Facilitating Dialogues in an Online Classroom: Insights from an EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Research on classroom discussions and dialogues is well-established, however, studies on how classroom dialogue is facilitated in online classrooms remain underexplored. This qualitative case study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of an EFL teacher educator and her 16 students during a twelve-week enacting dialogic pedagogy mediated by Microsoft Teams (MT). Utilizing thematic analysis from thirteen video recordings, four discussion forums, three series of teacher interviews, student feedback, and researchers' observations, the study revealed that the classroom dialogue was facilitated in MT by structuring the online environment, enhancing synchronous video conferencing through 'meet now,' extending dialogue through chat-based learning in 'channel,' and enriching interaction with multimodal cues. The study suggests that while digital technologies can enhance dialogic activities, it is crucial for teachers and students to enhance and maintain their dialogic stance and digital competence in online classrooms.

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Introduction

Classroom discussions, dialogue, and interactions are crucial for student learning, as they promote engagement, develop reasoning and creativity, and advance conceptual understanding in various disciplines (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Resnick et al., 2015; Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003; Webb & Treagust, 2006; Wegerif, 2010; Wegerif et al.,1999). Classroom discussions, especially dialogic exchanges, offer understandable input and chances to participate in academic discourse activities, aiding the development of academic language functions such as explanation, narration, and justification (Haneda & Wells, 2008). Additionally, this dialogic interaction exposes students to diverse perspectives and opinions on a given topic. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, these abilities correspond with English for Academic Purposes (EAP) speaking skills (Fielder, 2011), where students encounter academic discourse in class and engaging in dialogue with both instructors and peers is vital for honing communicative, linguistic, and sociolinguistic competence.

Facilitating meaningful dialogue in an EFL classroom presents unique challenges, which are exacerbated in online environments where physical cues and face-to-face interactions are limited (Anderson, 2008; Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Students often feel intimidated, anxious, and reluctant to participate in dialogues (Engin, 2017; Tsui, 1996). The lack of physical presence and immediate feedback in online settings further complicates the situation, making it difficult for educators to foster an engaging and supportive learning environment (Garrison et al., 2000). Thus, it is essential to study how classroom dialogue is facilitated in EFL online classrooms.

While prior research extensively explores the strategies employed by teachers to foster classroom dialogue using technology in English-speaking nations (Simpson, 2010, 2015; Omland & Rodnes, 2020), less attention has been directed toward understanding the unique challenges and advantages of promoting dialogue in non-English-speaking countries (Higham et al., 2013; Engin & Donanci, 2015). Interest in the role of technology in facilitating and enriching dialogue is on the rise, partly due to the increasing prevalence of digital tools like tablet computers capable of supporting classroom interaction (Major et al., 2018). The exploration of digital technology usage in educational settings remains relatively nascent, with the investigation of the interplay between classroom dialogue and technology being an even newer area of study (p. 1996). This study is a response to the need for dialogic interaction in computer-mediated discourse which draws on synchronous computer-mediated dialogues, text-based chat sessions, and video conferencing sessions (Basturkmen, 2016).

To fully unleash the potential of online classrooms in promoting classroom dialogue, this research examined how classroom interactions were facilitated in an EFL online classroom in Indonesia. The findings of this study hold significant implications for EFL educators aiming to improve student engagement and dialogue in online classrooms. By providing evidence-based strategies for creating a supportive and interactive learning environment, this research contributes to the broader field of language education and offers practical guidance for enhancing dialogic instruction in EFL contexts. This article is structured as follows: we begin with a review of relevant literature on dialogic interaction and online EFL education. Next, we describe the methodology of our case study, including the context, participants, and data

collection methods. We then present the findings, followed by a discussion of the implications for EFL educators. Finally, we conclude with recommendations for future research and practice.

Literature Review

Dialogic pedagogy and English language learning

Dialogic pedagogy, rooted in the theories of Bakhtin (1986) and Vygotsky (1978), emphasizes the role of dialogue in the learning process. This approach posits that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and communication, highlighting the significance of dialogue for cognitive development and language acquisition (Alexander, 2008). Our understanding of dialogic pedagogy is in line with the views of Nystrand et al. (1997), Alexander (2008), and Mercer and his colleagues, including Mercer et al. (1999), Mercer and Littleton (2007), and Mercer and Wegerif (1999). This approach to pedagogy involves teachers shaping the quality, dynamics, and content of classroom discussions. According to Alexander (2008), classroom dialogue centers on the integration of diverse voices that are explored, compared, and challenged during discussions. For effective dialogue, students must learn to build on each other's ideas, expand on their thoughts, and seek justifications (Hennessy et al., 2016; Mercer et al., 1999). It is also important for teachers to foster an environment where opinions are encouraged and critically examined, enhancing interactive and critical learning (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

In the context of EFL, particularly in higher education, engaging students in classroom dialogue is essential for facilitating academic discourse. Haneda and Wells (2008) emphasize that dialogic interactions provide students with comprehensible input and opportunities to participate in academic discussions, aiding in the development of skills such as questioning, seeking clarification, expressing agreement or disagreement, responding to comments, and presenting arguments. In line with this, conventionally EAP teaching has used a study skills type approach to help learners develop speaking skills which are typically broken down into two categories, presentation skills and participation skills (Fielder, 2011). The latter are dialogic interaction skills, and EAP instruction in these skills often includes a focus on functions, such as 'asking questions', 'asking for clarification', 'agreeing' or 'disagreeing', 'initiating comments or responding to comments' (Jordan, 1997), 'criticizing/objecting' and 'presenting reasons' (Fielder, 2011).

Dialogic discourse

Research over the past two decades has underscored the importance of dialogic classroom interactions in promoting linguistic and cognitive growth, content understanding, and learning engagement (Haneda, 2016). While the primary focus of dialogic pedagogies is cognitive development, they also facilitate linguistic advancement as learners use language to think (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2017). These pedagogies encourage authentic language use by prompting students to ask genuine questions and express their own viewpoints, rather than merely responding to teachers' queries on everyday concepts (general terms). This method

enhances students' language skills by requiring them to paraphrase ideas, provide reasons, offer evidence, defend their positions, and elaborate on others' contributions.

