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From Silence to Dialogue: Improving Student Talk through Philosophy-Based Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This action research delves into the effectiveness of Philosophy-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) in improving English language learners' participation in classroom discussions. In exploring how philosophical inquiry into language instruction could foster student engagement, critical thinking, and communicative competence, constructivist and inquiry-based learning theories were used as the anchors. Using purposive sampling, five students from a tertiary English class participated in a month-long intervention wherein PBLT was implemented and injected into structured dilemmas and dialogic activities. The data that were gathered via key informant interviews were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. Furthermore, these data revealed that PBLT significantly improved students' confidence, willingness to speak, and ability to express complex ideas in English. Participants also reported that there was an improvement in their critical thinking skills and they developed a more positive attitude towards language learning. Despite some challenges such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliarity with open dialogue, and time constraints, PBLT created a supportive environment conducive to meaningful communication. It was concluded that PBLT is a transformative approach to language instruction, advocating for its broader application in curriculum design and teacher training to cultivate reflective, articulate, and critically aware learners.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most challenging skills for language learners, often hindered by anxiety and limited opportunities for meaningful communication (Afriansyah, 2020). In light of this, Goldsmith (2013) said that creating a classroom environment where students feel comfortable and motivated to participate is crucial for fostering oral language development. Teachers, therefore, play a vital role in preparing students to effectively communicate in real-world situations, emphasizing the importance of improving students' communicative skills so they can express themselves proficiently (Widiadnya, 2019). When students can communicate confidently and fluently, they become more engaged and motivated to learn, as collaborative activities such as role-playing, problem-solving, and brainstorming encourage students to practice communicating effectively (Masuram & Sripada, 2020). However, Mardiani and Apriyani (2021) mentioned that the reality in the classroom setting reveals that some students do not feel confident participating in speaking engagements.

Overcoming this hesitation requires an approach that integrates effective teaching strategies, a supportive classroom environment, and a focus on developing critical thinking skills. One approach that fits this concept is Philosophy-Based Language Teaching, which encourages students to think critically, ask questions, and consider different viewpoints. It also strengthens their language skills and helps them communicate more clearly

and thoughtfully. Moreover, PBLT also encourages meaningful peer interaction, which can ease students' anxiety and boost their confidence. As stated by Sanchez and Athanases (2023), creative teaching strategies help students grasp complex ideas and encourage meaningful, thoughtful discussions in the classroom. Also, Chen (2021) emphasized the value of open communication and inclusive environments in helping students find and develop their voices through purposeful language use.

In addition, collaborative strategies could serve as approaches that provide discourse and social interaction between students and teachers. Within collaborative learning environments, students move beyond the passive reception of information, instead actively engaging with the subject matter, rigorously evaluating diverse perspectives through constructive dialogue, and constructing their well-supported conclusions, which enables them to learn how to think. In support, Murad *et al.* (2021) mentioned that promoting student discourse is essential for continuity, progress, and interpersonal communication. As such, it will foster critical thinking skills that will enhance language skills. By integrating critical thinking into curricula, educators can enhance students' academic performance and build lifelong learning skills, which are increasingly important in today's evolving job market (Fakour & Imani, 2025).

On the other hand, Wang and Wu (2022) suggested that educators should embrace a student-centered approach, replacing passive learning with active participation and

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cooperative knowledge construction, fostering increased intrinsic motivation and heightened self-learning efficacy in order to cultivate a more engaging and effective learning environment. Such active engagement promotes more profound understanding and improves students' communication skills as they learn to articulate their thoughts and ideas clearly and persuasively (Chen, 2021). PLBT is perceived as useful, especially to those who do not have much opportunity to speak up and those who are not confident with their making skills. Therefore, the researcher employed this approach to foster learners' speaking skills in this study. Lastly, the researchers sought to answer the following inquiries: 1. How effective is Philosophy-Based Language Teaching (PBLT) in making the English language learners participate in academic and informal conversations inside the classroom? And, 2. What are the participants' insights on the implementation of PBLT?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study explored the heart of dialogic teaching and philosophy-based language instruction and how these approaches can boost student dialogue and language skills, and dove into some hands-on strategies for bringing these methods to life in different classroom settings.

