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Dialogue Localization in Conversation Design and EFL Learners' L2 Classroom Conversation Fluency Achievement

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Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of dialogue localization as a classroom activity on intermediate EFL learners' classroom conversation. To achieve this, 60 intermediate language learners were selected as convenient sample. The participants' proficiency levels were determined through the administration of the OPT test. The OPT test utilized in this study comprises a total of 30 questions, distributed evenly across three categories: listening, vocabulary, and grammar, with 10 questions allocated to each category. The proficiency level of the students was determined based on their scores, with a range of 0-10 indicating a pre-intermediate level, 10-20 indicating an intermediate level, and 20-30 indicating an advanced level. Then, they were divided into experimental and control groups. According to Farhady, Jafarpur, and Birjandi (1994), a pre-test of speaking consisting of 7 questions was administered to both groups, and the participants were required to respond orally. The scoring system used for evaluating the participants' speaking skills was based on the guidelines outlined in the book "Testing Language Skills from Theory to Practice." The experimental group was then taught localized conversation while the control group was taught non-localized conversation. After ten sessions of the treatments, a post-test of speaking was administered in which the participants in both groups were involved in the same activity as the pretest. The data were analyzed through calculating independent sample t-test. The results indicated that the means of the two groups were significantly different, i.e., the experimental group outperformed the control group in the speaking achievement. This means that localization in dialogue has the potential to enhance students' speaking abilities during classroom conversations.

Keywords: Non-localized dialogue, classroom conversation, speaking achievement, localized dialogue

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1. Introduction

Speaking is defined as a means of enabling students to participate in classroom activities to provide an opportunity to talk about themselves and their beliefs (Chastain, 1988). Furthermore, he defines speaking as "the presentation of speaker competence, which requires language learners to activate their knowledge to construct messages" (p. 272). Speaking is a production skill that falls into two main categories: accuracy and fluency. Accuracy consists of vocabulary, grammar, and the use of pronunciation by some activities, while fluency describes the 'ability to continue speaking spontaneously' (Gower, Philips, & Walter, 1995). Bygate (1987) identified two factors: production and interaction skills. The ability to produce results in the ability to speak without time limits, and the ability to interact results in negotiation between learners. Both of these skills help learners improve their speaking skills more easily. Stuart (1989) suggested that learners should plan and coordinate their speeches. Effective speakers must practice through practice. Speaking is a high-risk activity that has been shown to cause anxiety and make learners afraid of losing face.

Fouladi-Nashta and Rahimy (2018) considered speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. He held that the form and meaning of speaking depended on the context in which it occurred including the participants themselves, their experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking. It is often spontaneous, open -ended, and evolving. However, speech is not always unpredictable. Speaking requires that learners not only know how to produce specific points of language such as grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary (linguistic competence), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic competence).

Observations and experiences have indicated that many Iranian EFL learners seemed worried about how to pass various courses such as listening and speaking in the institute. However, they were unable to speak in the context of actual language use. This claim is supported by a pilot study conducted on a group of EFL junior students in Iran, which tested their speaking skills and demonstrated that there was evidence of failure. Speaking problems include: a) They are not sufficiently motivated to practice in class (Asaei & Rahimy (2012), b) They are too shy and afraid to participate in conversations, c) They have nothing to say, and d) They do not like the materials. The nature of the aforementioned problems compels Iranian English teachers to use a variety of methods to facilitate learning of speaking skills in the classroom, most of which lead to failure. It seems that the position of "localization in conversation formation", which is the focus of this research, is being ignored among the techniques for improving speaking ability.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Language has long been used as a means of communication between people. Without this channel that connects people, there would be no life, as it is the basic means of verbal communication between individuals, groups and people. Speaking is not just knowledge of language functions. Linguistic characteristics of messages expanding oral communication requires more than memorized vocabulary and grammatical understanding. One of the obstacles of learning to speak is a contradiction between the material and the course, so most teachers do not promote real speaking situations. Teachers should also consider the learners' interests and needs. Learners must engage in verbal activities in which they spontaneously exchange ideas in a second language (Derakhshan et al., 2015). In this study, such an activation regarding real speaking situations is supposed to be represented in the form of "localized dialogues."

