The coding process was refined through iterative comparison and discussion, ensuring consistency in interpretation and reducing potential researcher bias. A total of 24 codes were generated and organised into subthemes and overarching themes. The analysis was guided by Alexander's Dialogic Teaching Framework (2018), Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogism and Young's (2011) Interactional Competence framework, enabling a theoretically informed yet inductive interpretation of the data. These codes were further interpreted by mapping them onto key constructs from Alexander's Dialogic Teaching Framework (2018) (collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful), Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism and Young's (2011) Interactional Competence framework (turn-taking, topic management and role negotiation), thereby establishing a clear theoretical alignment in the analysis. To ensure confirmability and objectivity, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating multiple data sources, including classroom observations, video recordings and field notes. This process facilitated the cross-validation of findings and strengthened the identification of recurring patterns across datasets. An audit trail was maintained throughout the analytical process, documenting coding decisions and theme development. This enhanced transparency and ensured a systematic and traceable account of how interpretations were derived from the data.

3. Results

3.1 Instructors' Perception of the Role of Dialogic Teaching

This section reports on the findings based on the first research question: What are the instructors' perceptions of the role of dialogic teaching in facilitating group discourse?

3.1.1 Promoting authentic language use through real-life contexts

In this study, all three ESL instructors acknowledged dialogic teaching as an approach to aiding group discourse. The instructors mentioned that this approach supported group discourses by providing authentic language experience through turn-taking. All instructors agreed that fluency over accuracy is one of the significant aspects of teaching proficiency, and their beliefs about English language teaching also shaped the way they perceived dialogic teaching as an approach. Two instructors conceded that their belief in Communicative Language Teaching was an interdependent method to improve interaction among students as they employed dialogic teaching.

Excerpt 1 (Instructor C)

I am actually a believer of CLT, Communicative English Teaching. So, I always believe that interaction is one of the ways to learn English. I promoted group discourse in class, and this helped. I love it when students are from the student; I will take the opportunity I have to ask for their opinions. So, I think my class, although listening, reading, and writing, there will always be in every other class, there will always be room for group discourse as students speak in turns.

TC acknowledged his strategy of contributing to classroom group discourses, emphasising the use of reciprocal and cumulative open-ended questions. As a proponent of CLT, TC valued classroom group discourse and actively utilised the opportunities to ask questions which prompted students to contribute to the discourse by taking turns. His use of open-ended questions reflects the purposeful and collective principles of dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008), as students are encouraged to contribute ideas within a shared communicative space. Furthermore, the emphasis on students "speaking in turns" highlights the development of turn-taking as a key interactional feature. All three instructors stated that this approach provided an avenue for them to engage with language in a meaningful and authentic context, which is a central aspect of dialogic teaching and functions as an inquiry-driven approach to classroom group discourse.

Table 3

Classroom interaction excerpt A

Participant	Excerpt
T	Okay, so let us do some practise a little bit. Alright? Okay, now, can you please tell me the most current issues that you know happen around us?
S1	Missing.
T	Huh?

These instructors highlighted that their primary questioning strategies were intentionally designed to immerse students in real-life contexts, with a particular focus on scenarios relevant to the workplace and the interviews. For instance, TB mentioned that "I usually will bring up current issues, specifically current issues from social media" because, from his perspective, students are able to engage in such topics, which promote the skill of turn-taking as they collaborate to sustain the interaction. These perceptions were also supported by classroom observations, where students engaged in short turn exchanges that contributed to topic continuity. As shown in Table 3, the brief instance functioned to sustain interaction. In this brief exchange, students responded to both the teacher and their peers by demonstrating reciprocity and cumulative

talk, where ideas are extended and developed collaboratively. Such interaction reflects how dialogic teaching supports authentic language use through meaningful engagement.

3.1.2 Facilitating dialogic interaction through strategic questioning and scaffolding

Instructors employing the dialogic principle also collectively agreed that it assisted group discourse through scaffolding. TA and TC observed that semi-guided support through scaffolding and questioning facilitated meaningful group discourse. Similarly, TB emphasised the role of scaffolding through targeted questioning, such as rhetorical and higher-order questioning, which involved probing to elicit deeper ideas and promoted topic development among the students as they took turns to engage in the group discourse.