Speaking Skills

Afriansyh (2020) stressed that speaking is vital, as it plays a key role in students' academic success and overall ability to communicate effectively. Widiadnya (2019) also said that being able to express ideas clearly, take part in meaningful conversations, and share one's thoughts is essential not just for learning but also for thriving in today's interconnected world. However, the current classroom environment does not align with these ideas. Leyaley (2023) has observed that many students especially those learning English often remain quiet and hesitant to speak up in class. It is said that this silence can stem from several factors, such as anxiety, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, or cultural norms that do not encourage active classroom participation.

Sanchez and Athaneses (2023) pointed out that to address the common issue of student silence in classrooms, we need to shift towards teaching methods that focus on open dialogue and foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment. Also, in the study of Goldsmith (2013), it was stated that a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere should be created that really encourages students to communicate. Therefore, this approach gives teachers the tools they need to help students overcome challenges, grow their language skills, and boost their ability to think critically.

Philosophy-Based Language Teaching

According to Vygotsky (1978; cited in Dabbagh & Noshadi, 2016), higher levels of thinking skills, especially abstract thinking, are achievable using mediated tools/approaches

such as PBLT, for example. Palmerola (2024) explained that Philosophy-based language teaching promotes critical thinking and enhances communication skills, fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment. However, this approach does not only aid in improving grammar and vocabulary but also facilitates students to articulate their thoughts using well-supported reasoning and evidence. PBLT can be considered problem-based learning. Jasti and Pavani (2021) also claimed that it can enhance professional communication skills, especially for students who may not have numerous chances to speak in a conventional, teacher-centered setting. Therefore, teachers must create plenty of opportunities for students to engage in speaking activities inside and outside the classroom, fostering tangible improvements in their communication abilities.

Furthermore, PBLT promotes collaborative strategies since they can foster discourse and social interaction among students and teachers. Murad *et al.* (2021) posit that when students are allowed to contemplate, reflect, and draw conclusions, they can easily express their emotions, thoughts, or goals that arise during the lesson. In addition, Jasti and Pavani (2021) assume that these kinds of approaches aim to help the learners become self-directed and be able to engage thoughtfully with complex ideas and communicate effectively across diverse contexts, even outside the four corners of a classroom. As a result, the classroom becomes a dynamic place of communication and critical thought.

Nonetheless, there are still some challenges and limitations that need to be addressed. One of which, as Kiely (2019) mentioned, is the possibility of resistance from teachers who are more comfortable using more traditional and teacher-centered approaches. There is also a need for teachers to carefully plan and prepare the class, as mentioned by Kumarulzama *et al.* (2021), to ensure that the philosophical discussions align with the curriculum objectives and learning outcomes. Hence, teachers are expected to be proficient in facilitating philosophical discussions, managing diverse opinions, and providing appropriate scaffolding and support for the students.

Furthermore, a PBLT classroom is not different from other classrooms that implement other approaches; diversity is still present. However, diversity in culture and linguistic repertoire may influence their willingness and ability to participate in the discussions. In fact, Biswas and Nandi (2020) stated that some students may come from cultures wherein questioning authority or expressing dissenting opinions is discouraged, while others may lack the confidence or language proficiency to articulate their thoughts effectively. To address these challenges, teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe and inclusive classroom setting where students feel valued, respected, and supported. Thus, expectations should be set clearly; communication should be respectful, students can practice speaking in small groups, and individualized support and feedback to help students develop their language skills and confidence are offered.

Given the nature of the approach, shallow or unproductive discussions are a concern. To tackle this, Dewsbury and Brame (2019) recommend that teachers take a few important steps: give students the background knowledge they need, demonstrate effective ways to communicate, and use thoughtful questions and prompts to spark critical thinking. This idea underscores just how important the teacher's role is in making philosophy-based language teaching (PBLT) successful they are not just facilitators but key guides in helping students engage meaningfully and think deeply.

Markey *et al.* (2021) believed that for PBLT to be properly implemented, there needs to be a substantial commitment of time and resources, demanding both meticulous planning and adaptive execution and continuous reflective practice on the part of the educator. Addressing student silence calls for a better understanding of what the students need when learning through PBLT. It also necessitates a respectful discussion and encouraging intercultural dialogue.

