

# TEACHER TALK IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSES AT UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** Teacher talk plays a very important role in English language teaching and learning. This study aimed to investigate the attitudes of first year EFL students towards teacher talk in English speaking classes at a university. It also examined how teacher talk was actually carried out in these classes. The participants of this study included 120 first year EFL university students. The data were collected through the questionnaire, interviews and audio-recorded classroom observations. The findings of the study revealed that first year EFL students had positive attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes. It was also found that all teachers used both English and Vietnamese when teaching and they tended to use English language more frequently than Vietnamese language in English speaking classes. Additionally, they often used English to give oral instructions, information related to the lectures and to ask questions. Based on the study findings, some implications were suggested for EFL teachers and students in order to enhance the quality of teacher talk in English speaking classes as well as to help students to understand their teachers' speech more effectively.

**Keywords:** Teacher talk, EFL students.

## INTRODUCTION

In English language teaching, teachers play a pivotal role as language input providers and language models to be imitated by students. It cannot be denied that in teaching process, teachers who implement the specific communicative acts, such as lecturing, asking and responding questions, explaining, giving instructions or feedback to students. The kind of language used by the teachers in the process of teaching is known as teacher talk. According to pedagogical theory, the language that teachers use in classrooms also determines to a larger degree whether a class will succeed or not and good teacher talk can create opportunities for interaction between teachers and students, this means that teacher talk can give learning chances to make students have the desire to engage in classroom interaction. Given the fact that teacher talk plays a pivotal role in English classes, this study was carried out to explore how teacher talk was actually carried out in English speaking classes at university and the attitudes of EFL university students towards teacher talk in English speaking classes. More specifically, the research particularly tried to answer the following questions:

1. How is teacher talk actually carried out in English speaking classes at university?
2. What are students' attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes at university?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Role of Teacher Talk*

Teacher talk is the language typically used by foreign language teachers in the process of teaching. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 543) defined teacher talk as “language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching.” Similarly, Ellis (1985, p. 145) gave another definition:

Teacher talk is the special language that teachers use when addressing L2 learners in the classroom. There is systematic simplification of the formal properties of the teacher’s language and the studies of teacher talk can be divided into those that investigate the type of language that teachers use in language classrooms and those that investigate in the type of language they use in subject lessons.

In another perspective, teacher talk is viewed as a source of target language as well as a language model for students. As Allwright and Bailey (1991, p. 139) claimed, “talk is one of the major way that teachers convey information to learners, and it is also one of the primary means of controlling learners behaviour”. This means that through the language, teachers employ in the classroom helping students to acquire the target language easily. They also emphasized that teacher talk is the major source of comprehensible target language input in the instructed language learning environment, thus it plays an integral role not only in the organization of the classroom but also in the processes of acquisition. In line with Krashen’s input hypothesis (2003) and Cullen (1998), teacher/lecturer talk is the valuable source of comprehensible input which is viewed as an essential for students’ language acquisition.

In EFL classes at the university level, teacher talk is used as a means of communication and a language input for the students’ language proficiency because Fengqican (1999, p. 23) declared that teacher/lecturer talk is a kind of communication-based or interaction-based talk that connects teacher/lecturer and students to communicate. She also explained that teacher talk is used in class when teachers are conducting instructions, cultivating their intellectual ability and managing classroom activities to encourage the communication between learners and themselves. In this way, learners practice the language by responding to what their teacher says. Likewise, according to Ellis (1994), teacher talk means that teachers address classroom language learners differently from the way they address other kinds of classroom learners, it makes adjustments to both language form and language function in order to facilitate communication and these adjustments are referred to as “teacher talk”. He added that teacher talk is very important for both classroom teaching organization and students’ language learning in the process of foreign language acquisition, because it is an instrument of implementing teaching plan, “good” teacher talk does not necessarily mean “little” teacher talk; rather, effective teacher talk facilitates learning and promotes communicative interaction.

