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## Exploring Classroom Organisational Forms and Teacher Talk Time in Malian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Classes

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### ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Malili İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen (EFL) sınıflarında sınıf organizasyon biçimlerini ve öğretmen konuşma sürelerini inceleyerek, bunların dil edinimi ve yeterlik gelişimi üzerindeki etkilerini ele almaktadır. Gözlemsel bir araştırma deseni kullanılarak, 10 öğretmenin gerçekleştirdiği 30 ders analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma, öğretmenlerin tercih ettikleri sınıf organizasyon yapılarını ve öğretim sürecindeki konuşma sürelerinin öğrenci katılımına oranını belirlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bulgular, gözlemlenen derslerin %70'inde "ikili ve grup çalışması" etkinliklerinin yoğun olarak tercih edildiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bu durum, özellikle kalabalık sınıflarda öğrenci katılımını artırmaya yönelik bir çözüm olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Ancak, sonuçlar öğretmenlerin sınıf içi konuşmalarda belirgin bir şekilde baskın olduğunu ve bu durumun öğrencilerin aktif dil kullanımı ve iletişim becerilerini geliştirme fırsatlarını sınırladığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, dil öğreniminin etkin bir şekilde gerçekleşebilmesi için öğrenci merkezli yaklaşımların benimsenmesi ve sınıf içi etkileşimlerde denge sağlanması gerektiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu bulgular, EFL bağlamlarında öğrenme çıktılarının iyileştirilmesine yönelik dengeli sınıf etkileşimlerini destekleyen literatüre katkı sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Malili EFL Sınıfları, Sınıf Dinamikleri, Gözlem Çalışması, İkili ve Grup Çalışması Etkinlikleri, Öğretmen-Öğrenci Etkileşimi

### ABSTRACT

This study explores classroom organizational forms and teacher talk time in Malian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, emphasizing their influence on language acquisition and proficiency development. Using an observational research design, 30 lessons delivered by 10 teachers were analysed to identify preferred classroom structures and the balance between teacher talk and student participation. The findings reveal that 70% of the observed lessons predominantly utilized pair and group work activities, particularly in response to the challenges posed by large class sizes. However, the results also indicate that teacher talk time significantly outweighs student talk time, with teachers maintaining a dominant role in classroom discourse. This teacher-centered approach, while facilitating structured instruction, limits opportunities for students to engage in active language use and practice essential communication skills. The study underscores the need for more student-centered strategies to foster greater learner participation and interaction, which are crucial for effective language learning. These findings contribute to the growing body of research advocating for balanced classroom interactions to enhance learning outcomes in EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Malian EFL Classes, Classroom Dynamics, Observational Study, Pair-group Work Activities, Teacher-student Interaction

## INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Mali is a dynamic field that warrants continuous investigation to optimize instructional practices and enhance student learning outcomes. Central to the effectiveness of EFL instruction are the classroom organizational forms and teacher talk time, which shape the learning environment and influence students' language acquisition and proficiency development.

Classroom organizational forms denote the diverse methods used to arrange and administer a classroom in order to support learning. This encompasses the layout of furniture, seating arrangements, grouping methods (such as whole class, small groups, or individual tasks), and established routines for managing transitions, materials, and activities.

Whole-class teaching refers 'students sitting in rows listening to a teacher who stands in front of them (Harmer 2001, p.114)'. This type of teaching is thought to have advantages and disadvantages. According to Harmer (2001), whole-class teaching promotes a sense of belonging among students, which is important for teachers to cultivate. When everyone participates in the same activity, it fosters a collective experience. This method is ideal for situations where the teacher needs to take control, such as giving explanations and instructions, as it avoids the need to repeat these for smaller groups. It allows teachers to assess the overall mood and progress of the class rather than focusing on individuals. Many educational settings prefer this approach because it provides a secure environment where both students and teachers feel comfortable working together under the teacher's guidance.

In short, whole-class teaching, despite its drawbacks, offers several advantages such as consistency in instruction and the ability to cover a broad curriculum efficiently. It ensures that all students receive the same information simultaneously, promoting a unified learning experience. However, while it is beneficial for delivering structured content and maintaining classroom management, it can limit individual expression and participation. Balancing whole-class teaching with opportunities for smaller group activities or individualized instruction can help mitigate its disadvantages and enhance overall student engagement and learning.