Through the scaffolding and modeling teachers provide, students learn to employ specific discourse structures or elements that enable them to examine others' statements, thus collaboratively constructing knowledge critically. This classroom discourse can be operationalized by employing dialogic discourse which includes initiating, stimulating, sustaining, and uplifting the dialogue. Classroom dialogue can be initiated by employing elicitation. This involves prompting students to participate in classroom dialogue, typically through authentic or open-ended questions. Numerous studies have shown that such questions, especially open ones, effectively encourage active student participation (e.g., Nystrand et al., 1997, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2015). As students provide their responses, an extension can help sustain the dialogue by introducing an alternative perspective to prompt reflection or seeking further elaboration. Empirical research (e.g., Howe et al., 2019; O'Connor et al., 2015; Rojas-Drummond et al., 2010) indicates that this approach leads to positive student outcomes. Another way to sustain the dialogue is to use connection which involves encouraging students to respond to others' contributions, fostering reciprocal interaction. Dialogic teaching, highlighted by Alexander (2018) and supported by studies like Teo (2016), emphasizes the importance of connecting student discourse in a dialogic classroom.

Students' inputs are subsequently subjected to scrutiny, often achieved through posing stimulating questions aimed at encouraging profound thought and comprehension. Mercer and Littleton (2007) and Michael et al. (2008) underscore the significance of this approach in fostering critical thinking. Moreover, students' contributions may undergo critique, where they are allowed to evaluate others' inputs by stating their concurrence or dissent along with supporting justifications. The significance of critique is corroborated by several studies (e.g., Mercer et al., 2004; Vrikki et al., 2019).

These dialogic moves help teachers and educators extend, elaborate on, and explore student responses and contributions. They enhance classroom discussions by fostering a dialogic space where students are encouraged to listen actively, share their thoughts, clarify and expand on their ideas, build on others' contributions, and provide reasoning for their perspectives. The widespread adoption of digital technology enhances the ability to support classroom dialogue fuels the growing interest in exploring how teachers can improve dialogue through technological means. Investigating the interactions between classroom dialogue and technology is a relatively new area of research (Major et al., 2018). The technology-aided classroom dialogue is reviewed in the following section.

Technology-aided dialogic pedagogy

The rapid advancement of technology facilitates the expansion of classroom dialogue within traditional face-to-face settings. For instance, scholars have explored the utilization of interactive whiteboards (IWBs) (e.g., Hennessy & Warwick 2010; Warwick et al. 2010). Mercer et al. (2019) contend that new dialogues can revolve around digital artifacts: temporary knowledge objects collaboratively crafted by educators and students. For instance, in a study involving primary school students collaborating on science tasks using an IWB (Warwick et al., 2010), it became evident that creating a dialogic environment for sharing ideas and jointly

constructing knowledge was achievable through relatively basic applications of this intricate technology. Another study examining the use of iPads in a dialogic classroom revealed that iPads both created and inhibited opportunities for classroom dialogue (Engin & Donanci, 2015). Engin and Donanci (2015) suggested that the development of classroom dialogue is contingent on both teachers and students embracing a dialogic approach, which involves using specific communication patterns to create a space for exploration and diverse viewpoints (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). The transition to online learning environments, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, presents unique challenges and opportunities for fostering meaningful dialogue. Traditional face-to-face interactions, which form the cornerstone of dialogic pedagogy, must be recontextualized to virtual platforms where digital connectivity replaces physical presence. This shift necessitates a reevaluation of how dialogue can be effectively situated and facilitated in an online setting to promote language learning and student engagement.

To effectively transition dialogue into the online classroom, educators can leverage the use of technology for dialogic interaction. For example, utilizing iPads to facilitate classroom dialogue in the EFL classroom (Engin & Donanci, 2015), employing video conferencing tools like Zoom (Khonke & Moorhouse, 2020), Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet facilitates real-time interaction or synchronous meetings, allowing students to engage in face-to-face conversations, participate in group discussions, and receive instant feedback (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). These platforms help create a sense of presence and immediacy, essential for building rapport and a friendly atmosphere (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Asynchronous discussion forums available on online learning platforms like Microsoft Teams or Moodle enable students to participate in ongoing conversations at their own pace. These forums provide a space for thoughtful reflection and in-depth discussion, promoting inclusivity by allowing all students to contribute (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In asynchronous meetings, incorporating discussion forums, blogs, and collaborative documents (e.g., Google Docs) allows students to engage in reflective dialogue at their own pace, providing opportunities for thoughtful responses (Richardson & Swan, 2003). This chat-based learning can foster classroom dialogue. Classroom dialogue can also be facilitated in 'breakout rooms,' a feature available on platforms like Zoom, to facilitate tasks in smaller groups (Cheung, 2021). Alexander (2013) recognizes the influence of sociocultural factors in managing classroom interactions and organization. As classroom dialogue can be intimidating for students who are from a teacher-centered learning culture, allowing and promoting social presence can reduce students' anxieties about speaking impromptu while contributing to the classroom dialogue. Educators can begin with activities that help students get to know each other and build rapport, such as sharing personal stories or cultural experiences (Rovai, 2002). Encouraging regular, informal communication through chat groups or social media to maintain a sense of community and connectedness (Wang, 2004) can reduce the distance between the teacher and students and among students themselves.

As online learning reduces non-verbal cues and often lacks the rich non-verbal cues present in face-to-face interactions, such as body language and eye contact, which can impact the quality and clarity of dialogue (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). Satar (2015) recommended that employing multimodal cues can enrich the quality of online communication and foster social presence. Social presence refers to the ability of participants in an online environment to

project themselves socially and emotionally, creating a sense of real, human connection. High social presence is characterized by open communication, emotional expression, and group cohesion, which are vital for effective learning and engagement (Lowenthal, 2010). Social presence is crucial in EFL online classrooms, where students may otherwise feel isolated or disconnected.

Social presence can be enhanced by employing multimodal cues, both verbal and non-verbal. In online learning, both oral and written verbal cues can be employed, such as praising the students' comments with "O.K.," "Great," and "Good job" during video conferences and discussion forums. Non-verbal cues, such as nodding, smiling, and giving thumbs up, contribute to the nature of communication in a way that closely resembles face-to-face interaction (Satar, 2015). These elements help humanize the online environment and make interactions more personal and engaging (Lowenthal, 2010). However, despite these strategies, issues such as unreliable internet connections, lack of access to suitable devices, and unfamiliarity with online learning platforms can hinder effective communication (Murphy, 2010) and should also be considered when using technology-aided dialogic classrooms. It is both the teachers' and students ' dialogic stances that support the emergence of classroom dialogue (Engin & Donanci, 2015).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate the dialogic practices of an EFL teacher educator in Indonesia. It aims to explore how this novice dialogic teacher educator facilitates dialogue in an online classroom. The case study method is particularly favorable for this research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within a real-life context (Yin, 2014).