### *Types of teacher talk*

In analyzing teacher talk in EFL classrooms, some tools have been proposed and one of them is FLINT (Foreign Language Interaction Analysis) system adapted from

Moskowitz (1971, as cited in Brown, 2001). According to Moskowitz's FLINT system in Brown (2001, p. 177), there are seven categories of teacher talk in language classrooms, which are classified into two subcategories, indirect influence and direct influence as follows:

Table 1. *Categories of teacher talk in language classrooms (Adapted from Brown, 2001)*

<b>Foreign Language Interaction Analysis (FLINT) System</b>		
<b>Teacher Talk</b>	<b>Indirect Influence</b>	1. Dealing with feelings
		2. Praising or encouraging
		3. Using ideas of students
		4. Asking questions
	<b>Direct Influence</b>	5. Giving information
		6. Giving directions
		7. Criticizing students' response or behavior

In indirect influence, it deals with students' feelings, praises and encouragements which includes joking, uses ideas of students which relates with repeating students response verbatim, and asks questions. The indirect influence leads students to the warm classroom atmosphere and tries to break the ice in order to encourage students to actively participate and learn in classroom interaction. Specifically, as Brown (2001, p. 170) claimed that interactive teaching is closely concerned with indirect teaching with such category as "dealing with feelings" or teacher talks in a non-threatening way, accepting, discussing, referring to or communicating understanding of past, present or future feelings of students. Secondly, "praising or encouraging" is to compliment, to tell students what they have said or done is valued, encouraging students to continue, trying to give them confidence, confirming that answers are correct. Thirdly, "using ideas of students" is to clarify, use, interpret, summarize the ideas of students. The ideas must be rephrased by the teacher but still be recognized as being student contributions. Also, teachers can repeat the exact words of students after they give answer. The last category is "asking questions" to which the answer is anticipated (rhetorical questions are not included in this category).

Another influence in the teacher talk is direct influence, it consists of giving students information, correcting without rejection is a part of it, giving directions and criticizing students' behavior which comprises criticizing student response. The direct influence aims to encourage students to involve directly in the teaching and learning activity and according to Moon (2000), it relies on academic reasons, which affect to more formal classroom atmosphere. According to Brown (2001), the first type of teacher talk is "giving information", or giving information, facts, own opinions, or ideas; lecture or ask rhetorical questions. Besides, teachers can tell students who have made a mistake and give the correct response without using words or intonations which communicate criticism. Another type is "giving directions", teachers give requests or commands that students are expected to follow; direct various drills; facilitate whole class and small-group activity. The final types are "criticizing students' behavior" that teachers reject the behavior of students, try to change the non-acceptable behavior, communicate anger,

displeasure, annoyance, dissatisfaction with what students are doing and “criticizing students’ response” by telling the student his or her response is not correct or acceptable and communicating criticism, displeasure, annoyance, rejection by words or intonation.

In general, it is important to know the types of teacher talk occurring in the classroom and by acknowledging these categories that teachers tend to use in the classroom, they can design a better teaching and learning process where students can feel at ease and actively participating since comfortable classroom environment is associated with students’ motivation, and easy for them to participate in the interaction (Gharbavi & Iravani, 2014).

### *Previous studies*

The topic of teacher talk in ELT has been carried out in different contexts. For example, Mulyati’s (2013) study aimed at investigating the realization of verbal classroom interaction, especially teacher talk and students talk that occurred during teaching speaking in one primary school in Bandung. The data were analyzed by the framework adapted from Flanders’ Interaction Analysis Categories (1970) and another by Kumpulainen and Wray (2002). The findings indicated that the teacher acted as the most dominant interlocutor during speaking activities. Besides, it also revealed the teacher’s roles during interaction as director, manager, and facilitator. The study recommended the teachers to support students to have more opportunity to speak during the lesson.

Arif, M.Zaim, and Refnaldi (2018) analyzed teacher talk in classroom interaction at a high school. This paper focused on identifying the types of initiation and follow-up used by the teacher in classroom interaction. The findings presented that the types of initiation used by the teacher in classroom interaction were display question, referential question, direction, and invitation, while the types of follow-up used by the teacher in classroom interaction were informing, prompt, criticism, ignoring, and acknowledgment. The study proved that teacher talk played an important role in provoking interactions between teachers and students. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the using variation of initiation rather than giving question that require students’ short response which could be lead the student disinterest to participate in interacting.

Nasir, Yusuf, and Wardana (2019) explored teacher talk in an EFL classroom interaction in Aceh Tengah, Indonesia. This study aimed at analyzing the types of talk employed by the teacher in the classroom interaction based on the framework of Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System (FIACS) promoted by Flanders (1970), which is quite similar with the above research of Mulyati (2013). The data were collected through audio-recordings and observations for three class meetings, and interviews with the teachers at the second grade of a senior high school in Aceh Tengah, Indonesia. The results showed that all of the seven types of teacher talk were found and among them, giving directions and asking questions were the most frequently used types by the teachers. It indicated that the teachers mostly controlled and provided the students with directions, commands, or orders in the learning process and made the students attentive to the subject of discussion

as well as to check their understanding of the topic by asking questions. Meanwhile, the least used were accepting or using ideas of pupils and accepting feelings. From the result of the interviews, this matter occurred due to the lack of students' participation in expressing their ideas and feelings. Thus, this study was expected to be a reference by which teachers could consider the types of teacher talk to be implemented to improve their students' activity and interests in classrooms.