Talking with other pupils allows them to learn from each other. Sometimes classmates can explain something differently than a teacher, which helps with learning. Listening to how a peer thinks about a concept or uses language around a certain topic will benefit learners. Speaking also helps EFL learners in fluency of language and improve the skills of learners who need confidence in their speaking ability to get more attention. Conversation gives you social support. Whether you talk to your friends, colleagues, and family members to share information, offer advice, or just to vent, this process helps you put things in perspective which helps build your resilience and cope better when things don't go to plan.

According to Mohammadi and Enayati (2018), many English learners aspire to achieve fluency in speaking, which is the ability to communicate quickly and effortlessly in the English language. This skill is highly sought after for both academic and practical purposes. Despite investing significant time and resources into learning English through various educational institutions, non-native speakers often struggle to attain native-like fluency. This difficulty may stem from a lack of understanding of lexical chunks in the English language. Additionally, learners in English as a

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Foreign Language (EFL) settings may face challenges due to limited exposure to the target language, leading to a lack of awareness regarding differences in lexical chunks between their native language and English.

Classroom observations and experiences indicate that problems in speaking can be as the result of both linguistic and psychological factors. For instance, many second language learners cannot succeed in speaking skill because of anxiety according to Abedini and Chalak (2017) anxiety and inactivity in speaking as the two biggest challenges. Both of these emotional limitations result from learners' tendency to predict being judged negatively, especially when they make mistakes in front of their friends.

According to Asaei and Rahimy (2012), becoming proficient in a second language is a highly complex and productive task when trying to understand its essence. They believed that the problems of speaking a second language were not confined to a particular group of learners, nor were they confined to a geographical area. Rather, research shows that different learner groups have trouble improving their speaking skills, and learners in Iran are no exception. Asaei and Rahimy (2012 as cited in Jamshidnejad, 2010), which summarizes current individual approaches and provides a comprehensive overview of the causes of oral problems in foreign language learning and communication. It offers. Using a systematic approach, he uses general theories of interpersonal communication to understand the complexities of problem construction in EFL oral communication. Therefore, he summarizes the problems faced by Iranian learners with oral fluency into three main categories. ‘Communication-based problems’, ‘meaning-making problems’, and 'contextual problems' (Jamshidnejad, 2010, p. 9).

1.2 Research Question

The research question of this study is as follows:

RQ: Can using dialogue localization promote Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ L2 classroom conversation fluency through a significant effect?

1.3 Hypothesis of the Study

In accordance with the above research question, the formulated null hypothesis is presented due to the nature of the variables as well as the non-directionality of the relationship between the variables. The hypothesis is as follows:

H0: Using dialogue localization cannot promote Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ L2 classroom conversation fluency through a significant effect.

2. Review of the Literature

Richards (2009) defines "Conversation as dialogue" as the typical form of conversation that serves a primarily social function. This type of dialogue is characterized by individuals seeking to establish a friendly and comfortable interaction with others through the exchange of greetings, small talk, and discussions about recent experiences. The emphasis is placed on the speakers and their desire to present themselves in a certain way, rather than on the content of the message. Muhammad-Ishtiagh-Khan et al. (2018) posits that the acquisition of speaking skills by foreign language learners presents considerable difficulty and challenge, particularly in oral communication. This issue can be mitigated through the implementation of classroom dialogue practice, which has been shown to enhance learners' motivation to engage with the English language. The primary objective of such dialogue practice is to address the obstacles encountered by foreign language learners. Empirical evidence indicates that dialogue serves as an effective strategy for surmounting the challenges inherent in foreign language acquisition.

Fluency, as defined by Ellis (2004), refers to the degree to which language production during a task exhibit pauses, hesitations, and revisions. Mizera (2008) further describes fluency as the ability to spontaneously and comprehensively speak a language without excessive formal errors that may distract listeners from the intended message. Hedge (2000) adds that fluency involves linking speech units effortlessly and without unnecessary slowness or hesitation. The primary objective of teaching speaking skills is to develop communicative efficiency, wherein students can effectively express themselves using their current language proficiency. It is crucial for students to speak English confidently in order to engage in various basic communication activities. In real-life situations, speaking ability is often the most influential factor in forming initial impressions of individuals. Consequently, English language teachers bear the responsibility of adequately preparing students to communicate fluently and comprehensively in English beyond the confines of the classroom and testing environments.

