

Student voice in higher education: A negotiated curriculum in the foreign language classroom

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Abstract

The article examines an action research of negotiated curriculum in a university-level EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. Drawing on critical pedagogy, this study is best suited to action research as negotiated curriculum can be explored with a deeper understanding through action-oriented research. The research details how negotiated curriculum affects learning and teaching in an EFL classroom. Data collection methods included participant observation, teacher journals, student journals, and minutes of student meetings. The findings revealed that student choice, participation in classroom management, negotiated assessment, collaborative dialogue, and student-led activities can be considered in a negotiated curriculum. Moreover, it was indicated that the negotiated curriculum contributed to speaking skills, learner engagement, motivation, self-confidence, and enjoyment.

KEYWORDS

action research, foreign language classroom, higher education, negotiated curriculum

1 | INTRODUCTION

The effect of power relations on education has been investigated for a long time (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Illich, 1971, Shor, 1996). Today's "so-called" learner-centred teaching practices still give limited opportunities to students and teachers. Teachers remain the sole authority in the classroom and make all the important decisions for their students. O'Grady et al. (2014) stress that the international neo-liberal agenda affecting curriculum suppresses students' voice in their own curriculum. Freire (1970), the leading proponent of critical pedagogy, defines this situation as "banking education" in which students are passive receivers of knowledge and the teacher is the

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transmitter of it. This theory implies that learners are dependent on teachers since they are assumed not to have knowledge. He criticizes banking education in which teacher deposits knowledge in students' minds and proposes an emancipatory system that values critical thinking and dialogue between teacher and students (Freire, 1970). In this system, students and teacher are responsible for a process in which they can improve together.

Critical pedagogy suggests a change in power relationships between teacher and students. Drawing on critical pedagogy perspective, a curriculum design known as “negotiated curriculum” is proposed based on dialogue and negotiation (Paul, 2002). Negotiated curriculum refers to working together with students to make decisions in curriculum design (Boomer, 1992; Nation & Macalister, 2009). A recent body of literature on negotiation has also defined this term as “negotiated syllabus” (Khademi, 2022; Prior, 2023). Negotiated syllabus is a sort of syllabus providing a framework for designing curriculum in the classroom (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000b; Clarke, 1991; Nation & Macalister, 2009). It can be described as “the discussion between students and teacher to decide how learning and teaching are to be organized” (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a, p. 1). Negotiated curriculum and negotiated syllabus are used interchangeably in the literature. In this study, the former term was preferred.

1.1 | Negotiated curriculum

Negotiation is a gradual process that includes negotiating decisions, acting on these decisions, and evaluation (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a; Nation & Macalister, 2009). Negotiating decisions is the first step of negotiated curriculum which requires teachers to identify which decisions are open to negotiation. There is a consensus in the negotiated curriculum literature that learning objectives, content and assessment are negotiable elements. On the other hand, Doyle (2011) proposes that curriculum can be negotiated in areas of course policies and organizational issues as well as teaching and content issues. Negotiating course policies consists of discussing tardiness, attendance, late works, and retesting with students. Organizational issues involve deadlines, grading, office hours, and group formation. Likewise, Weimer (2002) suggests that students get involved in the decision-making process in classroom policies.

In a negotiation process, students are initially expected to identify their learning goals and expectations in curriculum design (Graves, 2008). Needs analysis is one of the ways to negotiate learning goals. In a needs analysis, student dairies, questionnaires, surveys, and group or individual interviews can be used to learn about learner needs, expectations, and interests (Prior, 2023). The second negotiable component of a curriculum is the content of a lesson. Students can decide to learn the content that interests them. Prior (2023) proposes that students can identify interesting and useful parts or chapters of a coursebook or bring their own materials to the classroom. Third, classroom activities and assignments are negotiable with students (Dalby, 2010; Weimer, 2002). Prior (2023) argues that the negotiation process allows students to make choices based on their needs and interests with the support of other students and teachers. Students should be allowed to make choices in classroom activities and assignments. These choices can be in the form of deciding whether classroom work would be done individually, in pairs, or in groups. Besides, they can decide the assignment topics or negotiate the rules for classroom activities.