Pair-work is an activity used for language teaching. In this style of teaching, 'students can practise language together, study text, research language or take part in information-gap activities. They can write dialogues, predict the content of reading texts, or compare notes on what they have listened to or seen (Harmer 2001, p.116)'. In other words, this highlights the variety of interactive activities in language learning. Students practice together, study texts, and research language, fostering collaboration. Engaging in tasks like writing dialogues, predicting content, and comparing notes enhances comprehension and makes learning more dynamic and immersive. Additionally, according to (Irkinovich, 2021), pair work is a collaborative organizational method where participants work in pairs to complete tasks together. It is advised for a range of exercises, including language practice, structured speech activities, and genuinely communicative tasks.

Unlike pair-work activity, group-work is an activity in which more students are involved in the activity. This type of activity 'allows [students] to do range of tasks for which pair work is not sufficient or appropriate (Harmer 2001, p.117)'. To put it differently, this type of activity allows students to engage in tasks that go beyond the scope of pair work. It provides opportunities for more complex, collaborative learning experiences that pair work alone cannot achieve, fostering a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the material. Similarly, Group work is a collaborative organizational method where three to eight students work together simultaneously to solve a task. It is characterized by each student's commitment to the collective effort, the ability to cooperate towards a common goal, mutual support

and accountability, self-critique, and evaluation of individual success or failure in the context of the group's work, as well as an interest in the group's outcomes (Irkinovich, 2021). In group work activities, students sit together, face each other, and discuss a problem openly. This setup encourages free communication, allowing students to use the language freely in the classroom without feeling self-conscious (Abdullah, 2016).

Group-work is praised to foster learner independence by enabling students to independently make group decisions, rather than relying on teacher instructions. It cultivates deeper cooperation and negotiation skills than pair-work, while providing a more private setting than activities conducted in front of the entire class (Harmer 2001).

According to (Sowell, 2018), there are numerous benefits to incorporating pair and group work in the language classroom, but one of the most important is that they offer chances for interaction in the second language (L2), which is crucial for language acquisition. We should incorporate pair and group work activities for several reasons: interaction is vital for language acquisition, students benefit from hands-on learning, and these activities are less intimidating, fostering a range of skills and competencies.

Teacher talk time (TTT) refers to the amount of time during a lesson or instructional session that the teacher spends speaking or presenting information to the students. It is contrasted with "student talk time" (STT), which is the time that students spend actively participating in discussions, asking questions, and engaging in activities. Haliti (2019, p.14) states 'STT represents the amount of time that students use in classroom to produce the language that they learned'. In other words, STT reflects the classroom time students spend actively using the language they have learned. In short, prioritizing STT encourages active participation and application of language skills, which are essential for language proficiency. It complements other teaching strategies and contributes significantly to the overall learning experience in the classroom. Additionally, Pour et al. (2023) discuss the allocation of speaking opportunities between teachers and students in the classroom. TTT represents the time teachers spend talking during lessons, whereas STT indicates the duration students actively engage in speaking activities.

Several voices emphasize the role of teacher talk as an input for learning. Aisyah (2016, p. 63) stated that 'teacher talk focuses on the talking time that teachers have in a lesson. Moreover, it serves as input for students, especially in EFL classrooms. Teacher talk affects the results of the teaching and learning process.' Additionally, Cardenas (2013, p. 18) adds that teacher talk is "the means of providing students with input in the second language, especially when the possibilities for learners to communicate in the L2 outside the classroom are limited – as in countries where English is not spoken as a second language."

However, according to Harmer (2007), excessive Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is counterproductive because it reduces the opportunity for students to practice speaking, which is essential for their learning. When teachers dominate the conversation, students miss out on other important activities like reading and writing. Therefore, effective teaching involves maximizing Student Talking Time (STT) and minimizing TTT.

In other words, the best lessons are those where STT is maximised in order to give students more chances to practice speaking. Additionally, an effective teaching approach should prioritise Student Talking Time over Teacher Talking Time. Therefore, minimising TTT and maximising STT are key strategies for enhancing student learning and participation in the classroom. In their study, Pour et al. (2023) assert that teachers should take on 'a balanced approach to classroom interaction.' They highlight that a high TTT may indicate that students are not getting enough chances to practice speaking English, which is essential for language acquisition.