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In the academic literature, fluency has been defined by Lennon (2000) as “the rapid, smooth, accurate, and efficient translation of thoughts or communicative intention under the temporal constraints of on-line processing” (p. 26). Lennon (2000) further distinguishes between narrow and broad senses of fluency. The broad sense encompasses overall oral proficiency in a foreign or second language, while the narrow sense focuses on fluency as a component of overall L2 competency. However, Fulcher (2003) argues that the term "fluency" in its broad sense is problematic due to its vagueness (Prefontaine, 2010, p. 135). In considering the narrow sense of fluency, Segalowitz (2010) introduces three aspects of fluency: cognitive fluency, utterance fluency, and perceived fluency. Cognitive fluency refers to the ability of L2 speakers to smoothly translate thoughts into L2 speech. Utterance fluency pertains to the oral features of utterances that reflect underlying cognitive processes (Segalowitz, 2010, p. 48). Perceived fluency involves the inferences listeners make about a speaker's cognitive fluency based on their perception of utterance fluency (ibid).

According to Gills (2013), in the realm of English language acquisition, a persistent issue has been identified by students over an extended period of time. This issue pertains to students who possess structural competence but struggle to communicate effectively in spoken discourse. To address this challenge, it is imperative to focus on the development of speaking skills through the exploration of conversational techniques. Conversation, characterized by informal and symmetrical exchanges aimed at fostering social connections, adheres to established norms of etiquette due to its inherently social nature. Typically conducted face-to-face and in real-time, conversations serve as a platform for participants to acquire knowledge, coordinate actions, and achieve common objectives. Proficiency in conversational skills can be cultivated through adherence to certain principles such as engaging in reciprocal dialogue, demonstrating courtesy and receptiveness, utilizing non-verbal cues for effective communication, and establishing emotional rapport.

The mastery of conversational skills necessitates a harmonious blend of motor-receptive abilities and interactional acumen. Motor skills encompass the cognitive processes involved in perceiving, recalling, and articulating linguistic elements accurately, while interactional skills revolve around making informed decisions regarding communication strategies. The selection of appropriate skill sets hinges on the specific educational context and learning objectives. Recognizing students’ struggles with spoken communication, educators are encouraged to adopt innovative approaches that foster student engagement and enjoyment in language learning. By guiding students towards enhanced oral proficiency through simplified sentence structures, ellipsis techniques for concise expression, formulaic expressions for idiomatic fluency, and strategic use of fillers and hesitation devices for coherence maintenance during speech production. In order to enhance students' speaking abilities effectively within the classroom setting, educators should strive to implement engaging instructional methods that promote active participation and enjoyment in language learning activities. The utilization of conversational techniques as a pedagogical tool holds promise for improving students' speaking proficiency levels. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the efficacy of incorporating conversation-based approaches into language instruction programs with a focus on enhancing students' oral communication skills.

According to Harmer (2007), there are three primary rationales for incorporating speaking activities in the classroom. Firstly, these activities offer students the opportunity to practice real-life speaking in a safe environment. Secondly, speaking tasks that encourage students to utilize all of their language skills provide valuable feedback for both teachers and students. Lastly, the more students engage with different aspects of language stored in their minds, the more automatic their use of these elements becomes. Consequently, students gradually become independent language users who can fluently employ words and phrases without conscious effort. Given these reasons, it is crucial for English language instructors to prioritize the teaching of speaking skills. Rather than focusing solely on memorization, it is desirable to create an environment that fosters meaningful communication. Instructors should design engaging and purposeful activities or tasks that encourage serious speaking practice among students. As Harmer (2007) suggests, well-designed speaking activities can be highly captivating for students. When all participants are fully engaged and the teacher provides appropriate feedback, students derive immense satisfaction from these activities. With this objective in mind, a variety of speaking activities can significantly contribute to the development of essential interactive skills necessary for life. These activities not only make students more active participants in the learning process but also make their learning experience more meaningful and enjoyable (Namaziandost et al., 2018).