Negotiated assessment refers to assessing learning progress and giving feedback on the negotiation process with students (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a). Learners can be asked how to be assessed and using what criteria (Doyle, 2011). Developing rubrics with students to assess works is one of the ways to negotiate curriculum (Cranton, 2006; Inoue, 2004). Prior (2023) suggests that assessment means, tasks and length of the assessment can be decided with students. As a part of the assessment, it is an effective way to discuss the negotiation process with students and get feedback from them regarding how it works and they benefit from the process (Dalby, 2010). Lastly, the negotiated curriculum includes allowing students to make decisions in classroom rules and procedures (Erwin, 2004; Myers, 1990; Shor, 1996; Weimer, 2002). Weimer (2002) designed a classroom activity that aimed to create a policy for classroom participation. The students discussed the behaviours which could be accepted as classroom participation in groups. Consequently, a policy for classroom participation was created together with the students.

1.2 | Effectiveness of negotiated curriculum

Curriculum negotiation has been indicated to develop many educational outcomes (Boomer, 1992; O'Grady et al., 2014; Shor, 1996). O'Grady et al. (2014) explored the need and feasibility of a negotiated curriculum and proposed that it had the potential to empower both students and teachers. In the first place, negotiating with students is expressed to enhance student learning (Boomer, 1992; Reid, 1992). Negotiated learning enables students to connect the subject matter with the knowledge outside school (Ting, 2015), develop critical thinking skills (Moreno-Lopez, 2005), and decision-making skills (Brubaker, 2012; Humphreys, 2012). They can get learn how to cope with real-life situations which demand decision-making and critical thinking skills (Giroux, 1988). This process enables students to create learning goals, identify resources and strategies to achieve these goals, be aware of what they have learned, and show what they have learned during the evaluation process (Myers, 1990). As students develop their learning skills, they will discover their weaknesses and strengths, and find various learning opportunities and resources outside of the classroom.

Negotiation can be thought as developing collaborative dialogue in order to enhance student engagement and learning (Brubaker, 2012). It can help students learn to negotiate with their peers and make decisions for the benefit of the group they belong to (Weimer, 2002). Therefore, a negotiated syllabus enables students to engage in authentic communication which also enhances language learning (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000b; Prior, 2023). Students can learn to be active in the classroom as they have learned to be passive in the classroom (Brubaker, 2012). This is how they start to manage their learning (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000a). This implies that power relations can be reshaped in a negotiated classroom environment (Beane, 1997).

As well as student-related outcomes, the negotiated curriculum enables teachers to reflect on their practices and improve their teaching (Sproston, 2008). Kaplan and Renard (2015) indicates that instructors get feedback about their teaching from the students in a negotiated curriculum. Therefore, it can be seen as an effective tool for reflective teaching.

1.3 | Negotiated curriculum in foreign language classroom

Negotiated curriculum has been claimed to be conducive to language teaching environments (Öztürk, 2013). One recurring question in research papers on negotiated curriculum/syllabus in EFL classroom has been how negotiation impacts on language learning achievement, language skills, motivation, and learner autonomy. Tuan (2011) examined task negotiation in which the students and the teacher discussed what tasks to be done and how to accommodate students' learning needs and increase their learning effectiveness in a foreign language classroom. This experimental study revealed that task negotiation enhanced language achievement. Pakdaman et al. (2022a) also explored the negotiated syllabus of an English course in the higher education context. It was revealed that the negotiated syllabus affected students' language achievement positively.

Beside to general language achievement, language skills have been examined in the negotiated curriculum (Pakdaman et al., 2021; Peyvandi et al., 2020; Uztosun et al., 2014). Uztosun et al. (2014) have revealed that negotiation can lead to greater participation and improvement in foreign language speaking in their action research aiming to improve the effectiveness of speaking classes. Peyvandi et al. (2020) studied the effect of negotiated syllabus on the reading comprehension of higher education students learning English for specific purposes. It was indicated that the negotiated syllabus had a significant effect on reading comprehension. Similarly, Pakdaman et al. (2021) examined the impact of negotiated syllabus on undergraduate students' reading comprehension and oral production. It was found that the negotiated syllabus had an effect on the students' reading comprehension and oral production.

