



Teacher Talk and Their Importance for EFL Learners

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In the learning process, the teacher talk is critical because it can help the success of the learning process, especially in mastering English as a foreign language (EFL) at various levels of education. EFL learners need to adapt when they enter the classroom. This narrative review aims to determine the form of teacher talk and its importance to EFL learners at different educational levels. This study uses secondary data from 13 journal articles, which are research results on English teacher talk from various levels of education and settings and published between 2010-2020. The articles were accessed through several databases available to the researchers. All data were synthesized based on two research questions. The results of this study were the discovery of four categories of teacher talk forms based on (1) speech modification to facilitate learners, (2) the teacher's role as a facilitator, (3) responses to learners, and (4) their attitude in the classroom. Teacher talk is important because it can provide correct language input to learners and help them develop and improve their ability to speak English. By knowing these results, this narrative review can provide new insights to EFL teachers at all levels of education regarding the forms of teacher talk that they can use and how the talks can help the learning process and outcomes.

Keywords: benefits of teacher talks, forms of teacher talk, teacher talk of English as a Foreign Language

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INTRODUCTION

In a globalized world, almost all aspects of life are progressing with time. For instance, Indonesia currently has a free market policy in which cooperation with countries in the world in exports and imports is carried out (Directorate-General for National Export Development, 2011). Free market policies like this can impact various sectors, not only the economy. One of them is in terms of communication. The easier the mobilization of access between countries has led to interactions needing a specific communication tool.

In communicating, language plays a part as the medium to convey and receive information without any misunderstandings. De Swaan classified English as a hyper-central language used and taught in almost all countries for different purposes (as cited in [Cook & Singleton, 2014](#)). Similarly, [Saville-troike \(2006\)](#) said that English ranks first as the most widely spoken foreign language with 950 million speakers, followed by Spanish and Hindi in second place and lastly, Chinese. This shows that mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is essential.

The role of the teacher is needed in the learning process to meet the goal of learning, namely mastering the foreign language (Aisyah, 2016). In learning foreign languages, especially English, a teacher is a center and facilitator in the learning process in the classroom (Incecay, 2010). In foreign language learning classes, especially English, several methods used by the teacher are trying to maximize the learner's speech compared to the teacher's speech (Saville-troike, 2006). However, what happened is that teacher talk had a higher percentage than the student's speech. Rezaee and Farahian (2012) found that 62%-73% of class time is used for teacher talk. Meanwhile, 20%-25% is for student talk, and the remaining 5%-12% is for joint activities.

A narrative review is needed as one of the researchers' efforts to examine more deeply a phenomenon by identifying and summarizing previous studies to seek for new topics that have not been studied and to avoid duplication of research. This narrative review focuses on teaching English classes at various levels of education. Saville-troike (2006) argued that a teacher would unconsciously modify his talk when communicating with learners during foreign language learning in the classroom. For example, someone who is more proficient in English tends to modify his speech when communicating with someone who is not fluent in English to understand that what is conveyed can still be understood by both (Saville-troike, 2006). Setiawati (2012) stated that teacher talk is vital in language acquisition because it is the primary source of target language input that learners can understand and accept. Therefore, teacher talk is needed in adapting learners to follow the learning process. Consequently, teachers need to know what forms of teacher talk can be applied to create effective learning.

Teacher talk is the talk that a teacher does in the teaching and learning process (Basra & Toyyibah, 2017). Yanfen and Yujin (2010) argued that it is the language most used by the teacher in the classroom to give directions, explain activities and check students' understanding. Walsh stated that teachers' choice of language and their capacity to control the language use in classroom interactions are crucial to facilitate learners' participation (as cited in Nasir, Yusuf & Wardana 2010). In fact, teacher talks can be in the form of speech modifications made by the teacher. Early studies of teacher talk have found that teachers make certain modifications in their classroom speech, including adjustments to the rate of speech, lexicon, and syntax to manage the class well (Zhang, 2020). This is in line with Meng and Wang (2011) who pointed out that EFL teachers usually use short, simple, grammatically correct sentences and high frequent vocabulary. In addition, Yanfen and Yugen (2010) mentioned some features of teacher talk including the slower speed, more frequency of pauses, clearer and more understandable pronunciation, more familiar vocabulary, less use of subordinate degree (subordinate clause), more narrative sentences or declarative sentences than interrogative sentences, and more frequency of teachers' self-repetition.