Research design

The research will be designed as an exploratory (rather than explanatory or descriptive) case study, given the intention was to explore the context openly to develop new insights into how an EFL teacher educator creates a dialogic atmosphere in an EFL online classroom. The case study can deeply explore the practices of an EFL teacher educator who is a novice to the dialogic approach and is well-aligned to understand complex, context-specific phenomena. The detailed findings about how synchronous video conferences, discussion forums, classroom contracts, and multimodal cues facilitate dialogue fit this in-depth, contextual exploration.

Research site and participants

An English teacher educator and her class of 16 students (4 males and 12 females) from a public university in Indonesia took part in the study. However, only 7 students agreed to be interviewed, consisting of 3 males and 4 females. The participant was selected through purposive sampling due to her initiative to implement dialogic pedagogy in her classroom. The English teacher educator in this study has been teaching at the university for more than a decade and recently began to consider dialogic pedagogy as a core approach in her teaching

practice. She also plans to introduce the dialogic approach to the university where she is affiliated.

The students involved in this research were in their fifth semester of academic study. Based on their English proficiency profile, they demonstrated basic language abilities, with an IELTS speaking band score of 3.7, equivalent to level A2 on the CEFR scale. This indicates that they possess the skills to communicate in basic English and handle simple, routine tasks involving straightforward information exchange on familiar topics. None of the participants had prior experience with a dialogic approach. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the university has transitioned to online learning, utilizing platforms such as Microsoft Teams and other online learning tools provided by the university.

The study strictly followed the ethical standards mandated by the university. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Research Ethics Committee, and both students and the teacher signed consent forms. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Additionally, students were informed that allowing their lessons to be audio-recorded was voluntary. For subsequent interviews, teachers whose classes were recorded were approached for consent to participate in further interviews.

Data collection and analysis

The following qualitative case study is based on multiple sources of data collected by the first author over a semester. Since the study was conducted during COVID-19, we relied on technology to collect the data. Data were collected through multiple sources to ensure the triangulation of findings, including:

- *Classroom Observations*: Regular online classes were observed and recorded over a semester to capture the teacher's practices and student interactions. These observations focused on identifying how the teacher facilitated classroom dialogue in her EFL online classroom.
- *Video recordings and lesson transcript.* A total of 13 video recordings and 4 synchronous discussion forums yielded approximately 836 audio minutes for data analysis. Among all the recordings, 13 of these are whole-class teaching sessions and the remaining are small-group activities run by the teacher and the students. These recordings were transcribed manually to obtain the emergence of classroom dialogue.
- *Interviews*: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher educator before, during, and after the observed classes. These interviews aimed to gain insights into her intentions, reflections, and perceptions of her teaching practices.
- *Student Feedback*: Feedback was gathered from students through two semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion. This data provided additional perspectives on the effectiveness of the teacher's strategies in engaging students and promoting dialogue.
- *Document Analysis*: Relevant documents, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and classroom rules, were analyzed to understand the preparatory and procedural aspects of the teacher's approach.

The combination of classroom observations, video recordings and lesson transcripts, interviews, student feedback, and document analysis provides a comprehensive set of data that captures various dimensions of the classroom environment and interactions. The findings that emerged from these data sources regarding the facilitation of classroom dialogue demonstrate how these methods effectively contributed to uncovering detailed insights. To analyze the data, we focused on how the teacher facilitated classroom dialogue in her online classroom. The text from all data sources was coded independently using inductive and deductive coding (Patton, 2002). Following independent coding and analysis, we compared our results, arriving at mutually agreed-upon themes. These data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the initial stage, we transcribed all the data and then repeatedly reviewed all data to become thoroughly familiar with the content. We immersed ourselves in the data, reading and re-reading all data sets, a process conducted concurrently with data collection. In the second stage, the researchers were involved in identifying points of interest in the data relevant to the research questions (Seidman, 2006). We systematically coded each piece of data, generating initial codes across the entire set and organizing data pertinent to each code, thus identifying themes and subthemes within each data set. At this juncture, we aggregated codes into potential themes across multiple data sets. Throughout this process, we compared the analysis to relevant literature, discussed the findings, and conducted member-checking with the students, thereby enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of the analysis. Finally, the findings were synthesized into a coherent narrative that highlights key themes and provides illustrative examples from the data. The final report emphasizes the teacher's strategies for facilitating classroom dialogue in an EFL online classroom.

This process uncovered two key themes related to facilitating classroom dialogue in online settings: the facilitation of dialogue via Microsoft Teams and the constraints faced in this process. The first theme included four sub-themes: structuring the online classroom, enhancing dialogue during synchronous video conferences using 'meet now', expanding discussions through 'channel' forums, and enriching dialogue with multimodal cues. The second theme highlighted challenges such as technical issues and maintaining appropriate timing and pacing.

Table 1. *Themes and Sub-themes*

Theme	Sub-themes
Facilitating classroom dialogue via Microsoft Teams	Structuring the online classroom
	Enhancing dialogue in a synchronous video conference through 'Meet Now'
	Extending dialogue through discussion forums in 'Channel'
	Enriching dialogue with multimodal cues

Findings

This section addresses the research question 'How did the teacher educator facilitate classroom dialogue in an EFL online classroom?' The data analysis reveals that the classroom dialogue was facilitated via Microsoft Teams.

Facilitating classroom dialogue via Microsoft Teams

Drawing on the observation, it was evident that the teacher created dialogic spaces using Microsoft Teams (MT) by leveraging its digital tools. Classroom dialogue was enhanced and mediated through structuring the online classroom and MT digital features like 'meet now' and 'channel', and further enriched by employing multimodal cues.

Structuring the online classroom, a dialogic classroom is created through diverse organizational settings, adaptable layouts, minimal distractions, smooth transitions, and effective time management (Alexander, 2014). Structuring the class is a key strategy (Reynolds, 2016). This section describes how the teacher structured her online classroom. From the classroom observation, the teacher facilitated classroom dialogue by structuring her online classroom. In this study, the online classroom was structured into synchronous video conferences and chat-based meetings. Specifically, the teacher used video conference and chat-based sessions with student group work between two whole-class sessions as depicted in Figure 1. The first whole-class sessions either through video conference or chat-based were organized by the teacher to build rapport, instruct the learning goal, and other classroom managerial. During the first whole-class session, the teacher also reiterated the discussion prompts for students to engage in the group work. Prior to this meeting, flipped learning was employed to support students to engage in a whole classroom dialogue. It was embedded to help students access authentic learning materials and tasks such as text models, videos, quizzes, and other resources to support their online learning. This was also intentionally designed for students to promote self-regulated learning before the first whole class session. In other words, the teacher provided students with the learning content so that they could engage in the whole classroom dialogue.