Motivation has also been shown to be affected by negotiated curriculum positively (Assaf et al., 2022; Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Kaplan & Renard, 2015; Ma & Gao, 2010; Pakdaman et al., 2022a, 2022b; Sproston, 2008;

Tuan, 2011). Kaplan and Renard (2015) examined negotiated syllabus in public and private universities in the USA. They have found out that the negotiated syllabus affected learning and motivation positively. Likewise, Pakdaman et al. (2022b) investigated the impact of negotiated syllabus on language anxiety and motivation in higher education EFL classes. The results showed that the negotiated syllabus affected foreign language anxiety negatively and motivation positively. Another study conducted by Assaf et al. (2022) explored the readiness of learners to implement a negotiated syllabus. It was shown that the negotiated syllabus had the potential to enhance learner motivation. Lastly, Sproston (2008) studied the experiences of a teacher and students who negotiated over decisions in an English language classroom in action research. The research indicated that students had greater motivation, commitment, collaboration, and a sense of community in this classroom environment.

Learner autonomy is another construct that has been reported to be affected by the negotiated curriculum (Ma & Gao, 2010; Pakdaman et al., 2022b; Peyvandi et al., 2021). Ma and Gao (2010) explored promoting learner autonomy through the negotiation of purposes, contents, ways of working, and evaluation. It was revealed that the students' participation and learning responsibility were observed to be enhanced. Additionally, Pakdaman et al. (2022b) found that negotiated curriculum improved learner autonomy and critical thinking in higher-education EFL classroom. Lastly, Peyvandi et al. (2021) investigated the impact of the negotiated syllabus on Iranian students' autonomy. The study revealed a significant increase in the students' autonomy.

Some studies examining the effect of negotiated curriculum on language skills have shown no effect (Abbasian & Malardi, 2013; Abbasian & Seyed-Hendi, 2011; Khademi, 2022). Abbasian and Malardi (2013) investigated the effect of negotiated syllabus on writing ability and self-efficacy. The study showed that there was no effect of the negotiated syllabus on these variables. This finding was attributed to the unfamiliarity of the syllabus to the students and the fact that the length of the implementation was relatively short. In Abbasian and Seyed-Hendi's (2011) mixed-method study, the quantitative and qualitative findings gave contradictory results. While the quantitative phase of the study showed that the negotiated syllabus had no effect on the outcome variables, the qualitative results indicated improvement in the speaking skills of the students. Moreover, Khademi (2022) examined the effectiveness of a negotiated syllabus on the reading achievement of EFL English learners in an experimental study. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups regarding English achievement. In this study, the negotiation was solely in the form of selecting reading passages based on the interest areas of the students. Because the scope of the negotiation was limited, it may have influenced the results.

1.4 | Challenges in negotiated curriculum

Negotiation is a demanding approach for both students and teachers (Bloor & Bloor, 1988; Boomer, 1992; Nguyen, 2011; Pakdaman et al., 2021; Prior, 2023). Boomer (1992) asserts that it is because schools have a system based on competition, external rewards, and the absolute authority of teachers in the classroom. Other researchers report challenges such as demotivated learners, overloaded teachers and top-down management system (Assaf et al., 2022), time constraints, large class size, student diversity, prior learning experiences (Tuan, 2011), student expectations, conventions and expectations of a context (Prior, 2023).

A degree of student resistance can be observed at the outset of negotiation. Students may be reluctant to be involved in the process because they are used to having passive roles conventionally. Nevertheless, there can be certain ways to make students include the process of negotiation. In the first phase of negotiation, it needs to be identified which decisions are a matter of negotiation (Dalby, 2010). Breen and Littlejohn (2000b) argue that it can be inefficient to negotiate all the aspects of every lesson. The most appropriate method to use would depend on the age, proficiency, and number of learners in each course.

In a negotiation process, students are required to learn how to be involved in decision-making and be a part of the negotiated curriculum. Thus, students demand teacher scaffolding to make educational decisions (Fitzpatrick

et al., 2018). This requires teachers to help their students improve their awareness of learning goals, needs, interests, and learning strategies (Bloor & Bloor, 1988). Prior (2023) suggests that language courses include a learner-training phase in the beginning in which students will be allowed to discover and express their strengths, weaknesses, needs, and interests. On the other hand, Nelken (2009) argues that teachers need to meet with their students to get to know them personally which can make the negotiation process more effective. Teachers have a critical role in negotiation in that they should both maintain control over the process and provide flexibility and space for students (Prior, 2023).