In the context of Vietnam, Nguyen (2010) investigated teacher talk in EFL classroom at Backan education college. This study was implemented on a very small number of classroom teachers of English (three teachers) through in-depth interviews. The results expressed that these classes were still under teacher-dominated class, to be more exact, the amount of teacher talk occupied more than two third the amount of student talking time and Vietnamese language used more than English language. Therefore, the teachers should change their belief and shift the teacher-centered classroom into student-centered classroom.

In line with Nguyen (2010), Le (2012) conducted a research on teacher talk at a high school in Hanoi with 102 grade 10 students and three teachers via the use of questionnaire. The findings revealed that the ways of talk preferred by teachers at this school are invitation, using questions, prompting and encouragement. Moreover, there was superiority of teacher talk over student talk and a large number of students had a strong desire for talking and participating in class discussion, giving more time to think of the answer, so the study recommended the teachers to facilitate as much time as possible for students to talk and increase their participation in class.

Besides, Phan's (2018) exploratory study on teacher talk and students' learning opportunities in a primary school context demonstrated that teachers tended to repeat the basic linguistics patterns to the students and rarely used their talk to provide comprehensible input to the students, they used Vietnamese unnecessarily excessive, thus limiting the students' exposure to input for learning. Hence, the teachers should make plans to improve the quality of teacher talk in primary school context through the short-term course teacher training every year.

In general, the previous studies related to teacher talk focused on the analysis of various phenomena about teacher talk, teachers' perceptions on the amount and types of teacher talk used by the teachers in English classes, ways of teacher talk preferred by teachers and the objective description on teacher talk such as its features or the role of teacher in EFL classes. There is not much research concerning students' attitudes towards teacher talk in the classrooms, specifically in English speaking classes. Furthermore, most of the studies concentrated on primary, junior and senior high school students. There has been a dearth of research on teacher talk at the university context. Therefore, it would be significant and practical to investigate university students' attitudes towards this topic.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative approach in the form of questionnaire administered to 120 university students to collect information about their attitudes towards teacher

talk as well as explore the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes. The study also made use of the qualitative approach to provide a deeper understanding of how teacher talk was actually carried out in English speaking classes.

The participants in this study included 120 first year EFL students chosen randomly from three English speaking classes at a university in central Vietnam. These students had already had at least seven years of English learning at secondary and high school before entering the university and they had different levels of English proficiency ranged from low to high according to their teachers' formal and informal evaluation.

The data collection instruments consisted of questionnaire, interviews, audio-recorded classroom observations. Specifically, 120 first year English major students were invited to complete the questionnaire with the purpose of reflecting what they thought about teacher talk and the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes. The questionnaire was designed with 14 items. Items 1-6 focused on the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes and items 7-14 on students' attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes. The contents of the questionnaire questions were adapted from the theoretical framework on teacher talk by Brown (2001). Besides, 25 out of the 120 students were asked to volunteer to be interviewed to support the information collected in questionnaires. Moreover, audio-recorded classroom observations were carried out to analyse the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes. Classroom observations were carried out in three English speaking classes with two periods for each class in the second semester of the school year 2019-2020. During the lesson in each class, one of the researchers acted as a non-participant observer, took notes of the classroom activities and recorded teacher talk relating to these activities.

The data collected from the three instruments, namely, questionnaire, interview, audio-recorded classroom observation were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Firstly, data gathered from the questionnaires are carefully totaled up, grouped, compared and contrasted according to statistical frequency and percentages, then they are presented in the tables and charts for quantitative data analysis with the purpose of finding out students' attitudes towards teacher talk as well as their difficulties when listening to teacher talk in English speaking classes, and the actual teacher talk in these English speaking classes. Besides, data from interviews and recorded classroom observations were used to extract themes referring to the research questions. After that, all the data were combined to draw conclusions of the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes and students' attitudes towards teacher talk. The combination of these different design methods aided in guaranteeing methodological triangulation for more persuasive, reliable and valid results.