The class then split into group work where students discussed the learning task in the breakout rooms. During this group work, a dialogic circle, inspired by the concept of literature circles (Daniels, 2001), was adapted to facilitate dialogue among students. In this dialogic circle, each member of the group took on different roles such as the poster picker, poster master and discussion leader, poster language enhancer, and poster maker. In the second whole-class discussion, the teacher and the students had a whole classroom dialogue where the teacher and the students discussed the prompts by co-constructing knowledge and getting diverse perspectives from the classroom members. The teacher also incorporated dialogic discourse during this session. Through this way, students' knowledge was justified, expanded, connected, and challenged.

Figure 1. *The dialogic EFL online classroom format*
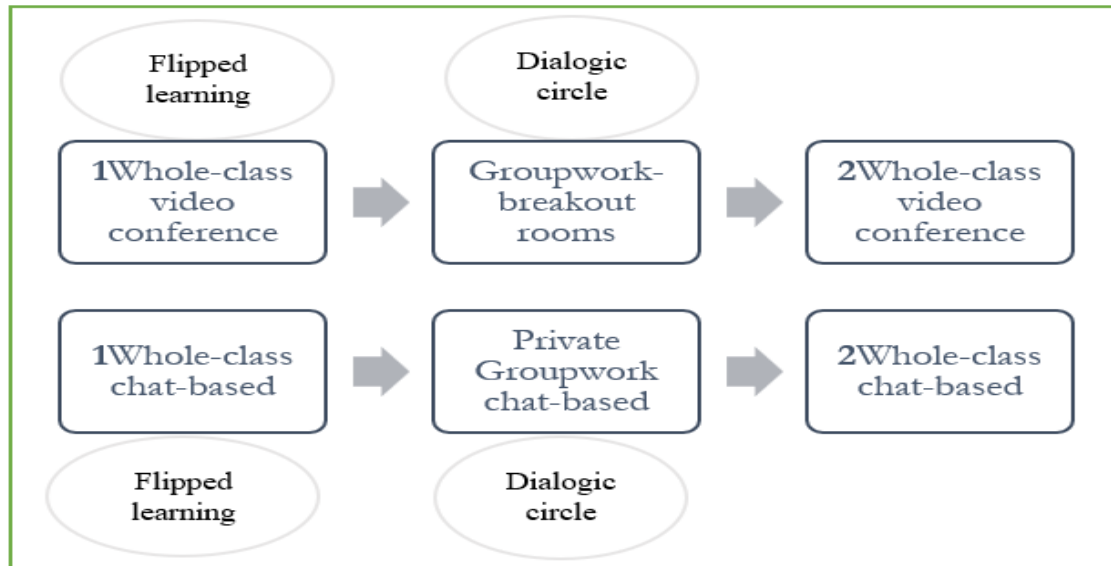
During the interview with the teacher, the teacher elaborated on the reasons why she organized her online classroom. She commented that structuring the online classroom in such a way can encourage students to engage in a classroom dialogue.

> "To engage in a dialogue, one should have 'ammunition', the knowledge to contribute. Therefore, it is important to provide time and learning access before the classroom dialogue. During group work, talking among peers also allows the students to exchange knowledge, which helps boost their confidence before finally coming to the whole class discussion. So, structuring the class is an important initial step a teacher can take." (TI)

The teacher confirms the importance of prior knowledge as ammunition for students to engage in a classroom dialogue. Effective engagement in dialogue requires prior knowledge, suggesting that students need time and resources to learn before participating in classroom discussions. This prior knowledge can be attained by students learning on their own and talking with peers. Talking among peers in group work helps build students' confidence, which is crucial for their active participation in whole-class discussions. This resonates with the students' feedback on the classroom structure indicating that they find this pattern helpful. For example, one student commented, *"Engaging with peers during the group work gave insights that I missed or did not understand before, allowing me to confidently contribute to the classroom dialogue."* (SI) The student also emphasizes the importance of having group work before the whole class session as it contributes to her confidence in the classroom dialogue. Therefore, properly structuring the class is essential for facilitating productive dialogue, as it ensures students are adequately prepared and confident to contribute.

Enhancing dialogue in a synchronous video conference through 'meet now',
studies have shown the effectiveness of synchronous video conferences in mediating online
language learning (Cheung, 2021; Khonke & Moorhouse, 2020). Utilizing 'meet now', a digital
feature for having video meetings in MT, the teacher organized synchronous video conference
sessions to meet with the students and set up this as an online classroom. This video
conference allowed for dynamic interactions similar to face-to-face communication, where the
members of this classroom community can see each other, the teacher delivers the learning
and have classroom dialogue. To organize this video conference meeting, the teacher set up a
schedule and posted it on the 'channel' and students were notified about this online meeting.
Like other video communication devices such as ZOOM and Google Meet, facilitating
classroom dialogue in this the 'meet now' feature enables the users to see each other and have
classroom dialogue. During the classroom dialogue, the members could get immediate
feedback creating engagement for learning like face-to-face classroom session. For example,
in the following excerpt, the teacher and students engaged in a dialogue on how to deliver a
presentation.

Excerpt 1. *Classroom dialogue-'delivering the presentation'*

43	L	9:34	Ok, ok. Do you think that memorizing the script will be beneficial for the speaker?
44	S9	9:45	Yes, of course. Because for me it will be much more to gain a confidence for me to speak out loud because I already know the, *apa? Alurnya.* (what is it? The pattern)
2 turns-deleted			
47	L	10:08	Ok, so do you all agree with S9 that we, the speaker, need to memorize our script?
48	S13	10:18	Yes, Ma'am
49	All S	10:18	Agree
50	L	10:21	Yeah, why S13?
51	S13	10:23	Uhm yeah, because when we memorize the script, we, *pas kita inget scriptnya kaya gimana* (when we memorize the script) we can gain more self-confidence when we speak loud, Ma'am, in front of people.

(Transcript video conference meeting 21)

This excerpt illustrates how classroom dialogue for learning emerged, mediated in a video
conference session. The teacher utilized the feature 'meet now' to facilitate a synchronous
video conference classroom dialogue allowing for dynamic, real-time interactions. The ability
to see and hear each other creates an interactive environment that resembles face-to-face
communication and is believed to be more beneficial in helping students cope with the
demands of real-life communication (Li, 2017).

In this excerpt, it is also notable that the teacher engaged students in a dialogue by
incorporating dialogic discourse in Turn 43. The teacher employed elicitation by arousing
students' opinions on how to deliver a speech, "Do you think that memorizing the script will

be beneficial for the speaker?" This elicitation evoked S9 to elaborate on the answer in Turn 44. In Turn 50, the teacher sustained the dialogue by asking S13 to justify the answer. Engaging students in this dialogic exchange promotes students' linguistic and cognitive growth (Haneda & Wells, 2008). These dialogic exchanges were affordable and expanded by utilizing video conferences via MT. Considering MT as a virtual learning platform allows for real-time exchange.