1.5 | Problem statement

Learner-centred practices do not necessarily ensure a classroom environment in which important elements are negotiated with students. Ornstein and Hunkins (2017) indicate that negotiated curriculum has enabled child-centred design to be accepted by more educators. This implies that negotiated curriculum allows questioning power relations in the classroom which critical constructivism and learner-centred approaches have originally intended to do. In this regard, it is essential to investigate negotiated EFL curriculum since it is regarded as conducive to foreign language teaching environments (Öztürk, 2013). Foreign language curriculum can be flexible in higher education context which also allows negotiated curriculum to be implemented effectively. Besides, action research and experimental design studies are rare examining how to negotiate curriculum and the outcomes. To this end, the paper will endeavour to answer the following research questions:

How was the EFL curriculum negotiated in the higher education context?

2 | WHAT EFFECTS DID THE NEGOTIATED CURRICULUM HAVE ON THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

2.1 | Methodology

The study explored how the EFL curriculum was negotiated and how it affected the learning environment. The purpose of the study best fits action research since negotiated curriculum can be explored with a deeper understanding using action-oriented research. Action-oriented research, which has two distinct types participatory action research and practical action research is grounded on critical theory and feminism. While participatory action research focuses on emancipation and social change, practical action research deals with a practical problem in professional practice (Clark & Creswell, 2014). Although the current study investigated curriculum negotiation which had roots in critical pedagogy, it was designed as practical action research because it implemented an action plan which would have practical effects on the students and the teacher.

2.1.1 | Participants

The participants of the study were 14 university students in an English Language Preparatory Program in the academic year of 2016–2017 in Turkey. The Program consisted of 6 classes where there were approximately 10–15 students in each. The language level of the participants was B1, and it was the highest-level classroom in the program. The study was conducted in a listening-speaking class in the Spring term. Listening-speaking lesson aimed to improve the listening and speaking skills of the students. The objectives of the lesson were in line with the descriptors of B1-level listening-speaking skills in CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The course required the students to deliver two speeches during the term. The students filled in a consent form

to signify their voluntary participation. They were informed before the implementation that the classes would be videotaped for research purposes. The implementation lasted eight weeks which were 16 h in total.

2.1.2 | Data collection

The data were collected through participant observation, teacher journals, student journals, and meeting minutes. Four sources of data were teacher journals, student journals, video recordings of class sessions, and meeting minutes.

Participant observation

In participant observation, researchers have specific interests in the field and gather data themselves rather than using data instruments (Hatch, 2002). As a participant observer, the researcher was the instructor of the course.

Video recordings

As a part of participant observation, the classroom sessions were recorded. Video recording requires considering what is to tape, the place of the camera, and the participants (Creswell, 2012). The place of the camera was on the teacher's desk since the students preferred it to be there which was less distracting to them. As video recordings may have the risk of changing student behaviour (Lodico et al., 2010), they were informed that the video recordings would be used only for research purposes.

Teacher journals

Teachers can use journals to reflect on their thoughts, perceptions and interpretations in the classroom (Lodico et al., 2010). The instructor wrote weekly journals to describe and reflect on her observations in the classroom. The journals included descriptions of how the negotiated curriculum was implemented and the effects on the learning environment. The journals served as field notes of the participant observation as well.

Student journals

The students were expected to write weekly journals at the end of the week. The journals were written on the notebooks distributed by the instructor. Since the student journals provide direct insights into the participants (Hatch, 2002), it was determined as an effective method to capture participant perspectives regarding curriculum negotiation. It was important to provide clear instructions before writing journals (Clark & Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the students were guided by the questions: "How did we negotiate the curriculum this week? How did it affect your learning? How did it affect the lesson? Explain it by giving examples."

Minutes of student meetings

Minutes of meetings describe the actions considered and taken during a meeting (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). The students held four meetings without the teacher during the term. The minutes were shared with the teacher after the meetings.

2.1.3 | Data analysis

Data analysis involved inductive analysis which was a search for meanings in data in order to make general statements about the phenomena (Hatch, 2002). The data from teacher journals, student journals, and the meeting minutes were read several times to form initial ideas about the data. Then, the video recordings were watched and transcribed verbatim. Some additional field notes were written related to the non-verbal language used by the

students. The codes were assigned to the data and major ideas were identified. The themes that emerged from these ideas were termed drawing on the theory and practice of curriculum negotiation.