Pourhosein (2012) asserts that there is a prevailing notion advocating for foreign English learners to enhance their speaking proficiency through classroom conversations. Presently, numerous scholars are directing their attention

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towards enhancing speaking skills through dialogue, as it is deemed the most effective method for improving oral communication abilities. Classroom interactions are recognized as a pedagogical strategy for language learning, and the practice of engaging in dialogue with students in the EFL classroom is considered a crucial exercise for students' linguistic development. Localization is the process of making interactive elements more accessible to individuals, enabling them to easily comprehend the functioning of conversational design. The consideration of multilingualism is already prevalent in this context, although not all conversation designers may share this perspective. It is important to recognize that there are instances where a conversation project is intended for local use and may not be suitable for translation into other languages. Therefore, it is essential for localization considerations to be integrated and communicated during the initial stages of conversation design, particularly during the contemplation of requirements.

Finally, Moslehi and Rahimy (2018), made a study in which they had a different look at classroom dialogues. Accordingly, they investigated the effect of role-play through dialogues vs. written practice on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' knowledge of English idioms. The results of their study revealed that the experimental participants (the dialogue group) outperformed the writer-practice group in learning idioms. Actually, what makes their study noticeable is that using dialogues seemingly plays a significant role in learning various sorts of language components, having been revealed in oral proficiency-related studies in the literature.

The studies examined in this review have focused on the investigation of speaking and conversation within the context of classroom teaching theories. However, these studies have primarily explored speaking and conversation in a general sense, without specifically addressing the impact of localized dialogue on language learners' in-class speech. Furthermore, while previous research has involved adapting dialogues for classroom materials, this study aims to design and implement localized conversations to determine their potential impact on improving students' language fluency. Language localization is the process of adapting a product to the appropriate language for a particular culture and geographic location/market. It's not just about translating from one language to another. Localization in conversation formation is hypothesis that using it as a task in classroom conversation may exert some positive effects. Based on the problem stated and the literature reviewed here, the gap which is the basis of the study emerges i.e. lack of applying localized dialogues in EFL learners' conversation classroom materials. Consequently, the rationale for the current study is to attempt to find possible answers to the following question:

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study were selected from Saba institute. It is language institute in Mazandaran province in north of Iran. As a background of the instrument, it should be noted that this institute is under the supervision of Iran Technical and Vocational Training Organization. After passing each level, language learners can participate in the written and oral exam from technical and vocational training organization and receive a valid and translatable certificate. The participants of the study were 40 Iranian EFL learners in an Iranian English Institute in Mazandaran province in north of Iran. They were selected in a convenient sample manner. According to John Best Convenience sampling is a qualitative research sampling strategy that involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher. Rather than being drawn at random from a bigger population, participants in this strategy are picked because they are easily available to the researcher. They were divided in two groups of 20 and were randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group to show the difference of the means.

3.2 Materials and Procedures

The study utilized three types of materials: pretest materials, treatment materials, and posttest materials. The pretest and posttest materials consisted of seven oral questions that were designed by the researcher based on the Cambridge English Preliminary Speaking test. The validity of these questions was assessed by two professors from the university's English language department, with one professor giving a score of 0.70 and the other professor giving a score of 0.83. The questions covered various topics such as personal information, telling time, asking for directions, discussing abilities, and describing rooms and furniture at home.

The speaking test used in this study consisted of four parts. In part 1, candidates engaged in a conversation with the examiner about themselves and their interests. Part 2 required candidates to describe a set of pictures based on a given topic. Part 3 involved a collaborative task where candidates discussed a topic with another candidate. Finally, in part 4, candidates engaged in a conversation with another candidate based on a visual prompt.

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The treatment materials for the study consisted of ten sessions of teaching conversation. Each session included 40 minutes of intermediate conversation training using PowerPoint presentations and role-play tasks such as "acting out" and "group work". The posttest material for the study consisted of the same 10 questions as the pretest, which were answered by participants in both groups. This approach ensured that the pretest and posttest had sufficient validity and reliability. However, it is important to note that using parallel questions may result in different levels of difficulty for participants. Participants' performance on the speaking pretest and posttest was evaluated using five criteria: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. One such criterion adopted from the Farhadi, Jafarpoor, and Birjandi (1994) rating scale.