In addition, Sadeghi, Ansari, and Rahmani (2015) mentioned some forms of teacher talk, such as applying open and direct approaches to error correction, using of real-life conversational language appropriately when giving feedback, allowing extended wait-time for learners' responses, scaffolding by providing needed language to pre-empt communication breakdowns and offering communication strategies to maintain and extend interactions. Thus, it can be said that appropriate teacher talk can contribute either to the presence of politeness or directness in teaching which will impact on the teaching process and on the students.

To date, there have been studies that investigated teacher talk. However, previous studies only focused on a certain level of education, such as elementary level (see Syarifudin, 2012), and only looked at a particular case like the forms (see Rukmana, Suryad, & Diani, 2017). Therefore, this narrative review attempts to present a synthesis by drawing a common thread from the results of previous studies. By drawing a common thread from previous research, one form of teacher talk and its general importance for English language learners in any level of education will be found. In addition, this narrative review can also be a new insight for the world of education, especially for foreign language teachers, especially English teachers.

To meet the above objectives, this narrative review uses two research questions:

1. What are the forms of EFL teacher talk?
2. What is the importance of EFL teacher talk in the EFL teaching and learning process?

METHOD

Using a narrative review design, the authors tried to explore several books and databases such as Google Scholar, Jstor, Proquest, Citation Evaluation to find and access studies investigating teacher talk in the field of EFL and its importance to learners. In this paper, the term "teacher talk" covers all talks used by teachers of English as a foreign language at all levels of education. Articles were searched using keywords such as teacher talk, the role of teacher talk, the importance of teacher talk, and teacher talk in the EFL Classroom. Articles were published between 2010-2020 in peer-reviewed journals. Articles also had to be the results of an empirical research and the object discussed should match the definition of 'teacher talk' even if the terminology was slightly different. The articles were then synthesized based on the research questions. Initially, 25 Articles were found using the keywords. After a thorough look on the nature of the articles – whether they were empirical research articles or not – and other aspects such as participants, how teacher talk is defined or how the term is used, the authors decided that 13 articles were suitable for analysis. The following list is the articles analyzed:

TABLE 1 / Labor Regulations Subjects

No	Authors	Year	Title	Setting	Method	Participants/Sample
1	Incecay, G.	2010	The role of teacher talk in young learners' language process	A private middle school in Istanbul, Turkey	Qualitative	16 grade 7 students who used English as a foreign language and one teacher
2	Rezaee, M., & Farahani, M.	2012	An exploration of discourse in an EFL classroom: teacher talk	A high school in Iran	Qualitative and Quantitative	12 upper-intermediate students (4 female and 8 male students) between the ages of 25-31 years old and a teacher of 6 year-experience
3	Aisah, E. E., & Hidayat, D. R.	2012	Teacher talk on expanding ESL primary classroom discourse	A private school in Bandung, Indonesia, which uses national and international curriculum	Qualitative	An English teacher with 5 year-experience, who won Best Teacher in the school in the academic year 2009/2010, and 18 students of lower primary level
4	Shamsipour, A., & Allami, H.	2012	Teacher talk and learner involvement in EFL Classroom: The case of Iranian setting	Iran	Qualitative	3 English teachers with more than 5 years experience and 36 intermediate-level students between the ages of 18-26.
5	Chu, C, PY.	2014	Supporting new arrival students' engagement with picture books: analysis of teacher talk using the appraisal theory	An elementary school in Adelaide, South Australia	Qualitative case study	An English native speaker teacher, 10 female students, 6 male students of Grade 7 and 6
6	Ünel, A. & Miriouglu, M.	2015	Lexical Modifications In Teacher Talk Of Native Speakers Of English And Non-Native Speakers Of English In Efl Classrooms	Ca University in Turkey	Qualitative and Quantitative	8 foreign language teachers
7	Aisyah, N	2016	An Analysis of Teachers' Talk In An Efl Classroom	A high school in Bandung, Indonesia	Qualitative and quantitative	An EFL teacher and 30 Grade X students
8	Kim, N.	2016	Critical Teacher Talk: Successful English for Academic Purposes Classroom Practices in a Global Campus	A state university in the USA	Qualitative	A teacher of English for Academic Purposes and 16 international students
9	Basra, S, M., & Thoyyibah, L.	2017	A Speech Act Analysis of Teacher Talk In An EFL Classroom	University of Education, Indonesia	Qualitative	An English teacher for an EFL class
10	AL-Ghamdi, H., & Al-Bhargi, A.	2017	The impact of teacher speech modification on the quality of interaction and learning: An analysis of spoken discourse in Saudi EFL classroom	King Abdul Aziz University (KAU)	Qualitative	3 EFL teachers, 40 male students, and 22 female students