2.1.4 | Validity and reliability

Qualitative research associates internal validity with the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Triangulation was applied in data collection to ensure the accuracy of the findings. In triangulation, the researcher tried to find evidence to support the themes from different sources. Additionally, gathering data from students, the teacher, and a professional teacher trainer helped enhance the triangulation. External validity refers to transferability in qualitative research (Geertz, 1973). The strategy to ensure transferability was describing the research process in detail. Lastly, reliability corresponds to “consistency” in qualitative studies (Grossoehme, 2014). The consistency of the research data was verified in form and context through constant data comparison. Another strategy was using an external audit. An external auditor who was an educational researcher reviewed the data and codes in the data analysis process. It served to prevent observer bias referring to the influence of the observer due to their perceptions, expectations, and background.

2.1.5 | Procedure

Negotiated syllabus requires needs analysis as well as teacher experience (Gómez & Cortés-Jaramillo, 2019). The needs analysis was a starting point to identify the areas of negotiation. The negotiated curriculum was designed based on a needs analysis study conducted by the researcher (Oruç, 2021) and a body of research on curriculum negotiation (Boomer, 1992; Brubaker, 2009; Cranton, 2006; Doyle, 2011; Inoue, 2004; Moreno-Lopez, 2005; Nation & Macalister, 2009; Paul, 2002; Shor, 1996; Weimer, 2002). The needs analysis investigated learners' needs, interests, and expectations. The implications of the needs analysis were reflected in the negotiated curriculum. The implications were including extra activities such as role-plays and real-life situations into the curriculum, giving meaningful choices to the students, establishing a supportive learning environment where mistakes are welcomed, and using classroom discussions to improve speaking skills (Oruç, 2021).

Grounded on numerous inquiries on curriculum negotiation, four negotiable areas were identified: classroom rules and policies, course content, classroom activities and assignments, and assessment (see Figure 1). At the beginning of the implementation process, a professional language teacher-trainer was invited to the classroom to observe the classroom and make recommendations for the lesson. He made some recommendations both on language learning and negotiation. His recommendations were enabling the students to justify their ideas and decisions, to nominate one another by asking questions in the target language, to ask questions to each other after speaking activities, and to guide the activities that they can handle.

2.2 | Findings

The findings were presented under the themes based on how the curriculum was negotiated regarding the first research question: *student choice, participation in classroom management, negotiated assessment, collaborative dialogue, and student-led activities*. The second research question was examining the effect of the negotiated curriculum on the learning environment. It was revealed that the negotiated curriculum improved the students' speaking skills, learner autonomy, engagement, motivation, self-confidence, and enjoyment. These were also discussed under the themes that emerged from the data.

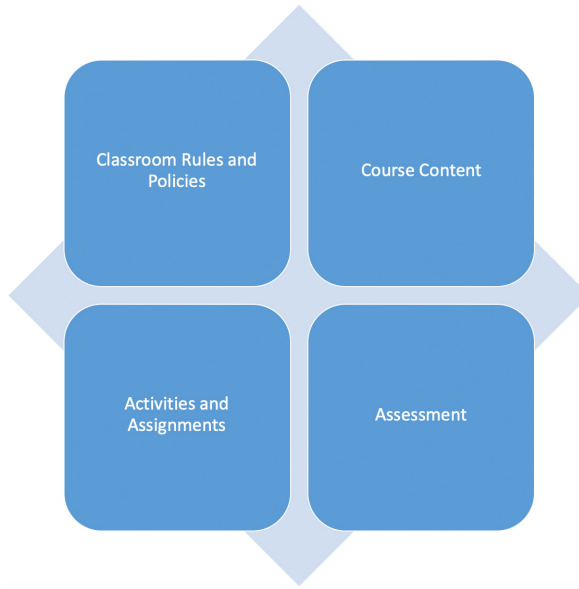


FIGURE 1 The negotiation model.