In short, teachers must be aware of their talking time. Excessive talking, even if comprehensive, can prevent students from practicing speaking or engaging with other inputs like reading or listening to recordings. Additionally, students might become bored if they constantly listen to the teacher (Harmer, 2001). However, this style of learning has some disadvantages. It favors the group over the individual, making everyone do the same activities at the same time and pace, which limits individual students' chances to express themselves. Many students are reluctant to participate in front of the whole class due to the fear of public failure. This approach may also discourage students from taking responsibility for their own learning, as it often emphasizes knowledge transmission from teacher to student rather than fostering independent discovery or research. Additionally, whole-class grouping is not ideal for communicative language teaching or task-based sequences, as communication is more difficult in large groups compared to smaller ones. In smaller groups, sharing materials, speaking informally, and maintaining eye contact is easier, which aids in successful task resolution (Harmer, 2001).

Despite their critical importance, there remains a paucity of research examining these aspects of pedagogy within the context of Malian EFL classrooms.

This study seeks to address this research gap by exploring the classroom organizational forms and teacher talk time in Malian EFL classes. Understanding the dynamics of classroom organization and teacher-student interaction is essential for informing pedagogical strategies that promote effective language learning experiences for students.

Through observations conducted across multiple EFL classrooms in Mali, this research aims to shed light on the prevailing instructional practices and their implications for student engagement and language learning outcomes. By investigating the extent to which teachers employ different organizational forms and the distribution of talk time between teachers and students, this study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the field of EFL pedagogy in the Malian context.

Overall, this study endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of the classroom dynamics in Malian EFL classes, laying the groundwork for future research and informing instructional practices aimed at fostering optimal language learning experiences for students.

The research question guiding this investigation is:

- What is the prevalent classroom organizational forms and patterns of teacher talk time in Malian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class?

It is hypothesized that a significant proportion of Malian EFL classes predominantly utilize pair-group work activities, and teachers predominantly dominate classroom discourse, resulting in limited student participation in verbal interaction during instructional sessions.

## **METHOD**

This study utilizes an observational research design to examine the classroom organizational forms and teacher talk time in Malian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The research was conducted across 30 lessons taught by 10 different teachers. The primary aim was to identify the organizational strategies employed in the classrooms and to assess the balance between teacher talk time (TTT) and student talk time (STT). Data was collected through direct observations, focusing on the types of group work (whole-class, pair-work, group-work) and the allocation of speaking opportunities between teachers and students. The observations aimed to determine how these organizational structures influenced student engagement and language learning outcomes. The research provides a comprehensive overview of how classroom dynamics, specifically the distribution of talk time and group activities, impact the effectiveness of language learning in the Malian context.