Excerpt 3 (TA)

Because of our students, as I mentioned, they are from different levels of proficiency, so you cannot- hmm- they are not into independent learning yet, so they are semi-guided to speak.

The semi-guiding process reflects Vygotsky's 1978 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where students require assistance with the idea generation process and help them in knowledge construction to engage in group discourse as they sustain the interaction through turn-taking. This facilitates language acquisition as students will need to listen to and communicate their ideas in sentences in a reciprocal manner, which develops metalinguistic awareness as they practice language forms and vocabulary in context to create meaningful interaction.

Excerpt 4 (TB)

For example, let's say thinking on a different perspective. When we talk about cause and effect, for example, effect, it is not necessarily something bad. It can be something good as well. Just by invoking these ideas, it creates a new paradigm for students to see differently. And what I can see by the end of the semester is that I can see differences in terms of how well they come up with ideas in the activity."

TB's questioning strategy motivated the students to reconsider alternatives and expand their thinking, which reflects the cumulative principle as each contribution is built upon prior ideas. The questioning was also directed to deeper conceptual understanding, which is focussed on the purposeful principle, and through such scaffolding, students are able to generate ideas, sustain interaction and engage in group discourse more confidently.

3.1.3 Establishing supportive dialogic spaces for student participation

The instructors felt that through dialogic teaching, all students had the opportunity to voice their opinion. TA indicated that during the group discourse, she felt that everyone had the opportunity to express their opinion despite having a lead person in the session when she said: "So, basically, I noticed that during the group discourse, everyone is given the opportunity to voice out their opinion, to interact as they manage the order". This lead person managed to include the rest of the group members to interact, which supports the principle of dialogic teaching of support, and this develops students' identity as all voices are valued.

TB encouraged his students to share their ideas, even during small class talks. He referred to this activity as "parlimen bawang" in Malay, an activity conducted prior as a warm-up to promote a culture of dialogue and "to get them running with ideas with the vocabulary first and then we go on with the lessons". This provides a supportive environment for students to share their viewpoints without feeling embarrassed. Although "bawang" literally means "onion" in Malay, it can also refer to contemporary cultural lingo in the Malaysian context, which means "to gossip." "Parlimen" here is simply a direct translation of "parliament," but in this context it refers to a large-group discourse. Although the classroom group discourse activity was not meant to be a gossiping session nor was it meant to be a serious decision-making activity that simulates parliamentary sessions, setting up the groupwork through playful use of Malay words to label the activity helps to establish rapport among the students. Given that Malay is also most students' first language, they were likely to understand the connotation that comes with the term "parlimen bawang", which sustains the discourse in a cumulative manner.

3.2 Strategies Employed by Instructors to Aid Group Discourse

This section reports on the findings obtained for the second research question, "How do instructors employ dialogic teaching to facilitate classroom group discourse?"

3.2.1 Employing Socratic questioning and dialogic principles to scaffold group discourse

Through the observation of all six classes of TA, TB, and TC, it was discovered that instructors employed the Socratic questioning technique through open-ended, probing, and rhetorical questions to construct meaningful group discourse, as students were encouraged to formulate responses and questions that enhance their vocabulary and grammar through critical thinking. The group discourse that began with smaller groups eventually became a whole-class group discourse. As shown in Table 4, the excerpt illustrates how she created an opportunity for students' active engagement by employing open-ended questions, which prompted students to respond and acquire the academic vocabulary of the word 'kidnap' to sustain the topic of discourse.

The open-ended and probing questions used in the whole-class group discourse through collective and cumulative responses promoted knowledge building on kidnapping. TA used "why" to encourage further thinking and leveraged students' responses by probing further. She also employed translanguaging as she asked "cute je jadi kidnap?" which

translates as “so cute girls get kidnapped? This maintained a natural discourse flow, which helped students relax as they laughed at the humour and participated in further probing questions, enabling them to co-construct knowledge collaboratively.