## FINDINGS

### **1. The actual teacher talk in English speaking classes**

To explore how teachers used their talk in English speaking classes, the questionnaire was delivered to 120 students and the result is presented in the following chart.

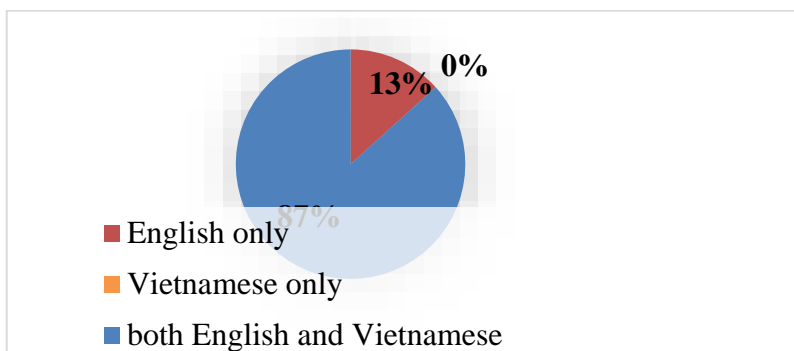


Chart 1. *Teacher talk in English speaking classes*

The pie chart illustrates the teacher talk in English and Vietnamese in English speaking classes. Eighty-seven percent of students reported a combination between English and Vietnamese language in their teacher talk. While only 13% of them chose that in English speaking classes, their teachers used their talk just in English, none of them stated that teachers used only Vietnamese.

Actually, these results are in correspondence with the data from the observations of three English speaking classes at the research site. All the three observed teachers used both English and Vietnamese when they talked. Specifically, from audio recordings, in three English speaking classes, besides English, teachers A, B, C used Vietnamese to explain the new words to students, for example:

Teacher A: “Altruism means... share or support or concern the other ones - có nghĩa là mình quan tâm, mình giúp đỡ người khác, mình share bất cứ điều gì.. and all the heroes, they are very altruistic, careful, support - that is “altruism”, or praise someone as a hero tức là ca ngợi ai đó như một người anh hùng.”

Teacher B: “Whole grains có nghĩa là ngũ cốc từ tất cả những cái hạt từ cây lúa, củ mì, lúa mạch,... - nuts khác với peas ở chỗ nuts là các loại hạt điều, hạt dẻ còn peas là các hạt đậu.”

Teacher C: “Altruism is the willingness to do something, bring advantages to others even if it brings disadvantages for yourself, có nghĩa là mình làm việc tốt cho người khác, mặc dù đôi lúc nó mang lại bất lợi cho mình, ngoài ra vị tha ở đây không có nghĩa là ai làm gì đó xấu, mình tha thứ mà các bạn thường nghĩ nhưng ở đây không phải, ở đây là chủ nghĩa vị tha gọi là “altruism”, nó đối lập với chủ nghĩa vị kỷ “selfishness”, selfish ở đây là antonym của altruism. or “It turned out that, what does it mean? Yeah, it’s something like unexpected happened, có nghĩa là điều gì mà mình nghĩ là nó không xảy ra, “it turned out that” dịch là hóa ra rằng, sau “that” là các bạn cộng với một mệnh đề. Các bạn có thể sử dụng từ này trong học viết và trong học nói.”

As can be seen from the recorded transcript above, the teachers often used both English and Vietnamese because they wanted to make sure that all of students were able to understand what they talked and what the new words meant in English speaking classes,

but students still had opportunities to develop their competence in listening and speaking English.

In the interview, one student shared,

Teachers should combine English and Vietnamese when giving lectures so that students can not only understand knowledge deeply and avoid misunderstanding teachers' thought but also have opportunities to listen English and make a habit to use English in the class.

(Interview with student D on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020)

From data in Chart 1 above and the observations of three English speaking classes, it can be inferred that all teachers in this study used English language more often than Vietnamese language in classrooms, this is completely different from the findings from the previous study of Nguyen (2010) in the literature, when all teachers in her study tended to speak Vietnamese more than English. Actually, students need to listen to English and in foreign language context, teacher talk is a source of input they can learn. It is clearly seen that if teachers use Vietnamese so much in language teaching, the students will not gain input and they become dependent on it. They do not try to understand meaning from context and explanation or express what they want to say in the target language. As a result, the students lack their ability of English communication inside and outside classrooms. The habit of using teacher talk in the target language directly influences on the language competence of students. Too much L1 used in English speaking classes cannot help students reinforce and enhance their English speaking skills. Hence, to make teacher talk be an useful source of input for learners to acquire the target language, teacher talk should be in the target language and comprehensible to students. Nonetheless, sometimes, using English one hundred percent in the classroom cannot satisfy students' demands in deeply understanding the meaning of new words or complicated phrases, this is the reason why all teachers in this study combine English and Vietnamese in talking and explaining something difficult and abstract to students. In conclusion, the balanced proportion between the target language and the mother tongue greatly affects the success of students' language speaking proficiency in English speaking classes.