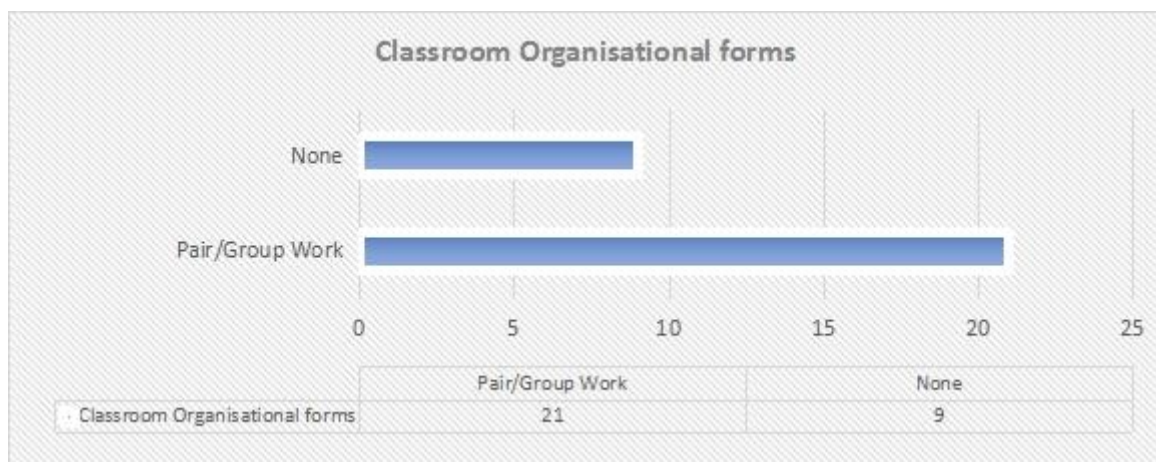
## **FINDINGS**

This section analyses the findings from data collected through the structured observation designed to observe Malian EFL teachers' teaching practices. In all, 30 lectures of ten (10) teachers were observed. The researcher had an observation checklist to be filled. Teachers were observed while teaching to see if the behaviours listed in the observation checklist occur in the teaching process. The main objective of the observer was to find out which classroom organizational forms were prevailed and the degree of teachers' talk time.

### *Classroom organisational forms in Malian EFL classes*

#### **Item 1. Classroom organisational forms**

- a)  Pair work activity
- b)  Group work activity
- c)  Whole-class teaching



**Figure 1: Classroom organisational forms**

There are several classroom organisational forms that can be effective in developing speaking skills. It is important to note that creating a supportive and positive learning environment is crucial in helping students develop their speaking skills. Encouragement and constructive feedback can go a long way in building confidence and improving performance. Among the classroom organisational forms, the researcher has chosen three types: pair, group work activities and whole-language teaching, and observed teachers while teaching to stick the ones that occur during the teaching process.

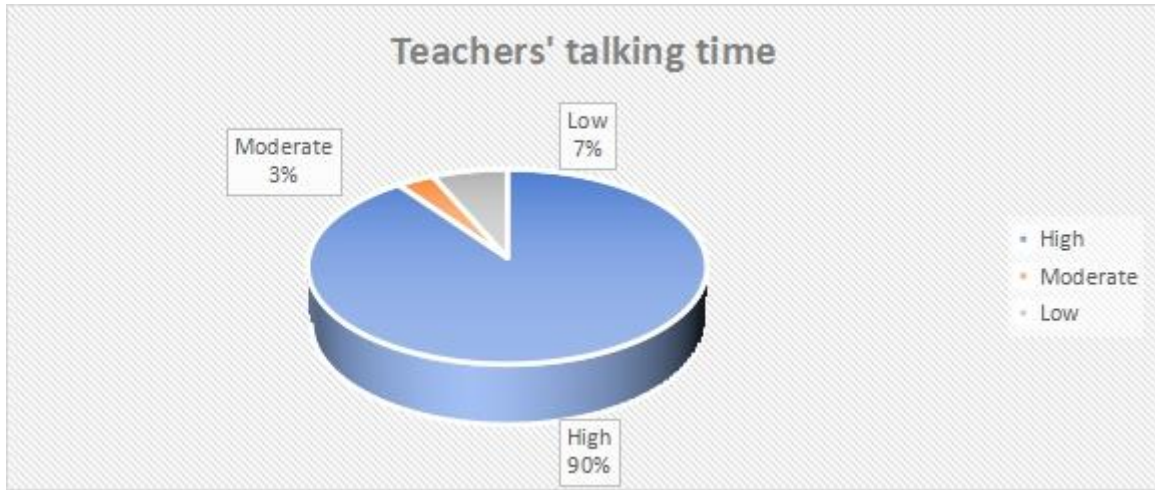
As it can be seen on figure 1, seventy (70%) of the observed lectures frequently use “pair-group” activities in class. Teachers use these activities to deal with large classes. Most secondary school classes are overcrowded. Use of these activities is more popular than the other types. Pair and group work activities can be effective with large classes, as they provide an opportunity for students to collaborate, communicate, and work together towards a common goal.

On the other hand, thirty (30%) of the lectures mainly focused on other activities such as grammar exercises done individually or reading texts and answering questions individually. The results indicate that most lectures observed mainly focused on the use of pair and group work activities, which could imply that these teachers hold somehow a view of language as a means of communication.

### *Teachers' talks time in Malian EFL classes*

#### **Item 2: Teachers' talking time**

- a)  High
- b)  Moderate
- c)  Low



***Pie-chart 1. Teachers' talks time***

The amount of talking time that a teacher should have in a second or foreign language classroom can vary depending on several factors, including the goals of the class, the level of the students, and the teaching method being used. Communicative teaching method is given greater opportunities to use the target language. The teacher's role is to facilitate, monitor, and provide support, rather than to dominate the conversation.