2.2.1 | Student choice

Student choice was one of the themes that emerged from the data regarding how the EFL curriculum was negotiated in the higher education context. The students were involved in designing the syllabus in the first lesson. The researcher introduced a sample syllabus to the students. The syllabus involved the B1-level objectives of the listening and speaking course, course content, assignments, and assessment methods. Even though core content was predetermined by the department, there was a chance to change the sequence of the units and decide the allocated time for them. Therefore, it was discussed that they were appropriate. Another component of the syllabus which was a matter of discussion was compulsory end-of-term assignments. The students asked to have more time before submitting their compulsory end-of-term assignments. Thus, it was planned to complete the units two weeks earlier in order to give the students extra time for their assignments to finish. Lastly, in classroom tasks, activities, and assignments, they were encouraged to make choices such as selecting discussion questions or topics.

The second research question was to investigate the effects of the negotiated curriculum on the learning environment. Thus, there is a need to elaborate on how student choice affects the learning environment. Based on the data analysed, it was observed that giving the students learning choices affected student engagement and motivation positively. In a group discussion activity, they selected one of the discussion questions and made a daily conversation. Student journals showed that they were enjoying studying what interested them: "We presented our conversations in front of the class. It was great to have chosen the topic ourselves (Student 10)." Besides, teacher journals indicated that the students had increased engagement levels when they had choices in their learning activities or tasks. "Giving them meaningful choices is both engaging and motivating for them. They began to express their preferences, needs, and expectations (Teacher)."

2.2.2 | Participation in classroom management

Participation in classroom management refers to including the students in decisions on classroom rules and policies. It was one of how students got involved in negotiation. A student committee was formed to help the students

make decisions about classroom rules and policies. 4 of them volunteered to be members of the committee. The committee was in charge of developing classroom rules and policies to be voted on by all the students. Initially, the committee was asked to develop sample rules for tardiness, late works, using an online dictionary. The following week, the student committee came up with a sample policy report. The classroom rules and policies were voted on and negotiated as follows:

- It is allowed to be late at most 20 min.
- Assignments can be accepted in two days after the deadline. However, late ones will lose 5 points.
- Mobile phones are only allowed to be used to look up words.

Student participation in classroom management has been indicated to develop student autonomy. Teacher journals indicated that the students tended to stick to negotiated rules more and reminded each other to obey the rules. "I observed that the students were following the rules since we created them together. Moreover, they were monitoring whether the others were following them (Teacher)." The students were also aware that commonly developed rules are effective in classroom management: "We all obey the classroom rules. When we stick to the rules, the lesson is getting better (Student 9)."

2.2.3 | Negotiated assessment

The students participated in assessment decisions and developed assessment criteria for their compulsory speeches. In the second week, the lesson started with a speaking activity which encouraged the students to discover what criteria they needed to assess the effectiveness of speeches. In this activity, the students were required to discuss the question "Who makes you laugh?" in groups of four and create a word map. After that, one student from each group drew their word map on the board and made a short speech answering the former question. Based on the speeches, assessment criteria were developed for their speeches. Seven criteria were negotiated and written on a table with three columns (Values: good, fair, and poor) and seven rows (Criteria: pronunciation, fluency, accuracy, creativity, using humour, eye contact, and body language). The rubric was hung on the wall (see [Photo 1](#)). Before the first speech, the rubric was revised to determine whether it was relevant to the speech they would deliver. "Punch line" was added to the rubric since they were going to tell jokes for their speeches. The second speech was about sports preferences. They were required to do research about their classmates' sports preferences and report the results in a presentation. For this presentation, visual aids and graphs were added to the rubric. The students evaluated themselves using the rubric as well as teacher evaluation.

Regarding the effect of the negotiated curriculum, it enabled the students to improve awareness of their strengths and weaknesses: "Today, we evaluated the presentations based on the criteria we developed together. In this way, we identified our weaknesses (Student 7)." Teacher journals indicated that their autonomy was also enhanced: "The fact that students evaluated themselves with student-generated rubric was improving their autonomy (Teacher)."

2.2.4 | Collaborative dialogue

Collaborative dialogue was used to negotiate the curriculum. The students were encouraged to work collaboratively to make decisions about group activities and discussions. The decisions were about how to carry out the activity such as deciding the topic and duration of an activity. Therefore, the students needed to use the target language which aimed to improve their speaking skills. Moreover, collaborative dialogue requires peer feedback. They were asked to evaluate their peers' speeches, ask follow-up questions to them, and give feedback to each

For a good speech		Good	Fair	Poor
1.	Pronunciation			
2.	Fluency			
3.	Accuracy (gram./voc.)			
4.	Creativity			
5.	Using humour			
6.	Eye contact			
7.	Body language			

PHOTO 1 The rubric for assessing speeches.

other: "We asked the presenters follow-up questions after their performance which made us listen to them attentively (Student 2)."