Furthermore, one important aspect of PBLT is communication. Yang and Zhang (2019) stated that teaching cannot occur without effective communication. Often, some barriers to effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, arise in the classroom. Thus, the educator must identify and resolve the factors detrimental to effective communication (Bambaeroo & Shokrpour, 2017). Furthermore, Wenning and Vieyra (2020) said that teachers must understand what students are thinking, as it checks student understanding and retention while supporting their sensemaking of new ideas. Also, actively involving students enhances learning opportunities, which can motivate them to work together (Chuang, 2014). Teachers can cultivate participatory learning and build a secure environment that encourages open expression by fostering teacher-student engagement.

Some studies found that PBLT can be implemented in the classroom in line with the need for innovation in language teaching methods (Veigas & Wilson, 2020). The role of teachers has evolved in the classroom, as they are required to cultivate an environment where students can freely express themselves without fear of judgment. The teacher's role as a mentor and facilitator, rather than a dispenser of knowledge, is crucial in ensuring that students actively engage with the learning process (Farrow *et al.*, 2022; Simanjuntak, 2023). Therefore, implementing strategies to enable students' active participation in classroom discussion is necessary.

Relevant Theories

PBLT, as posited by Zhao (2023), is aligned with theories such as constructivism, in which the importance of active learning and knowledge construction through experience is emphasized. In line with the previous idea, Wang and Wu (2022) also said that philosophical discussions are an avenue for students to construct their understanding of concepts, challenge assumptions, and explore alternative perspectives. Moreover, Palmerola (2024) explained that

when a teacher incorporates philosophy within language education, it can promote critical thinking, enhance communication skills, and foster a deeper engagement with learning.

According to Silva *et al.* (2018), this method provides a framework that strengthens the development of essential skills like problem-solving and decision-making since inquiry-based learning, based on Alrajeh's (2021) idea, encourages students to ask questions, investigate, and discover answers, complements philosophy-based language teaching. By engaging in metacognitive processes, students become more attuned to their learning styles, knowledge gaps, and cognitive biases, which promotes intellectual autonomy and a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Taylor, 2017; Veigas & Wilson, 2020). By integrating philosophical inquiries into language lessons, educators can stimulate intellectual curiosity and analytical prowess among students (Hsbollah & Hassan, 2022).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The researcher utilized action research in this study. Specifically, it employed a phenomenological qualitative design, focusing on the participants' experience implementing PBLT in the classroom. Their experience is crucial in evaluating the effectiveness of PBLT; thus, qualitative inquiry is the best option for evaluating this kind of action research, as it is only through experience that the actual performance is known.

Research Participants

The researcher used purposive sampling based on the nature of the study. The researcher uses this sampling method to select informants and to provide accurate information about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2009). The participants of this study were the five (5) selected students from the class where the PBLT lesson exemplar was used. They were chosen based on their significant positive changes when PBLT was implemented.

Data Gathering Procedure

For data gathering, the researcher subjected the participants to a week-long classroom instruction using PBLT. After implementing the approach, the researcher interviewed five selected students to share their insights about the strategy's effectiveness. The researcher conducted Key Informant Interviews as it was deemed the most appropriate method to answer the research questions.

Data Analysis

After the data-gathering procedure, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis using the procedure suggested by Colaizzi (1978). First, the researcher transcribed the responses of the study participants. After transcribing, the researcher read the transcripts closely and looked for significant statements. Then, formulated

meanings were created based on the identified significant statements. After the formulated meanings were created, they were clustered into groups. Finally, the clustered themes were analyzed to formulate emergent themes.

Intervention/Action Plan

As discussed in the earlier parts of this research, some students do not participate in speaking engagements, which may impede their growth in communicative competence. The researcher had personally witnessed this in his classes with tertiary students. Because of this, the researcher constructed a lesson exemplar using PBLT to enable and allow the students to speak freely inside the classroom with confidence and without hesitations. The method integrates philosophical inquiries in language teaching, fostering critical thinking skills and allowing learners to use the target language. Aside from asking philosophical questions, the researcher also played the devil's advocate to stimulate answers from the learners. If the students discuss freely, the teacher allows the informal debate to continue so the learners can speak without hindrance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The focus of this study is to determine whether PBLT was effective in helping learners express themselves in classroom conversation. The intervention was given for the whole month of April 2025. Out of 49 students in the classroom, the researcher identified five students for this study. Interviews were conducted to get feedback on the effectiveness of the PBLT.