11	Sagita, I.	2018	Teacher Talk and Learner Talk in The Classroom Interaction (An Interaction Analysis to an English Language Class at SMP N 2 Sindang	SMP 2, Sindang, Indonesia	Qualitative and quantitative	Teacher and students
12	Colle, A, T, L, 2019 A. & Fitriati, S, W.		Realization of Actional and Formulaic Competence in Teachers' Talk in English Language Class	State University of Semarang, Indonesia	Qualitative	One male English teacher, one female English teacher from different high schools, and high school students
13	Zhang, P.	2020	Interactive Patterns and Teacher Talk Features in an EFL Reading Class in a Chinese University-A Case Study with Communicative Teaching Method	Chinese University	Case study	One EFL teacher

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The teacher talk is part of the learning process in the classroom, which [Cook \(2008\)](#) defined as a talk carried out by the teacher rather than the learner. [Poorebrahim and Talebinejad \(2015\)](#) said that teacher talks facilitate understanding, building, and regulating communication patterns. Teacher talk has a significant role as an interactive device which can be interpreted as the language used by the teacher as a source of knowledge input, regulates class activities, and communicates language ([Yanfen & Yuqin, 2010](#)). Because of its crucial role in the learning process, research on teacher speech has been widely carried out in various worlds with their uniqueness and point of view that can fill the gaps in the literature.

The synthesis of the narrative review will be analyzed through two sub-chapters, namely the forms of teacher talk and the importance of teacher talk for learning English as a foreign language.

1. Forms of EFL Teacher Talks

The role of the teacher in the learning process is as a facilitator so that learners can be more active in communicating. However, the percentage of teacher talk is more than the number of learner talk. Of the total class time, teachers have a percentage of 56.4% for speaking ([Sagita, 2018](#)). In line with this, [Rezaee and Farahian \(2012\)](#) also said that 62%-73% of the total class time was allocated for teacher talks. Meanwhile, the discussion time for students is only around 20%-25%, and the remaining 5%-12% is for joint activities. This fact indicates that the teacher talk during learning can significantly affect learning foreign languages, especially English ([Sagita, 2018](#)).

This narrative review finds four categories of teacher talk based on points that are considered similar, namely modification of talk to facilitate learners, teacher talk based on the teacher's role as a facilitator, teacher talk based on responses to the learner, teacher talk based on his attitude in the classroom.

1.1. Modification of Talk to Make It Easier for Learners

The teacher talk in the first category is seen based on the modifications made by the teacher during the learning process. This modification can be in the form of word choice or pronunciation. In delivering material or giving directions to students, teachers must pay attention to their words so that they can be understood by students in class, especially in foreign or second language classes. One form of teacher talk is using simple vocabulary and sentences to make it easier for learners to understand ([Al-Ghamdi & Al-Bargi, 2017](#)). This is in line with Nel and Mirioglu (2015), who found that teachers use more basic vocabulary for learners of English as a foreign language, especially those with lower language proficiency levels.

In pronouncing a word or sentence, the teacher must also use a clear articulation so as not to cause misinterpretation by the learner ([Al-Ghamdi & Al-Bargi, 2017](#)). In addition, a repetition is also a form of teacher talk that is often used to determine whether the learner understands what the teacher is talking about ([Zhang, 2020](#)). Then, [Al-Ghamdi and Al-Bargi \(2017\)](#) also argued that in their speech, teachers must pay attention to pausing vocals and slow down the talk to give students time to digest and understand what the teacher is talking about.

This form of speech will make it easier for students to capture the information provided by the teacher. In addition, the teacher also applies a clear word emphasis so that the meaning can be distinguished by the learner ([Al-Ghamdi & Al-Bargi, 2017](#)).

As stated by [Al-Ghamdi and Al-Bargi \(2017\)](#), the teacher also tries to clarify the learners' responses by using stressing words, namely the teacher will emphasize certain syllables by stressing or raising the voice so that the difference between syllables can be seen. The following is an excerpt from the research of [Al-Ghamdi and Al-Bargi \(2017\)](#).