During the initial interview, the students expressed their positive attitude toward the employment of video conferences to facilitate classroom dialogue. Despite the technological constraints and the students' limited skills in speaking, the students commented that the video conference facilitated their need to express their opinions freely without worrying about being misunderstood. One said, *"I like the video conference better than the discussion forum because I can get immediate response. Also, when we engage in a dialogue we need to elaborate on our contributions, and speaking directly like this can minimize misunderstanding."* (SI) Other students expressed, *"I prefer the video conference session because I don't like typing, it takes time."* (SI) Both students expressed their positive attitude toward video conference sessions by underscoring the need to get an immediate response and speak in real time. Facilitating dialogue through video conferences allows students' need to expand and justify their contributions. Through this way, it helps reduce the potential misunderstanding and the amount of time.   In line with the students' positive attitude towards the employment of video conferences, the teacher elaborated,

> "Meeting the students virtually helps create a positive relationship between me and my students and among the students themselves. Its features enable screen sharing, breakout rooms, and chat rooms to foster a more dynamic learning environment. It enhances the learning experience and provides diverse methods for practicing language skills. This video meeting is the main venue for classroom dialogue where the students and I engage in classroom dialogue." (TI)

The teacher underscored the benefits of 'Meet now' which she utilized for having video conference meetings. Its various features such as screen sharing, breakout rooms, and chat rooms help create a dynamic and interactive learning environment and serve as a crucial platform for classroom dialogue and engagement. Through video meetings, the teacher can foster positive relationships among classroom members which is crucial for classroom dialogue to emerge in an online learning environment.

These findings suggest that the digital feature 'Meet now' afforded by Microsoft Teams can facilitate the need for having classroom dialogue. This feature makes video conference meetings possible. Utilizing it for video conference meetings serves the need for real-time communication. The features in 'Meet Now' offer diverse methods for practicing language skills. Students have a positive attitude toward using video conferences to facilitate classroom dialogue. Video conferences help in expanding and justifying contributions during dialogues, which enhances the learning experience and reduces potential misunderstandings. The features in 'Meet Now' such as screen sharing and chat rooms, contribute to a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Both the students and the teacher view video conferences as the main venue for classroom dialogue, highlighting their role in promoting active participation and engagement. The use of video conferences is seen as effective in facilitating classroom

dialogue, enhancing communication, and improving the overall learning experience despite any technological constraints or limited speaking skills among students.

Extending dialogue through chat-based learning in 'channel', in addition to synchronous video conference sessions, the teacher also extends classroom dialogue by facilitating chat-based learning (Jepson, 2005). This method offers students opportunities to participate in meaningful dialogues at their preferred pace, catering to diverse communication styles and fostering deeper exploration of learning topics. Figures 2 and 3, extracted from MT screenshots, demonstrate how the teacher facilitated chat-based learning. During these sessions, students engaged in written dialogue and collaborated on designing a poster presentation through the chat feature. All verbal interactions were transcribed into written form, with both the teacher and students typing their contributions into the discussion forum. Figure 2 illustrates how the teacher announced the discussion forum by greeting the students and giving instructions on how the classroom would be conducted, the goal of the lessons, and the task and expectations as well as the learning resources available for the students to learn.

Figure 2. *A screenshot of a 'channel' facilitating classroom dialogue*
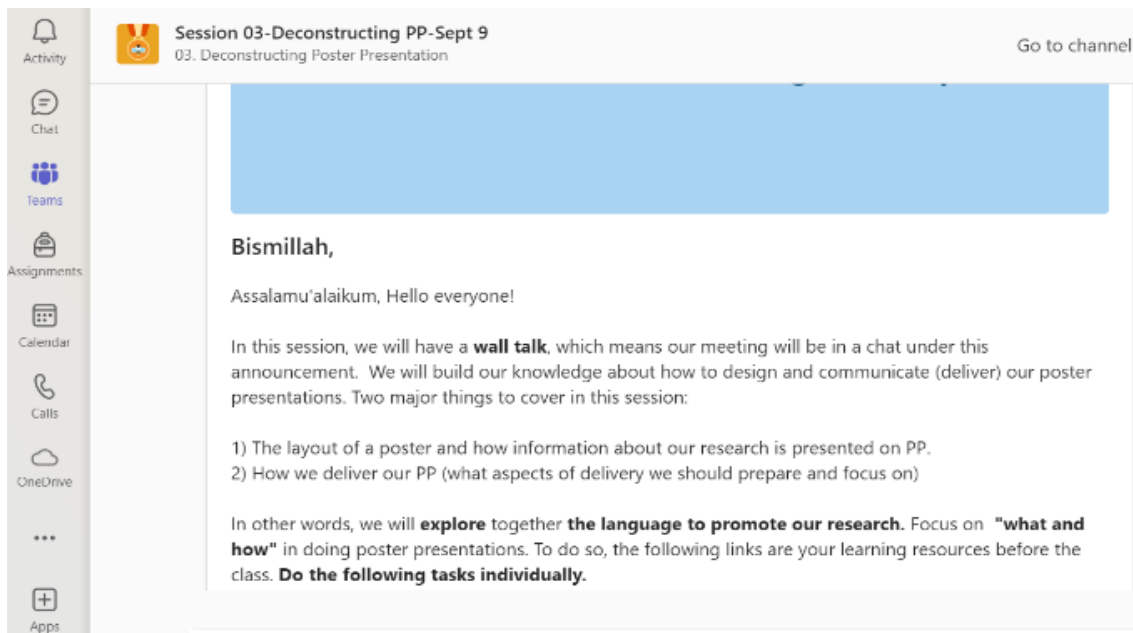
Along with this discussion forum, figure 3 provides an example of how the teacher and the students utilize this forum to engage in classroom dialogue deconstructing the poster presentation. The dialogue exchange illustrated how the teacher promoted the dialogue to achieve the learning goal. For example, in this discussion forum, the goal was to explore the layout of the poster and the presentation of the information in the poster. S1 initiated the dialogue in the forum by asking other students' opinions about the selected poster. S2, S3, and S4 provided their comments and provided their justifications. S4 had a different response to the selected poster and added the dynamic to the discussion forum.