Baseline Data Observation

Before implementing PBLT, the researcher observed that the learners were not participative in classroom conversation and discussion. As a language teacher, the researcher also wants the learners to use English confidently in formal and informal settings. As per observation, some students opt not to share their ideas even if they have one. Also, some students are anxious to share their ideas. Thus, before the implementation of PBLT, the researcher saw massive inhibition on the part of the learners when it came to classroom participation.

During the Implementation of the Intervention

When PBLT was implemented, the researcher saw a substantial change in the behavior of the learners. The learners, who typically stay silent, shared their thoughts about the issues given by the researcher. Aside from that, informal debate has become commonplace in the classroom. The learners use English to initiate healthy and academic conversations about philosophical and sensitive issues like religion, cultural relativism, and morality. Aside from using the target language to converse, they constantly used their critical thinking to find weaknesses in the other students' stances on specific issues. In implementing PBLT, the researcher/teacher facilitated the learning process. One of the things that the researcher

did was to give a moral dilemma for the students to ponder and solve. The excerpt below is one of the dilemmas that were asked of the learners:

Scenario: Me Before You

Your terminally ill parent is in severe pain and begs you to help them end their life. Euthanasia is illegal in your country, and assisting their death could lead to severe legal consequences for you. If you comply, you relieve your parent's suffering but face legal repercussions. If you refuse, your parent continues to suffer immensely. Will you help end their suffering or abide by the law?

Furthermore, the researcher allowed the learners to have a meaningful back-and-forth. If the topic of conversation goes astray, the researcher brings them back by clarifying or rephrasing the question. Also, if the researcher wanted the conversation to move in a specific direction, leading questions were asked to the students. Finally, when the learners have provided their stance or have settled on common ground about the issue presented, the researcher played the devil's advocate by providing a different view with examples to stir the learners' minds.

Post Data Observation

After implementing PBLT, the researcher interviewed five students to gather data on the effectiveness of PBLT. After the interviews, the researcher analyzed the data, resulting in the following emerging and clustered themes.

The effectiveness of PBLT in making the learners speak. The five participants mentioned the effectiveness and advantages of the use of PBLT. According to them, PBLT has engaged and motivated them to participate in the lesson. Furthermore, they also mentioned that they felt more confident speaking in the English language through PBLT. Lastly, one of the participants mentioned that PBLT allowed him to enhance his critical thinking skills.

Learner Engagement and Participation

Based on the data, many students mentioned being encouraged to speak in class because of Philosophy-Based Language Learning or PBLT. They mentioned that they were encouraged to speak because the questions in PBLT require opinion-based answers. This finding resonates with established research demonstrating that pedagogical approaches emphasizing student-centered activities and collaborative problem-solving significantly enhance communicative competence and oral expression (Jasti & Pavani, 2021). Another study that supports this finding is where students felt more confident speaking (Albino, 2017). This finding indicates that PBLT fostered a more interactive and engaging learning environment, encouraging students to articulate their thoughts and ideas more freely.

I often feel encouraged because I think most of the questions in the PBLT-based activities are opinion-based. (P5)

I often feel encouraged because the answers needed are opinion-based. (P1)

Student Confidence and Attitudes Toward Speaking English

Student confidence and attitudes toward speaking English. Based on the data gathered, the participants felt more confident sharing their opinions when implementing PBLT in the classroom. This is related to the previous finding, which states that PBLT encourages students to speak because of the opinion-based questions. Aside from boosting student confidence, the approach appeared to positively influence students' attitudes toward speaking English, with many expressing increased enjoyment and reduced anxiety associated with oral communication tasks. Such affective changes are crucial, as they can foster a more positive and growth-oriented mindset toward language learning, further enhancing students' willingness to participate and engage in communicative activities.

Even though my skills in communicating in English language is not perfect, I feel that my opinions are appreciated and heard, which motivates me to participate more in this kind of teaching method. (P3)

It allows me to practice thinking critically, organize and express my thoughts without pressure if my answer is right or wrong. (P4)

Participant's Insights

The participants shared their insights about the implementation of PBLT inside the classroom. Most of their answers were positive, though challenges were also identified.