Example: Teacher: Excellent. ↑So, where do we put the ingredients for pizza? (Pointing to the ingredients at the top of pizza). The word 'so' is marked with an upside arrow to show that it is said in a slightly rising tone at the beginning of the word because that is where the emphasis is. Not only that, but the teacher also made lexical modifications in carrying out the teacher talk in the English class as a foreign language. Nel and Mirioglu (2015) said that native speakers and non-native speaker teachers in EFL classes modify their speech lexis to teach non-native learners. It was also found that there is no difference in lexical modification in English as a foreign language class at primary and secondary levels ([Ünel & Mirioglu, 2015](#)).

Some of the modifications teachers make in their speech are usually done to facilitate the delivery of material and give orders. Because teachers are considered more experts in mastering English while English learners in foreign language classes are still relatively unskilled, it is necessary to modify the speech to understand the information conveyed to avoid misunderstanding the intent. Seeing that there is no difference in modifications at a certain level of education, it can be said that teachers at the elementary and upper secondary levels alike make modifications to their speech. Even though the level of education is different, modifying this speech can help teachers achieve learning goals, and students also do not feel burdened by mastering English as a foreign language.

1. 2 Teacher talks that shows a role as a facilitator

Some forms of speeches used by teachers in the studies analyzed are the ones that indicate that the teachers facilitate the teaching and learning process. Facilitating learning in the classroom can be from the teacher's providing direction, explanations, and information and asking questions. Teacher talks can show teachers' role to help understand communication ([Poorebrahim & Talebinejad, 2015](#)), building, and also regulating communication patterns ([Syarifudin, 2012](#)) during the learning process so that the class atmosphere becomes friendly ([Sagita, 2018](#)).

In addition, from 13 research results that were analyzed, it turned out that 6 of them found that the form of teacher talk that was quite commonly used was questions. The talk in the form of questions showed the most significant percentage used by EFL teachers, namely 40.77% of the entire teacher talk ([Aisyah, 2016](#)). In addition to ensuring

learners' understanding, [Aisyah \(2016\)](#) also said that asking questions can stimulate and make learners contribute more during the learning process. [Colle and Fitriati \(2018\)](#) also agreed that teachers could check students' understanding and stimulate learners' involvement in the classroom by asking questions.

Ensuring students' understanding was done by asking students to re-explain what they had learned along with examples ([Zhang, 2020](#)). [Rezaee and Farahian \(2012\)](#) classified the types of questions into several categories, namely procedural type, which are questions related to learning activities, convergent type, which are questions that require short answers, divergent type, which are questions that require higher-order thinking skills, self-answer type where the teacher will answer the questions posed by themselves, and the volunteering type in which the teacher asked questions to seek responses voluntarily. Meanwhile, [Sagita \(2018\)](#) divided the types of questions into two categories, namely open questions whose answers are in the form of opinions or responses from students and closed questions whose answers can be "yes" or "no."

The teacher talks in the form of providing direction and information are teachers' way to provide input to the learner to stimulate the learner's interest during the learning process. This is supported by the existence of questions that can ensure the understanding of the learner's mastery of English so that the teacher can still monitor whether the English learner understands the material. In addition, asking questions can maximize the contribution of learners in EFL classes since students can give their opinions or responses and practice the English directly that they have acquired.

1.3 The teacher talk in the form of a response to the learner

The next category is the teacher talk as a response to the learners. After providing input and then being responded to by the learner, the teacher will often provide his response. Responses from teachers can be in the form of accepting and using ideas from students, as stated by [Aisyah \(2016\)](#). Aisyah further said that accepting or using ideas from students is an attempt by teachers to solve problems by involving students. This is done by modifying answers or responses from students or using other words or speech from the teacher himself.