Table 4

Classroom interaction excerpt B

Participant	Excerpt
T	Okay, so let us do some practise a little bit. Alright? Okay, now, can you please tell me the most current issues that you know happen around us?
S1	Missing.
T	Huh?
S1	People are missing.
T	Kidnap? We speak that, missing people. Okay, there are lots of missing people nowadays.
S1	Yeah.
T	Okay, it involves...?
S1	children.
T	Most of the people who are lost are before what kind of age range?
S1	Teenagers, children adults.
T	Teenagers, children...adults. Adults. Okay, and the gender?
S1	girls...
T	Girls, mostly girls.
S2	Yes.
T	Why? Because girls?
S3	Because girls are cute.
T	Because girls cute, cute je jadi kidnap?
Students	(laughs)...ya...
T	Beware girls...Okay, so why do you think this thing happens in our community nowadays? Why is it happening? Lots of cases, kidnapped cases, missing people cases Why do you think happens? Because of? (calls for students...).
S1	Because of economy...
T	Because of economy...?? Elaborate. why do you think it is because of economy?
S3	When people doesn't have money...then they kidnap people to get money.

3.2.2 The role of questioning in knowledge construction and critical thinking

The instructors employed open-ended questioning techniques to prompt students to move beyond superficial responses and engage with the content from multiple perspectives. This approach facilitated substantive classroom dialogue and contributed to the development of critical thinking skills, particularly in students' capacity to analyse, evaluate and synthesise information (Hajhosseiny, 2012; F. Hardman, 2008). Instructors were able to extend student contributions, scaffold higher-order reasoning and collaboratively co-construct knowledge within the learning environment through these questions. The students demonstrated the ability to sustain the topic of discourse by contributing in depth through co-construction, which promotes experiential sharing that enhances interactional competence.

The excerpt in Table 5 demonstrates that the instructor further engaged the students by posing open-ended questions, encouraging them to explore and articulate the underlying reasons for the concept of a role model. She employed higher-order questioning techniques to challenge students' ability to make judgments from multiple perspectives, such as questioning whether it was inappropriate for the younger generation to set examples. This reflects the reciprocal and cumulative principles, as students build on each other's ideas and refine their understanding through dialogue. Through this, she contributed to the progressive co-construction of knowledge, thereby demonstrating that dialogic teaching practices can effectively cultivate critical thinking among learners, which promotes interactional competence as students negotiate meaning through turn-taking, topic management and role negotiation.

Table 5

Classroom interaction excerpt C

Participant	Excerpt
S2	I think just let the younger generation be the role model to the older generation
T	How?
S1	Because everywhere you go you will see the opposite of what you say You need to have a strong mindset To know what is wrong and what is right
S2	Ya, I think if we let go of the younger generation The thing is wrong So we might actually do it.
T	So how do you think? If someone says let the younger generation Set examples to the older generation, How? Don't you think that that can be considered as rude?
S2	No, When it comes to education It is a matter of age. It is about the manner we teach people So we don't consider about the age It is about the good things you teach.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study provide evidence on the critical role of dialogic teaching in facilitating classroom discourse among undergraduate ESL students in the Malaysian higher education context. All three instructors conceded that dialogic teaching is a valuable pedagogical approach that fosters authentic language use, supports critical thinking and encourages inclusive participation, which promotes interactional competence among these undergraduates. These findings resonate with Alexander's (2008) definition of dialogic teaching as purposeful and cumulative discourse that supports collective meaning-making. The instructors employed open-ended and probing questions during group discourse, as it not only encouraged students to express their opinions but also stimulated deeper reflection and metalinguistic awareness, echoing findings from Michaels and O'Connor (2015), who emphasised the role of extended questioning moves in fostering student reasoning through interaction.