Figure 3. *A screenshot of how dialogue exchange was facilitated through chat*
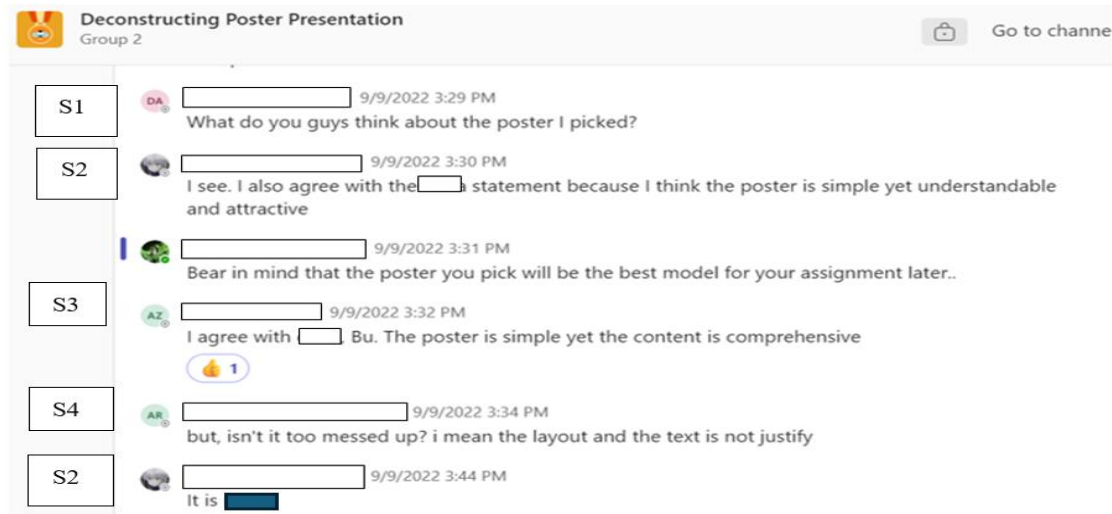
During the interview, the teacher admitted that this discussion forum made available by the MT can promote classroom dialogue. She argued:

> This forum significantly enhances the traditional classroom dialogue by providing a written mode of communication. For students who experience anxiety or have difficulties speaking impromptu, this platform offers a supportive alternative for expressing their thoughts through typing. While it can be tiring to elaborate on ideas in writing, this process allows students to review and revise their contributions before posting. This forum not only encourages careful consideration but also improves the clarity and quality of their input. I also employed positive written feedback such as "good job" or emojis like thumb-ups, happy faces, or a bouquet. (TI)

The teacher describes the benefits of providing chat-based learning for the students and considers this brings a positive climate for students as it can reduce the students' anxieties and allow for self-corrections. Additionally, to make the dialogue natural, the teacher employed positive verbal rewards and emojis making the students willing to take risks in classroom dialogue. The benefits of chat-based learning were highlighted by students during interviews. One student noted, *"The discussion forum provided time for me to formulate and edit my contributions. This learning also reduced pressure to speak impromptu".* (SI) This comment indicates the positive benefits of chat-based learning such as it allows more time for all learners to think about their ideas before responding to other contributors (Kilinc & Altinpulluk, 2021) and decreased tension in speaking. The feature 'Edit' afforded in the MT facilitates students to have self-correction. Similarly, another student commented that *"this chat-based feels like learning in social media. But this required us to think deeply about how to contribute and to argue. It was quite fun but challenging though."* By drawing parallels with social media, this student emphasizes the importance of thoughtful commenting to engage in classroom dialogue.

Conversely, another student commented that "to some extent, this chat helped but it was time-consuming. When I finished typing my responses, the topic changed, and comments were buried under other comments. Perhaps there is a better way to modify this" The students pointed out some drawbacks, such as the time-consuming nature of participating in forums, the rapidly changing topics, and how topics can get buried under the opinions of other students.

The findings suggest that the teacher can extend the oral dialogue into a written dialogue, a different way of having classroom dialogue. However, despite the positive amelioration the chat-based brings to extend classroom dialogue, several considerations must be considered to employ this format. Time-consuming becomes the heaviest concern and an improvement in facilitating dialogue in this format requires a better plan and some improvement.

Enriching dialogue with multimodal cues, virtual learning platforms can present challenges such as technological and social barriers in teacher-student interactions that can block the interaction. Acknowledging these issues, the teacher mitigated anxiety, burdens, and other social-emotional barriers by actively nurturing the use of multimodal communication methods (Satar, 2015). The employment of multimodal cues was captured and deployed consistently from the beginning and throughout the course, contributing to creating a warm and friendly atmosphere in this dialogic classroom.

The employment of verbal cues, both written and oral, was utilized to convey emotions, aiming to engage multiple senses and enhance interactivity in an online learning environment (Satar, 2015). These cues, such as greetings, acknowledging students' contributions, positive evaluation, providing emotional support and encouragement, and a sense of friendliness and warmth in the online classroom. A notable verbal cue that contributed to cultivating a friendly dialogic classroom was a written welcome note posted before the initial video conference meeting. This warm greeting note established the course's tone right from the start. The purpose of this written verbal message was to greet the students and initiate a connection, as depicted in Figure 4. In Figure 4, verbal cues such as 'A very warm welcome to Academic Presentation Course' set the tone, representing the teacher presence in the online classroom.

Figure 4. *Screenshot of a welcome note on microsoft teams*
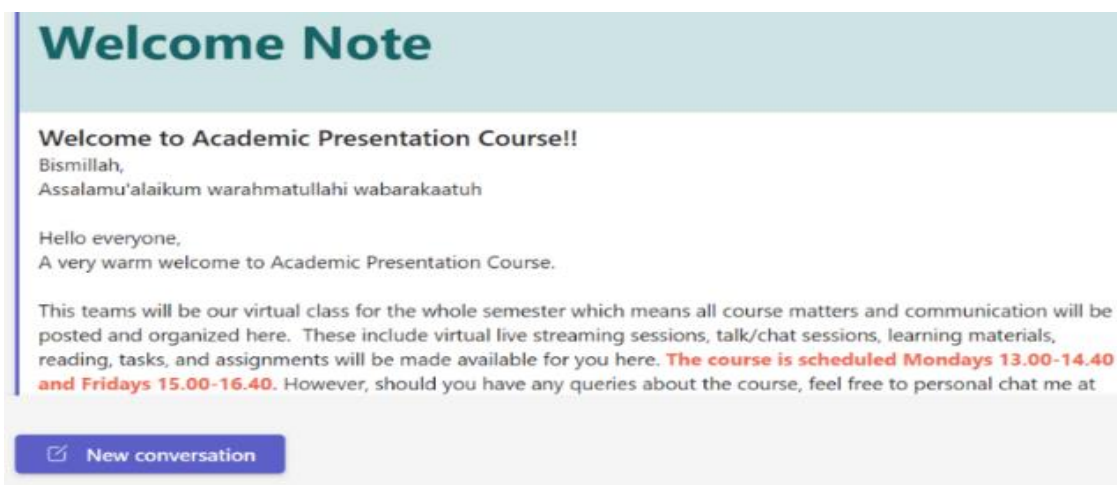
The welcoming note in Figure 5, features a personal introduction with expressions such as 'I'm very excited to welcome you...' and 'Let's get to know each other!' along with a casual expression such as 'as a kick-off,' fostered a positive atmosphere and conveyed a sense of closeness with students in the online learning environment. These written verbal cues played a crucial role in establishing a social presence, forging connections between me as the lecturer and students, and among the students themselves in the virtual classroom.