### ***Frequency of teacher talk types in English speaking classes***

The frequency of using the types of teacher talk in English speaking classes was also investigated. The following table shows the findings from the questionnaire.

The seven types of teacher talk were adapted from FLINT system (Brown, 2001). According to the table, most of participants stated that their teachers "often" used these above types of teacher talk except "criticizing students' response or behavior". Specifically, the largest numbers were found in three types of teacher talk such as "asking questions" (58.3% of students), "praising or encouraging" (56.7%) and "giving directions" (55%). Especially, more than half of participants (62.5%) in the questionnaire affirmed that their teachers "sometimes" used the type "criticizing



students' response or behavior". In fact, these findings are similar with what the researcher observed in three English speaking classes at the research site.

The recorded observations were transcribed and the frequency of each talk type in the three English speaking classes is presented in the following table.

Table 2. *Frequency of teacher talk types in English speaking classes*  
(N= 120, F= Frequency, % = Percentage)

Types of teacher talk	very often		often		sometimes		rarely		never	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
a. Dealing with feelings	23	19.2	51	42.5	30	25	10	8.3	6	5
b. Praising or encouraging	28	23.3	68	56.7	18	15	6	5	0	0
c. Using ideas of students	17	14.2	56	46.7	39	32.5	7	5.8	1	0.8
d. Asking questions	38	31.7	70	58.3	9	7.5	2	1.7	1	0.8
e. Giving information	48	40	57	47.5	15	12.5	0	0	0	0
f. Giving directions	41	34.2	66	55	13	10.8	0	0	0	0
g. Criticizing students' response or behavior	5	4.2	13	10.8	75	62.5	23	19.2	4	3.3

Table 3. *Frequency of recorded teacher talk types in English speaking classes*  
(F= Frequency, % = Percentage)

Types of teacher talk	Class one (Teacher A)		Class two (Teacher B)		Class three (Teacher C)		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
a. Dealing with feelings	1	0.7	0	0	0	0	1	0.4
b. Praising or encouraging	24	16.6	12	24	15	22.7	51	19.5
c. Using ideas of students	6	4.1	2	4	3	4.5	11	4.2
d. Asking questions	74	51	16	32	14	21.2	104	39.9
e. Giving information	15	10.3	10	20	12	18.2	37	14.2
f. Giving directions	20	13.8	9	18	18	27.3	47	18
g. Criticizing students' response or behavior	5	3.5	1	2	4	6.1	10	3.8

From Table 3, it can be seen that types of teacher talk began from the highest percentage to the lowest one, namely, asking questions, praising, giving directions, giving information, using ideas of students, criticizing and dealing with feelings. Among them, asking questions (39.9%), praising or encouraging (19.5%) and giving directions (18%) are three types of teacher talk that three teachers often used in English speaking classes.

In general, the result of analyzing the transcripts of classroom observations can get support from the questionnaire and interviews. It can be seen clearly that the three types of teacher talk, namely, "asking questions", "praising or encouraging" and "giving directions" are commonly used by teachers in English speaking classes. The results from transcription give clear description about what is actually going on in natural

classrooms. Actually, in English speaking classes, the “dealing with feelings” type was most rare used by the teachers and the most dominant types of teacher talk was “asking questions”, this finding was similar with what Nasir, Yusuf, and Wardana (2019) revealed in their study that asking questions and giving directions were the most dominant types of teacher talk and accepting feelings and using ideas of students were the least used by teachers in high school EFL classrooms. Specifically, at the beginning of each class, giving directions was mostly employed to inform what the learners were going to learn and do in class and asking questions was also dominantly applied to make the students attentive to the subject of discussion as well as to check their understanding of the topic. These two types helped teachers assess the students’ understanding of the lessons, from that, they could make decisions on what to do next to improve the teaching and learning process. Accepting feelings and using ideas of students were the least used by the teacher because the students were less prompted to express their feelings or ideas. It was found that teacher talk types happened during the observations, so the seven types of teacher talk adapted from Moskowitz’s FLINT system (Brown, 2001, p. 177) have become proof of the use of classroom language. These types indicate the ability of the teacher to maintain English as primary language in classrooms although both teachers and students sometimes use Vietnamese to keep the verbal interaction run smoothly. Regarding direct and indirect categories of teacher talk above, all teachers in this study employed both indirect teaching and direct one. As mentioned in the literature, the direct influence relies on academic reasons, which affect to more formal classroom atmosphere (Moon, 2000) while Brown (2001, p. 170) claimed that interactive teaching is closely concerned on indirect teaching. This can be seen from the fact that the teachers in this study led the students more to do the tasks and praised the student’s performance, and asked questions than explained materials and used students’ ideas.