Positive View of the English language

Many participants claimed that through PBLT, their views toward the English language changed. They shared that they enjoyed learning English more because of PBLT. This is because PBLT makes the students think critically, and they can share their opinions without worrying about the answers being wrong or right. These positive shifts in students' perceptions of the English language stem from PBLT's emphasis on critical thinking and open dialogue, which allows students to express their opinions freely without fear of judgment. The change in perspective could be attributed to the active engagement and critical thinking fostered by PBLT, which encourages students to express their opinions without the anxiety of providing definitively correct answers, ultimately leading to a more positive and relaxed attitude toward using English as a tool for communication and intellectual exploration (Silva *et al.*, 2018).

It is a positive influence in learning the English language. (P3)
PBLT has helped me feel more comfortable with learning English. (P5)

Improved Critical Thinking and Reasoning Skills

Two participants shared that PBLT enhanced their critical thinking and reasoning skills. The enhancement of these skills may be attributed to the nature of PBLT questions, which transcend simple recall, compelling students to engage in higher-order cognitive processes

such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information, thus cultivating a more profound understanding of both the subject matter and the English language itself (Bahri & Idris, 2018). Implementing PBLT, focusing on complex philosophical inquiries and open-ended discussions, necessitates that students critically evaluate diverse perspectives, construct well-reasoned arguments, and engage in collaborative problem-solving, ultimately fostering a more sophisticated and reflective approach to learning (Alghamdy, 2023).

They challenge my critical thinking skills...PBLT has helped me enhance my critical thinking and vocabulary. (P1)

It also improved my critical thinking skills and to listen better, respond thoughtfully...I am using the language to think critically, question, and express myself. (P3)

Challenges in Implementing PBLT

Despite the positive effects of PBLT implementation, the participants shared their challenges when the approach was used. One participant mentioned difficulty finding the right words to express his thoughts. This difficulty highlights the importance of providing students with adequate support and scaffolding to develop their linguistic competence and communication skills, particularly in complex philosophical discussions. Furthermore, one student said that PBLT is intimidating, especially if the students are not used to sharing their thoughts. This intimidation could be attributed to students' prior experiences with more traditional, teacher-centered approaches to language learning, where they may not have been encouraged to express their opinions or engage in critical thinking. Lastly, one student shared that PBLT can be very time-consuming. This time consumption underscores the importance of careful planning and resource allocation in implementing PBLT, ensuring that students have sufficient time to engage with the material and participate in meaningful discussions without feeling rushed or overwhelmed.

Sometimes, it is hard to find the right English words to express deep thoughts (P2)

... struggling to organize my thoughts into words (P3)

it is also very time-consuming (P5)

CONCLUSION

This study clearly shows the dynamics of a traditional classroom where there is a prevalence of teacher-centered instruction and a fear of making mistakes. These elements can hinder students from expressing their voices and their language skills. Therefore, the emergence of PBLT as a new practice transforms the classroom into a safe space for dialogue and inquiry-driven conversations. Moreover, the study also shows that when critical thinking is integrated with language acquisition, it can encourage students to think deeply and speak more purposefully. Also, the use of PBLT in the classroom highlights the importance of respecting students' perspectives, valuing their opinions rather than measuring them against strict rules of correctness, in contrary to the silence often observed in

classrooms where students fear committing mistakes. Moreover, the study showed that the implementation of open-ended philosophical dilemmas, such as moral and ethical issues, invited genuine engagement among the learners. During the discussions, students were no longer passive in the learning process; instead, they became active participants who were working around complex ideas in a second language. This kind of strategy allows students to develop their communication skills and become more thoughtful, empathetic, and reflective learners. However, the study also revealed the different challenges in implementing such an approach in terms of linguistic limitations, time constraints, and students' unfamiliarity with open discussion formats. These challenges require teachers to provide more support, careful planning, and a strong understanding of the students' needs and contexts. Several important recommendations are highlighted based on the findings of this study. First, teachers are encouraged to integrate PBLT into their instructional practices to develop both critical thinking and communicative competence. Second, it is important to build a supportive classroom environment where students feel safe to express their ideas without the fear of being judged. This includes avoiding penalties for mistakes and promoting a respectful dialogue. Third, teachers are encouraged to shift from being figures of authority to facilitators who guide discussions using open-ended questions and encourage students to explore diverse perspectives. Lastly, assessment methods should move beyond the standardized tests and embrace more holistic approaches, including but not limited to reflective journals, peer assessment, and performance-based tasks that are more accurate in capturing the linguistic and cognitive development of students.

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