Figure 5. *Screenshot of a welcome note on microsoft teams*
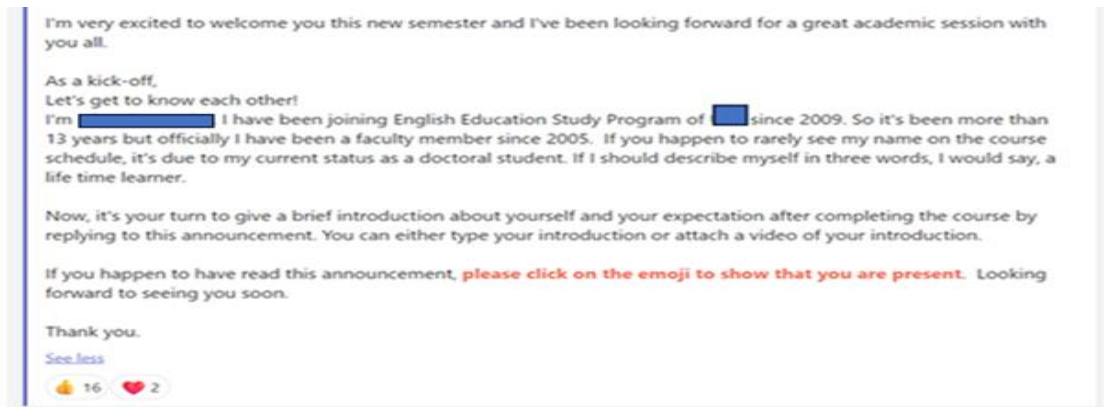
The positive rapport was affirmed by the student during the interview, as depicted in Excerpt 3 below. While the student did not explicitly mention the welcoming note, she conveyed a sense of intimacy with the lecturer that empowered her to pose any questions.

Excerpt 2

    I: How would you recommend the lecturer to improve her dialogic
            practice?
    S7:   I think Ms. ▮▮▮ is already quite good, there are no walls between us.
            And I felt comfortable to ask her anything. (SI)

Moreover, positive written verbal cues such as 'Good Job' and 'Good point' also nurtured a friendly dialogic environment. These written verbal cues were notably present during the discussion forums (chat-based meetings). Through these ways, the power relation issue (Lyle & Thomas-Williams, 2012) and the distance gap between the teacher and students may be overcome. The feeling of a safe and friendly environment was captured in a whole-class discussion in a video conference meeting when the student was willing to take the risk to have a different argument and expressed her position in a whole-class discussion as illustrated in excerpt 3. In this excerpt, the teacher tried to clarify S12's ideas on designing visual aids by repeating the response in Turn 141 and bringing the idea to the room by engaging S3's comment on the idea. Confidently, S3 refused the idea and justified her argument, the skills developed in this course. This indicates that the student felt comfortable disputing and building her agency in classroom dialogue.

Excerpt 3. *Classroom dialogue-'designing visual aids for 3-minute speech'*

141	L:	32:35	Colorful?
142	S12:	32:37	Ya
143	L:	32:38	S3, do you, do you agree with that idea, of giving a colorful, uhm, visual for your three-minute speech?
144	S3:	32:49	Well, I don't think so. I'm sorry, S12. But I don't think so Ma'am. I mean like it's only a three-minute speech, I think I will go with S7, Ma'am. Just include the important details. But Ma'am, I'm still kind of confused, with this kind, with these visual aids, but I think for now, I just go with the important details, Ma'am.

(Transcript video conference meeting 18, November 2022)

During the focus group discussion, the same student expressed her courage to disagree commenting on the unthreatening atmosphere created by the lecturer in the online classroom. She said, *'I think I am one of those who feel the freedom to argue, especially when my arguments differ from my friends; we appreciate each other's differences.'* (FGD) The student expressed her confidence in disputing with friends and emphasized the clear ground rules in a dialogic classroom that students should respect each other's opinions.

To nurture a positive climate in the online classroom, the teacher also employed and allowed for nonverbal cues including back channels and emoticons or emojis. Backchannels, such as nods, facial expressions, smiles, or raised eyebrows, are key aspects of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). These cues play a significant role in indicating engagement in communication, enhancing interaction, and creating a sense of warmth and intimacy (Satar, 2015). Emojis, along with their emoticon predecessors, represent nonverbal cues typically utilized in face-to-face communication. In digital interactions, emojis are considered substitutes for nonverbal cues (Boutet et al., 2021).

The incorporation of non-verbal cues, such as nods, smiles, facial expressions, and gestures such as raising an eyebrow or giving a thumb-up as well as vocal expressions like 'hmm' and 'uh-huh' enriched the online dialogic environment similar to the face-to-face classroom. An illustrative instance is in Excerpt 4 during an online coaching session with students. The coaching session concluded with the teacher's feedback on one of the student's mistakes in pronouncing the word 'student'. The feedback was enriched with smiles and laughter which further contributed to a friendly dialogic climate. These communicative elements facilitated the establishment of a supportive environment, nurturing a dialogic atmosphere and pedagogical approach.