## 2. Students’ attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes

As mentioned in the literature review, Yanfen and Yuqin (2010) emphasized that teacher talk can have a great effect on students because the teachers transfer the lesson to students through talking. Therefore, in order to know the role of teacher talk in English speaking classes, item 7 in the questionnaire was carried out to investigate how first-year students feel about teacher talk in English speaking classes.

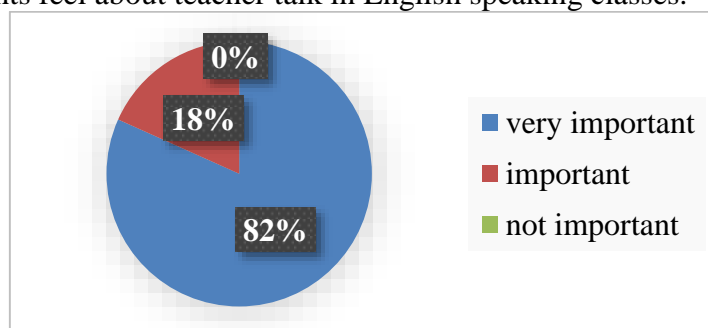


Chart 2. *The importance of teacher talk in English speaking classes*

The pie chart demonstrates the students' affirmation of the importance of teacher talk in English speaking classes. As Chart 2 shows, 82% of students stated that teacher talk in English speaking classes played a "very important" role, while 18% found teacher talk "important". No one thought that teacher talk was "not important" in English speaking classes. Accordingly, all of the interviewees (25 students) agreed that teacher talk was very important. When being asked about the reasons, one student stated that:

I think teacher talk played a very important role in English speaking classes, it was very helpful in students' English speaking. During English speaking classes, my teachers pronounced very accurately and fluently like native speakers. Every time she spoke, this attracted every students' attention in the class. My teacher mostly spoke English in English speaking classes, unless there were unfamiliar vocabulary words, or someone who did not understand something, she would explain further in Vietnamese.

(Interview with student Q on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020)

Moreover, in the interview, 10 students shared the same opinions that in their English speaking classes, teacher talk was very important because teacher talk could help them understand the lectures more deeply and clearly, gave them the concrete instructions on how to do tasks. Besides, when the teacher talked, he/she played a role model for students to learn to pronounce new words. In addition, the teacher feedback including praises and criticisms helped students know their strengths and weaknesses and thereby correct errors to improve themselves (interviews with students A, B, C, D, H, L, N, T, Q, X on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020).

Especially, another student emphasized the importance of teacher talk as follows:

I think teacher talk played a very important role in English speaking classes because it gave students many opportunities to listen English and made a habit to use English in the class. Also, it was very useful in English speaking classes. For example, teacher questions, teacher feedback and even teacher's positive feedback also helped me a lot when I learned speaking skills. Besides, thanks to teacher talk in English speaking classes, I could easily understand the contents of lessons more and felt more interested in learning speaking skills.

(Interview with student D on 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2020)

These findings show an optimistic outlook on students' attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes. In fact, as mentioned in the literature review, Cook (2000, p.40) said that teacher talk is particularly important to language teaching and it is the main source of interaction in the classroom. To be more specific, Nunan (1991) pointed out that the importance of teacher/lecturer talk is not only for organizing the classroom conditions but also for facilitating the students to acquire their target language easily. It can be inferred that teacher talk has a significant effect on students' language acquisition and mastering English speaking skills of students depends on teacher talk in

English speaking classes, specifically on the ways teacher talk is carried out and on how teachers use their talk in English speaking classes.

### *Teacher talk types preferred by students*

To know teacher talk types preferred by students, the results collected from questionnaire are displayed in the table below.