Alexander's dialogic teaching proposed that dialogue is an effective strategy for improving cognitive potential, as it empowers students to engage collaboratively, which prepares them for lifelong learning (Alexander, 2020). These students enhance their capacity to express ideas by thinking critically, making connections, and collaboratively developing knowledge, which promotes interactional competence as they negotiate meaning in group discourse. Notably, the instructors' belief in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) shaped their questioning strategies, as they sought to create realistic and context-rich learning environments that mirrored authentic interaction. The use of scenario-based questioning provided students with opportunities to engage in discourse relevant to real-world interactions, particularly in workplace and interview settings (Chow et al., 2021; Milliner & Dimoski, 2024). Prioritising fluency over accuracy provides a safe environment for students to express their thoughts without apprehension about being evaluated (Prefontaine, 2023). Furthermore, compared to didactic instruction, dialogic teaching gives students the opportunity to interact and clarify meanings, creating metalinguistic awareness among learners (Jocuns, 2021; Myhill et al., 2012; Newman, 2025). Students' ability to reflect on and manipulate the structural features of language plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, as it facilitates various aspects of language learning, from error correction to strategic listening comprehension, which supports the adjacency pair of topic organisation (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Through layered questioning techniques, the instructors provided incremental cognitive support that aligned with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and the Zone of Proximal Development, where learners are supported to progress from assisted performance to independent participation. While some instructors appeared to opt for more incidental, interaction-driven approaches, others relied on more explicit forms of scaffolding. This suggests that dialogic teaching in practice involves a flexible integration of both approaches, depending on the instructional context and learners' needs (Manap et al., 2025). The observations revealed that such scaffolding not only aids idea generation, but also supports students in transitioning from hesitant contributors to confident speakers who can articulate complex thoughts (Reznitskaya et al., 2009; Qin et al., 2025; Yang & Brindley, 2022). Classroom observations also found that Socratic questioning techniques served as powerful tools to sustain dialogue and build cumulative understanding (Michaels & O'Connor, 2015). These findings reinforce the idea that dialogic teaching goes beyond language practice, supporting the development of cognitive flexibility, problem-solving abilities and critical analysis (Hajhosseiny, 2012; Mercer & Howe, 2012b; Skidmore, 2006; Skidmore & Murakami, 2016). Furthermore, the implementation of extended and higher-order questioning created meaningful opportunities for learners to engage in analytical reasoning and reflective inquiry. These questioning practices not only enhanced students' metalinguistic awareness but also enabled them to engage in critical

reflection on vocabulary, grammatical structures and language use which are the key dimensions in second language acquisition.

An additional noteworthy finding was observed in translanguaging practices within dialogic interactions which promote participation among the students in the group discourse. This finding aligns with recent studies that highlight the role of translanguaging as an inclusive pedagogical tool that supports multilingual learners in academic settings (García & Wei, 2014; Maryansyah et al., 2024). In this study, instructors' translanguaging practices helped build rapport and encourage students to co-construct meaning for knowledge construction in the interaction. The study also revealed that translanguaging practices within dialogic interactions supported comprehension and promoted inclusive participation by allowing students to draw on their multilingual resources to sustain discourse. Collectively, these findings reinforce dialogic teaching as a pedagogical approach that supports both interactional competence and critical thinking in ESL classrooms, which are crucial skills for graduate employability in increasingly global and multilingual work environments. Overall, this study highlights the transformative potential of dialogic teaching in tertiary-level ESL classrooms. By integrating questioning strategies, scaffolding, real-life scenarios and fostering inclusivity, dialogic pedagogy can promote student participation and language acquisition in second language classrooms.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine the implementation of dialogic teaching in engaging undergraduate ESL students in group discourse and in developing their interactional competence. The findings demonstrate that dialogic teaching serves as an effective pedagogical approach in achieving these aims, particularly using questioning and scaffolding to promote participation and sustain interaction, which is crucial for workplace communication. This study contributes to the expanding scholarship on dialogic teaching in higher education language classrooms by demonstrating how dialogic principles are enacted within a Malaysian ESL context. It reinforces dialogic teaching as a pedagogical approach that supports both interactional competence and critical thinking in ESL classrooms, which are crucial skills for graduate employability in increasingly global and multilingual work environments.

An important implication of this study is that professional development for higher learning instructors should emphasise dialogic teaching strategies, particularly the use of authentic, real-world scenarios and scaffolded questioning techniques. These approaches can effectively support students in developing both language proficiency and interactional competence within group discourse. Additionally, dialogic teaching can help shift classroom practices away from monologic instruction towards more interactive and student-centred learning environments that better prepare students for workplace communication. This study is limited to three language instructors from a single higher learning institution in Malaysia, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and incorporate student perspectives to further examine the sustained impact of dialogic teaching across diverse ESL contexts.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

Thilaga Ravinthar: Conceptualisation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Writing - original draft

Azlin Zaiti Zainal: Conceptualisation; Validation; Supervision; Writing - review & editing

Generative Artificial Intelligence Declarations

The authors used generative AI tools solely to assist with language editing, grammar checking and improving readability. The AI tools did not contribute to the study design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings or the generation of scientific content. All outputs generated by AI were carefully reviewed, verified and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the manuscript.

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