Excerpt 4. *Classroom dialogue-'delivering academic paper coaching'*

Turn			
56	L:	13:21	OK. So, make it shorter, *ya*. Make it shorter instead of, uhm, a very detailed one. And for both of you I think, not only both of you, but other students also experience this, check your pronunciation. I think you should pronounce it /sto͞o d(ə)nt/ instead of /stəd(ə)nt/.
57	S8 & S11:	13:41	(smile)
58	L:	13:43	(laugh) You know. It's a common word
59	S11:	13:45	(laugh) I keep forgetting that

(Transcript video groupwork 4 meeting, September 4, 2022)

MT made emoticons or emojis and other visual indicators available to enrich online communication. Emojis, and their emoticon predecessors, represent nonverbal signals commonly employed in face-to-face communication. In digital interactions, emojis are viewed as substitutes for nonverbal cues (Boutet et al., 2021). These multimodal non-verbal cues played a pivotal role in amplifying the expression of warmth and friendliness during video conferencing. The teacher prompted students with a message like, 'Don't forget to click on the emoji to show that you have read this post'. This strategy not only fostered a welcoming and friendly conversational atmosphere but also served as a means to gauge students' consistent engagement with the MT as the Learning Management System (LMS). The use of emoticons and emojis in online learning has been reported as powerful tools to bridge the emotional and social barriers between the teacher and the students and among students themselves (Satar, 2015) creating a welcoming, friendly, and warm dialogic environment in an online classroom. These emojis included the heart symbol or the rise of a thumb to represent 'love' or 'like' or any positive affirmations. Emojis such as a happy face or a surprised face can represent students' emotional feelings towards learning.

Discussion

The current research has shed light on how dialogic space can be established and effectively utilized for university students through various synchronous sessions facilitated by MT. While classroom dialogue traditionally took place in face-to-face settings, the rapid advancement of technology has made it not only affordable but also expanded in online environments. The findings from this study indicate that the use of MT as an alternative learning platform offers opportunities for classroom dialogue in online settings. Similar to other classroom technologies like iPads (Engin & Donanci, 2015) and IWB (Warwick et al., 2010; Kershner et al., 2010), MT emerges as an affordable means to create dialogic space. Its digital features such as 'meet now' and 'channel' support the necessary dialogic activities in online classrooms. However, it is imperative for teachers to possess digital competence in

organizing online classrooms (Wong & Moorhouse, 2021) to utilize this digital technology effectively. Facilitating dialogue in the online classroom may be challenging without such competence.

Scholars in the field of dialogic approach highlight the importance of structuring the classroom to encourage student engagement in classroom dialogue (Alexander, 2014; Reynolds, 2016). In this study, varying the classroom structure into the teacher employed an appropriate variety of organizational settings (i.e. whole class and group) can promote classroom dialogue. In this study, the teacher formatted the class into video conference and chat-based sessions with sessions of student group work in between two whole-class sessions. This approach empowered students with the necessary knowledge before participating in classroom dialogue, thereby boosting their confidence, which is crucial for EFL students. Tan (2003) emphasizes that students need to have meaningful input to participate in the dialogue. This could involve providing evidence from the content, sharing personal experiences, or expressing opinions.

The rapid development in technology has made video-conferencing tools like Skype (Jenks, 2014) and ZOOM (Cheung, 2021; Khonke & Moorhouse, 2020) more accessible. These tools offer digital features such as chatrooms, annotations, breakout rooms for group activities, and non-verbal gesture buttons. While acknowledging that ZOOM cannot fully replicate face-to-face interactions in classrooms, some authors assert its "enormous potential for second language acquisition" (Khonke & Moorhouse, 2020, p.5). Similar to ZOOM, the 'meet now' feature in MT functions, similarly, making video conference meetings more accessible. Its features like breakout rooms and chat rooms can be utilized to facilitate classroom dialogue, allowing for immediate responses and the natural emergence of dialogue in face-to-face meetings.

Online learning creates physical distancing among classroom members. Organizing video conference sessions can reduce this distance and promote social-emotional relations among the community members in the classroom (Garrison et al., 2000; Zydney et al., 2012). In this way, the teacher and the students can see each other, which is important in online learning. Allowing social-emotional presence helps reduce the tension that classroom dialogue can bring (Lowenthal, 2010). Furthermore, the class members can engage in real-time discussions by incorporating the use of dialogic discourse (Garrison et al., 2000). During these meetings, the teacher can initiate dialogue, ask students to elaborate on their contributions, justify their opinions, connect responses with their peers' opinions, and challenge them. Thus, the teacher and the students' dialogic stance can be facilitated through this feature (Mercer, 2000).

The chat-based learning format, facilitated within a 'channel' as an affordable feature of MT, extends oral dialogue into written form, transforming the learning process into a chat-like interaction. Implementing discussion forums to encourage classroom dialogue brings various advantages, including boosting students' confidence (Satar & Özdener, 2008). Students lacking impromptu skills can prepare and revise their contributions (Jepson, 2005). However, in this study, utilizing chat-based learning for written dialogue presents more challenges than benefits. Writing lengthy responses consumes time, and managing accumulated student contributions becomes time-consuming (Janssen et al., 2007). Reconsideration of the use of chat-based learning as a dialogic space is necessary. This research contradicts previous findings

suggesting that typing responses enhance students' classroom dialogue engagement (Satar & Özdener, 2008).

Another crucial issue that merits our attention is how the online learning atmosphere is actively created by the lecturer through multimodal cues. Enriching the atmosphere with multimodal cues reduces the tension among students and encourages them to engage in classroom dialogue (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). A friendly atmosphere is fostered by positive verbal rewards, both oral and written. These rewards encourage students to take risks while contributing to classroom dialogue. The use of emojis can also reduce the gap between the teacher and the students, creating a more approachable and engaging environment (Garrison, 2011). This friendly atmosphere, facilitated by multimodal cues, motivates students to contribute to classroom dialogue (Satar, 2015).

Conclusion and Implications

The current study has accentuated how an EFL teacher educator facilitated classroom dialogue via MT which served as an EFL online classroom, extending traditional face-to-face dialogue to technology-mediated dialogic learning. The EFL teacher educator and her students effectively demonstrated how to maximize MT's features to foster and maintain teacher-student and student-student dialogue for students' learning. While this study represents a modest research endeavor, it has the potential to augment the relatively sparse body of research on dialogic teaching and the utilization of MT in second language learning, particularly within the realm of English for Academic Purposes.

The results offer several implications that will resonate with educators across various teaching domains who integrate technology into their classrooms. Particularly noteworthy is the conclusion that the effectiveness of employing MT for dialogic teaching hinges largely on the degree to which both the teacher and students incorporate dialogic discourse and digital competence (Engin & Donanci, 2015). MT functions merely as a tool, akin to other classroom resources like interactive whiteboards, computers, iPads, or textbooks. The successful facilitation of classroom dialogue in online settings ultimately relies on how teachers utilize MT in alignment with their approach to dialogic teaching.

Future research should focus on identifying the key elements of dialogic teaching and developing training programs for teachers and students to engage effectively and efficiently in online dialogic classrooms. Moreover, further research is needed to identify the potential obstacles that hinder language learning in synchronous dialogic online lessons. Issues such as teachers' and students' challenges in engaging students in dialogic online classrooms, factors that inhibit and promote dialogue, and other technological devices to create classroom dialogue in EFL online classrooms.

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