The above question seeks to determine the teacher's talking time while teaching. The researcher observed teachers while teaching to determine how much is their talking time in the classroom on a basis of the scale from "high to low". Hence, "high" represents the highest talking time, which means that teacher dominate the classroom interaction. "Moderate" means that both teacher and learners take part in the classroom interaction. "Low" indicates that students dominate the conversation, which means that teacher has less talking time. Therefore, "high" means teacher has more talking time; "moderate" means that teacher has an average talking time; and "low" means that learners have more talking time than teacher has.

In this respect, the pie-chart 1 indicates that, in the observed lectures, teachers dominate the conversation, which means that teacher is the only person to talk. Students sit and listen what he or she is saying. The good thing in this may be that students can practice their listening ability through listening to the teacher if the teacher has the correct pronunciation, but it could be better if they practice both skills at the same time. Thus, teachers should give more speaking time to students to develop their speaking ability. At the beginning, students may be shy, but teachers should insist and encourage them to use the language. The only way to speak a language is to practice. This can only be possible if learners are engaged in real communication activities.

In the end, the most important thing is to create a supportive and engaging language learning environment that promotes student interaction and the use of the target language. The teacher's talking time should be flexible and adjusted according to the needs of the students and the objectives of the lesson.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Regarding classroom organizational forms, the findings indicate a predominant use of pair-group activities, which account for 70% of observed lectures. This suggests that Malian EFL teachers commonly employ collaborative learning strategies to engage students and facilitate language acquisition. Pair and group work activities offer opportunities for students to interact, communicate, and collaborate, particularly beneficial in large class settings where individual attention may be limited (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998; Long & Porter, 1985). However, it is noteworthy that 30% of the observed lectures focused primarily on individual activities such as grammar exercises or reading tasks. This disparity underscores the need for further exploration into the rationale behind teachers' choice of instructional strategies and their alignment with language learning objectives.

The analysis of teachers' talk time reveals a notable trend wherein teachers predominantly dominate classroom discourse, with students primarily listening passively. This finding underscores the importance of reevaluating the balance of teacher-student interaction in EFL classrooms. While teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating language instruction, excessive teacher talk time may hinder students' active participation and speaking practice, which are essential for language fluency development (Walsh, 2002; Chaudron, 1988). It is imperative for teachers to adopt a more student-centered approach, where learners are encouraged to actively engage in communicative activities to enhance their speaking skills. Providing opportunities for authentic communication and fostering a supportive learning environment are crucial steps towards promoting active student participation and language proficiency development.

In sum, the results underscore the importance of creating a supportive and engaging language learning environment that promotes student interaction and the use of the target language. Teachers should strive to strike a balance between teacher-led instruction and student-centered activities, ensuring that students have ample opportunities to practice speaking and engage in meaningful communication (Nunan, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). By fostering an environment that prioritizes active student participation and communication, Malian EFL classrooms can better cater to the diverse learning needs of students and facilitate their language learning journey effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study was designed to examine the classroom organizational forms, and the teacher talk time in Malian EFL classrooms. The principal research question addressed was: What are the typical configurations of classroom organization and patterns of teacher talk in EFL classrooms in Mali?

The results showed that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Mali frequently prefer pair and group work activities to other methods. This preference is probably due to the congestion experienced by Malian EFL classes, making the teachers in such classes believe that these are the most appropriate activities to involve all students in the lesson actively. Further, as it was pointed out, pair and group work are also known to contribute to improving learners' speaking abilities. However, the findings also indicated that the classroom interactions tend to be mostly teacher-centred, hence providing little room for the learners to be to practice the language.

Therefore, the findings emphasize the significance of an engaging and supportive language learning environment in Malian EFL classrooms. While pair-group work activities dominate, reflecting a positive trend toward collaborative learning, the substantial teacher talk time suggests a need for a more balanced approach. Encouraging active student participation is crucial for language proficiency development. Teachers should aim to integrate more student-centred activities, allowing learners to practice speaking and engage in meaningful communication. By doing so, Malian EFL classrooms can better address the diverse learning needs of students, promoting a more effective and interactive language learning experience.

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