Table 4. *Teacher talk types preferred by students*

Types of teacher talk	Number = 120	Percentage (%)
Dealing with feelings (e.g. How are you today?)	76	63.3
Praising or encouraging	101	84.2
Using ideas of students	25	20.8
Asking questions	100	83.3
Giving information	81	67.5
Giving directions	96	80
Criticizing students' response or behavior	36	30

According to the table, the ways of teacher talk preferred by a very large majority students are praising or encouraging (84.2% of students) and asking questions (83.3%). Besides, the number of choices for giving directions is 80% and giving information is 67.5%, 63.3% was for dealing with feelings. On the contrary, 30% was for criticizing students' response or behavior and 20.8% were for using ideas of students. It is true that when studying Speaking skills, most of students like receiving praises and encouragement from teachers as this helps them feel good about themselves, boost their confidence and motivate them to speak English better in the classrooms. As explained by Harmer (2000), he suggested that teachers should praise students for their success, since teacher's positive attitude can dramatically change student's performance irrespective of their levels. Also, asking questions are chosen by the majority of students, when being asked about the reasons, one student said,

Teacher questions helped to elicit knowledge and answers from students, this not only developed students' critical thinking skills but also increased the interaction between teachers and students, students and students.

(Interview with student L on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2020)

In addition, other five students gave their opinions that when their teachers asked questions, this drew them a lot attention to the lesson because the questions were very practical and interesting. Moreover, asking questions helped them develop better critical thinking skills as well as expanded the knowledge of the lesson and gained more in-depth understanding of the lectures. Also, asking questions created a friendly classroom environment, at the same time, students could interact with teachers and increase communication skills (Interviews with five students C, D, H, L, N on 12th May, 2020).

Overall, the results of this study revealed that the teacher talk types preferred by students are praising or encouraging, asking questions and giving directions. Meanwhile, the previous studies reviewed earlier focused on exploring the ways of talk preferred by teachers such as invitation, using questions, prompting and encouragement, not the ways of talk preferred by students. Especially, from the findings of this study and previous studies, we can recognize that both teachers and students preferred the way teachers used questions in classrooms. Therefore, teacher questions form an indispensable component in EFL classrooms and they play an important role in facilitating student learning. This is supported by Richards and Lockhart (2007) as questioning is one of the most common methods used by teachers to control the classroom interaction and over half of class time is taken up by question-and-answer exchanges. It is undeniable that asking students questions is a critical tool for developing their skills, hinting students to think critically and analytically, gaining students' reflection and challenging deeper students' understanding and engagement in learning as well as boosting the students to communicate in contextual setting, and building a close connection between teachers and students in classrooms.

### *Teacher question types preferred by students*

The following chart with data from the questionnaire reports the types of teacher questions preferred by students in English speaking classes.

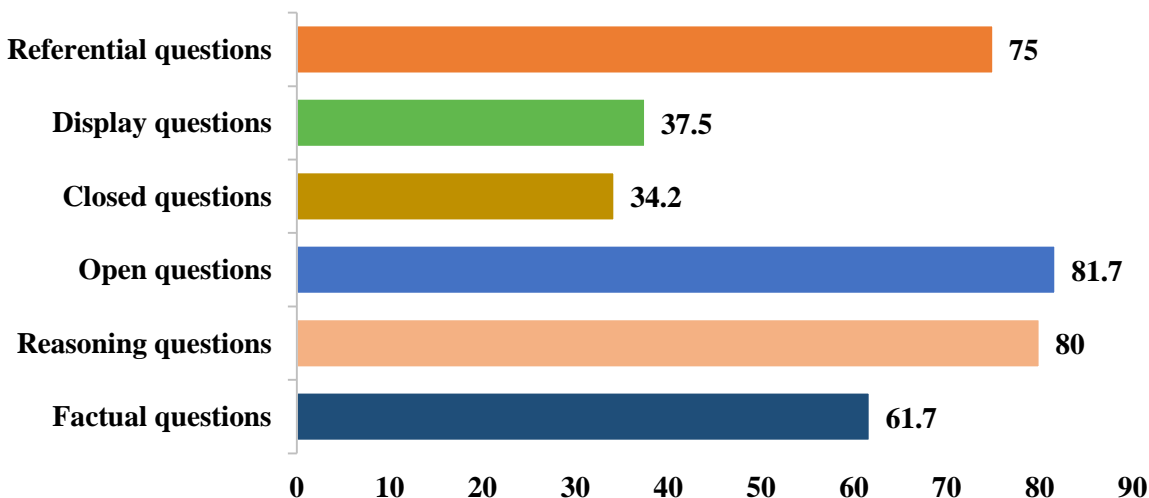


Chart 3. *Teacher question types preferred by students*

As revealed from Chart 3, open questions (81.7%) and reasoning questions (80%) are the first preferred choices by students. Actually, as mentioned by Chaudron (1988) in the literature review, open questions begin with 'why' and 'how' are the same as reasoning questions. These are classified having longer responses, enable students to express their feelings, attitudes and opinions. They are an effective way to challenge students as well as inspire their creativity and thinking process. The next preferred type