Other types of responses found by [Basra and Toyyibah \(2017\)](#) are in the form of sentences of thanks, apologizing, and congratulating. The word "thank you" is usually said by the teacher when the teacher receives something from the learner, or it can be when the learner tries to remind the teacher when something is wrong,

then the "sorry" is done when the teacher makes a mistake during learning such as mispronouncing the name of the learner ([Basra & Toyiyah, 2017](#)). In addition, the teacher also speaks in the form of feedback, where the teacher can justify or respond to the learner's responses ([Aisah & Hidayat, 2020](#)). The feedback given by the teacher is in the form of a direct response from the teacher to provide correct information to students ([Aisah & Hidayat, 2020](#)). The following is an example excerpt from the finding in the study by [Aisah and Hidayat \(2020\)](#):

By giving feedback to students, both in the forms of correction and appreciation, students can feel that the teacher appreciates their contribution to the class. The response given by the teacher does not mean that only the learner can make mistakes during the learning process, but the teacher can also make mistakes or mistakes. For this reason, giving good responses indirectly also familiarizes students to respect each other and be brave to admit mistakes, and do not hesitate to correct if something goes wrong but in a good and polite way.

1.4. Teacher talk based on his attitude in class

Although the term "talk" indicates verbal communication, interestingly, some research results show that teacher talk can be the attitude that teachers show in the classroom. The next teacher talk is based on the teacher's attitude in the classroom during the learning process and is categorized as an attitude because it involves the teacher's attitude in the learning process. The first is a good rapport, which reflects the closeness between teachers and students in the classroom ([Aisah & Hidayat, 2020](#)). As mentioned by [Aisah and Hidayat \(2020\)](#), good rapport between teachers and students was shown by how teachers know and memorize the names of students in class. This is considered a professional attitude shown by the teacher to improve the class.

Besides building rapport between students, teachers also sometimes gave students more time to think after being asked a question. [Aisah and Hidayat \(2020\)](#) said the teacher did this to give students longer time by pausing between questions and answering time to think and pay attention to the questions so that the answers produced were more critical and varied.

Another thing that teachers do is consciously correct their own mistakes. In his research, [Zhang \(2020\)](#) said that being aware of one's own mistakes and correcting them during learning can exemplify that mistakes when speaking English are considered natural. Some of the attitudes shown by the English teacher can indirectly accustom students to having good English learner characters, such as daring to admit mistakes, being confident in speaking English, having a good relationship with the teacher, and thinking critically.

1. The Importance of Teacher Talk

After knowing the forms of EFL teacher talks, the subsequent analysis is on its general importance for the learning process during lessons. One of the essential roles of the teacher talk is providing examples of the correct form of language to English learners because there is often ignorance of phrases or words by learners, so that information is needed about this from the teacher ([Incecay, 2010](#)). In foreign language classes, language input is critical as a tool for communication ([Zhang, 2020](#)). Concerning this, [Chu \(2014\)](#) argued that teacher talks could be a scaffold, or it can be said as a communication bridge between the teacher and the learner. Therefore, the learning process can run more effectively with the teacher talk because teachers and students can understand each other through the language delivered. For this reason, the role of the teacher talk is needed so that it can help students master the language.

In addition, [Zhang \(2020\)](#) also said that teacher talks could increase the language potential and creativity of English language learners as a foreign language. The teacher talk can also help students realize that making mistakes and learning from their own mistakes when learning English is part of learning and self-correction ([Zhang, 2020](#)). In their research, [Aisah & Hidayat \(2012\)](#) added that teacher talks could form a classroom atmosphere that encourages students' thinking skills and cognitive capacity while developing English language skills.

For this reason, the role of teacher talk in the classroom is constructive for students in learning, and it needs to be considered by the teacher in regulating his speech to achieve the objectives of the learning process of English as a foreign language. By knowing the form of teacher talk in the English class, the teacher can also adjust its use during teaching to make an effective learning process for students.

CONCLUSION

The speech forms of EFL teacher talks are classified into four categories. The first is based on the modification of speech to facilitate learners' learning. The second category is the teacher talk as a facilitator, where the teacher plays a role of a person that delivers the material, gives explanations and directions, and asks questions to students in a class to ensure understanding. The third is teacher talk as a response to the learner. Lastly, non-verbal teacher talk.

Meanwhile, from the data analysis, it can be listed that the vital role of EFL teacher talk is to provide correct language input to English language learners because it can be a communication scaffold between teachers and students.

Based on the findings of this narrative review, the author recommends that foreign language teachers pay more attention to the types of talks that they use in classrooms. Giving adequate responses or showing certain positive attitudes can give students a sense of appreciation and improve their learning motivation. The current study has provided an analysis of 13 empirical research articles on the topic of teacher talk. The number of studies reviewed is still limited, and therefore, the result might not represent the trend of all contexts and settings. There should also be a review of more currently published articles, so that consistency or variety of findings can be seen.

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