4. Results

The data of current study were analyzed via applying the following statistical methods: Independent sample T-test was calculated between the posttest scores of speaking in the two participant groups to show the effect of the hypothesis of the study. The descriptive findings of the current study is illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Descriptive results of the posttests of the experimental and the control group of the study

	Groups	N	Mean	S. D
Classroom conversation	Localized Dialogue	30	19.00	0.69149
Classroom conversation	Non-Localized Dialogue	30	17.70	1.41177

As Table 1 indicates, the mean of the localized dialogue group (the experimental group) is higher than that of the non-localized dialogue group (the control group). Accordingly, the number of participants in each group was 20 (NLD= 30; NCD= 30); Moreover, the standard deviation was lower in the experimental group compared to the control group in the study, suggesting that the posttest results in the experimental group were more homogeneous than those in the control group.

4.1 Normality Assumption

Prior to conducting the independent sample T-test, estimating the normality of variances is to be done as presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2. The normality assumption table

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			
F	Sig.	T_{obs}	df
22.908	0.001	4.762	58

The results in Table 2 indicate that the groups are homogeneous, as evidenced by the statistically significant t-value (tobs= 4.76, p<.05). The homogeneity provides the basis for running the Independent samples T-test of the study the result of which is presented in Table 3 as follows:

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Table 3. The result of independent sample t-test of the study

Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	Tobs	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Dialogue localization	Equal variances assumed	22.908	0.001	4.762	58	0.001	1.36667

According to Table 3, the result of the independent sample t-test (tobs= 4.76, p<.05) yielded significant difference between the experimental and control groups. The obtained t-observed is higher than the critical value of t in the t-student table with the degree of freedom of 58 (df=58) and the level of significance of 0.001 (Sig. = 0.001) for the two-tailed (null) hypothesis as to be 2.000 (tcrit = 2.000). Such a result (tobs>tcrit) rejects the null hypothesis of the current study. The findings presented in Table 2 can be presented in the subsequent schematic representation of Figure 1 as follows:

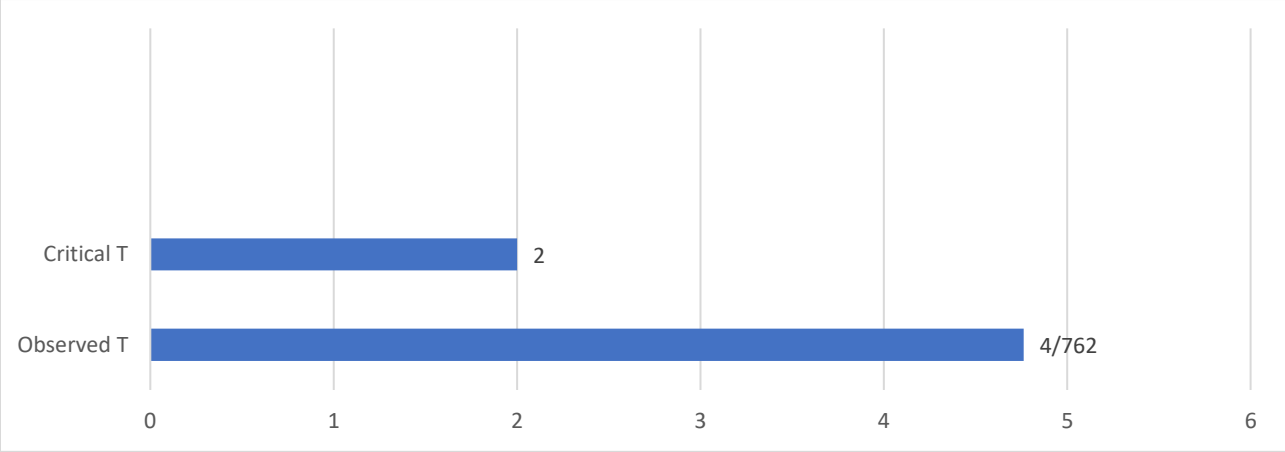


Figure 1. The result of independent sample t-test of the study

According to Figure 1, the t-observed in the presented chart exhibit a higher magnitude when compared to the corresponding critical value. This is indicative of a significant difference between the experimental and the control group of the study.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented in Tables (1) and (2) demonstrate that the null hypothesis of the study has been rejected, indicating that the treatment employed in the study had a significant impact on the outcome. Therefore, it can be inferred that the use of localized dialogues has a positive effect on the performance of intermediate EFL learners in a classroom conversation test. The results obtained provide justification for the effectiveness of utilizing localized dialogues to enhance classroom conversation fluency among intermediate EFL learners. The experimental group participants appeared to benefit from engaging in role-play activities and group work, suggesting that creating a collaborative learning environment within the classroom can lead to improved outcomes. When students perceive their class as a community working together towards common goals, it fosters effective communication and mutual understanding, which are essential foundations for learning.

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The findings support the notion that incorporating localized dialogues and collaborative activities into language learning can positively impact students' conversational fluency. This study contributes to our understanding of effective teaching methods for EFL learners and highlights the importance of creating a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Further research in this area could provide valuable insights into optimizing language learning strategies for diverse student populations. The outperformance of the experimental group of this study to the control group can also be interpreted as a clear-cut and perhaps best-fit orchestration of adapting conversation teaching conditions to EFL learners' knowledgeability degree due to the fact that there is always room for individual differences in learning abilities and personality factors.

The findings of the current study seem to be in line with the findings of Pourhosein (2012) who focuses on the prevailing notion advocating for foreign English learners to enhance their speaking proficiency through classroom conversations. Further, such findings are in compatibility with those of Harmer (2007) who depicts the "three primary rationales" for incorporating speaking activities in the classroom. Accordingly, teaching language components will be enhanced if they are integrated with speaking activities of a specific sort. Finally, the results of the current study confirm what Fouladi-Nashta and Rahimy (2018) have come to. They investigated the possible impacts of dialogue shadowing on enhancing conversation ability among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Although "dialogue shadowing" as the independent variable in their study cannot be directly comparable with "dialogue localization" in this study, the effective role of "dialogue" in general as a classroom task cannot be ignored.

One of the beneficial issues this study can shed a light on is that the concept of localization in designing classroom conversation seems to be a novel horizon opened in front of foreign language teachers and learners particularly in Iranian language community for at least two main reasons. First, at school level, Iranian intermediate EFL learners and teachers are faced with a sort of pre-determined national curriculum designed and authenticated by the Ministry of Education which must necessarily be implemented nationwide. It is actually a textbook-oriented curriculum for the implementation of which a time limitation has been allocated. This will impose teachers to remained stuck to the conversation content prescribed directly by the text and indirectly by the Ministry policy-makers; and as a result, will lead to a hinder in employing localization as a strategy in teaching conversations. Second, at institute level, intermediate language learners are instructed with categories of dialogues and conversations of course not in a specific time limitation, but in a so-called cliché classification of conversations included in textbook content again, which may obstruct dynamic and localized designation of them for instruction.

The current study brings us to the point that localized dialogue can possibly provide learners with a comfortable environment to flourish in. this reason leads to better attention in learning and stimulate them to participant in classroom conversation Localized dialogue helps students learn to use the foreign language in classroom conversations and speak more fluently in class. As a future prospect of this study, it is recommended that the researchers expand the scope of this research study from three intermediate classes with a limited number of participants to more classes with different language proficiency. Additionally, the experiment can be replicated to different geographical areas, institutes and linguistic situations; English is not the only language to which the experiments in this study can be applied. It can be repeated across genders (male and female) for student and teacher participants. The sample size (n=40) of this research study may be converted into a larger number of Iranian (non-Iranian) EFL participants to see if the results can be the same. Finally, while using localized dialogue in teaching conversation, teachers can teach about a variety of topics and situations involving human traits such as happiness, sadness, and dishonesty, and use these traits during daily conversation teaching.

What has been found in the study reported here may be beneficial to language teachers particularly conversation teachers in that they can use dialogue localization to justification and find out the equivalence of the new words. The results of the current study may also beneficial to language learners to initiate with new conversation practice in the classroom. They can learn new expressions easily because they can make a connection between localized dialogues and new terms in their mind, and this action makes them to speak more fluently.

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