are referential questions (75%) and factual questions (61.7%). Meanwhile, 37.5% of students preferred display questions and only 34.2% chose closed questions. Obviously, the open questions, reasoning questions or referential questions are preferred by most of students because they create more opportunities for students in developing their target language and their critical thinking skills than display and closed questions. In line with Lee, Kinzie and Whittaker (2012) as stated in the literature review, open questions are believed to be useful for developing students' cognitive skills, as these questions encourage them to express and elaborate upon their thinking, and provide rationales for thoughts. Besides, referential questions are genuinely information-seeking and are likely to be open to elicit long students' responses and expected to be best technique in creating the opportunities to learners to be active in language learning (Ellis, 1994; Qashoa, 2012; Salariyan & Moridi, 2016; Pan, 2017). In contrast, in the light of Long and Sato (1983), display questions elicit answers already known by the teacher and are likely to be closed, these questions check only what students know and allow them to give only one acceptable answer, this restricts students' output and does not encourage longer responses.

To sum up, from Chart 3 above, it can be seen that students had the tendency to prefer the types of questions such as open, reasoning and referential questions that encourage diverse longer responses from them and engage them in higher-level thinking to provide their own information and ideas to short answers as closed and display questions which only recollect the previously presented information. It can be inferred that in English speaking classrooms, students desire to participate in speaking tasks and expect to have more chances to speak English. Therefore, teachers should balance the use of their question types to the whole class appropriately so that each student has the opportunity to improve their language skills and proficiency in speaking skill.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study was set out to explore the actual teacher talk in English speaking classes at university and EFL students' attitudes toward teacher talk. Data were collected from questionnaire, interview and recorded class observation. The results indicated that all teachers in this study used both English and Vietnamese when talking and they tended to use English language more often than Vietnamese language in English speaking classes. Additionally, it was found that teachers often talked in English speaking classes to give instructions or directions, information or lectures and questions. The findings also showed that the three types of teacher talk, namely, "asking questions", "praising or encouraging" and "giving directions" were commonly used by the teachers. Moreover, class observation recordings revealed that the teachers in the present study preferred asking factual questions, open questions and referential questions that produce diverse longer responses and engage them in higher-level thinking to express their own ideas rather than display questions, reasoning questions and closed questions.

Regarding students' attitudes towards teacher talk in English speaking classes, in the questionnaire and interviews with students, all of EFL students in the current study

highly agreed that teacher talk was of great importance in English speaking classes. They stated that teacher talk exerted a positive effect on their English speaking competence and their motivation in speaking English in the classrooms. They admitted that teacher talk helped them understand the lectures more profoundly, know what they had to do in classrooms, and when the teacher talked, he/she was a role model for them to learn to pronounce new words.

From the study findings, it is suggested that in EFL classrooms, teachers should play a pivotal role model in the teaching and learning process, including explaining the material, praising, encouraging, giving information, correcting the mistakes, and giving instructions to the students. Therefore, teachers should try to understand what forms of teacher talk would be more efficient in creating an environment in which students feel more comfortable and more confident and become more involved in classroom activities. Despite the fact that students are exposed to teacher talk frequently in the class, they may have some problems when listening to teacher talk due to their English proficiency levels. They therefore should continuously improve their overall levels of English for more effective understanding of teacher talk.

In conclusion, teacher talk is always essential in English speaking classes but it will be more meaningful, interesting and effective when teachers give more opportunities to students to talk and make students feel confident and ready to use English more in the class. English teachers therefore should provide more indirect teacher talk or add some communicative activities to maximize the students' opportunities to participate in the classrooms and improve students' speaking skill.

In the scope of this study, only teacher talk types and questions were investigated and students' attitudes toward these issues. With a rather small number of classroom observations, the results may not be generalized to other contexts. Future studies therefore should document more data that reflect more aspects of teacher talk including word use, time allocation and repetition.

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