Teacher journals supported that speaking skills were improved through collaborative dialogue: "Establishing a supportive learning environment where mistakes were welcomed was significant to make the students speak more (Teacher)." The students reported that they felt more self-confident: "I feel more comfortable and I am more talkative in group activities (Student 5)." and had fun in communicative activities: "The discussions have become more fun and conversational. Everybody participates in the classroom discussions voluntarily (Student 14)."

Although the students showed some resistance in the beginning, a considerable increase was reported in their participation and engagement: "After a while, they became motivated and knew what to do. They formed the groups easily. They also began to manage time efficiently. They seemed more aware of what we were doing (Teacher)." The student journals also revealed their motivation: "Time flies in your classes (Student 6)." and engagement: "In the last term's classes, just a few of us participated in lessons. However, I can see that everybody enjoys the things we are doing this semester (Student 1)."

2.2.5 | Student-led activities

Student-led activities were used to negotiate the curriculum. Every lesson, a student was allowed to guide the classroom activities giving instructions, monitoring the activity, and giving feedback like an instructor. Another student-led practice was the student meetings. The meetings were held weekly without the instructor. Each meeting was managed by a different student. They were required to discuss negotiable areas (Classroom rules and policies, Course content, Classroom activities and assignments, and Assessment) and write their recommendations on the meeting minutes. The typical recommendations from the meetings were "skipping very similar activities in the coursebook, managing group discussions voluntarily, doing more role-plays and group activities (meeting minutes)."

Student-led activities were revealed to improve the students' speaking skills: "I observed that they could guide the activities which enabled them to use language spontaneously. They started to utter the typical sentences which I was modeling as a teacher (Teacher)." Besides, student journals suggested that their self-confidence was also boosted: "Guiding the activities makes us speak English confidently (Student 11)."

3 | DISCUSSION

In this research, the curriculum was negotiated through *student choice, participation in classroom management, negotiated assessment, collaborative dialogue, and student-led activities*. Besides, it was indicated that the negotiated curriculum enhanced speaking skills, learner autonomy, engagement, motivation, self-confidence, and enjoyment of the students. The first theme, *student choice* refers to giving students choices in the classroom environment. The students were allowed to make choices in the syllabus design, the classroom activities, and the assignments. Siegel and Skelly (1992) assert that choices convey the intentions of students which are significant to them. The findings of the current study revealed that giving the students learning choices enhanced student engagement and motivation. The studies on negotiated curriculum focused on student choice to negotiate curriculum with students (Cook, 1992; Fitzpatrick et al., 2018; Lester, 1992; Siegel & Skelly, 1992). Fitzpatrick et al. (2018) in their negotiated curriculum, the students were asked to list personal concerns, share them in small groups, and present them to the class. Lester (1992) provided choices based on student interests in her negotiated classroom. The students were required to choose one of the three texts to read and respond to in their diaries. Then, she held classroom discussions to allow the students to share their responses with their peers.

Unquestionably, negotiation means more than choice since it includes inquiry, dialogue, and relationships (Siegel & Skelly, 1992). Listening and Speaking Class was characterized by *collaborative dialogue* which refers to interaction and classroom discussion (Swain, 2000). Collaborative dialogue was a means of negotiating the curriculum and used to make decisions about group activities and discussions. Peer feedback was a part of the collaborative dialogue which required evaluating their peers' speeches, asking follow-up questions, and giving feedback to the peers. The findings revealed that collaborative dialogue enhanced their speaking skill, motivation, engagement, and self-confidence. Similarly, Wong (2015) explored negotiated curriculum and found out that the students could take responsibility for their learning and develop cooperative relationships with teachers. Humphreys (2012) also states that negotiated curriculum enables students to make their own decisions, be responsible for their learning, and work collaboratively with others which improves collaborative learning.

Participation in classroom management included student participation in decision-making on classroom rules and policies. Proposed by the student committee, the policies and rules for tardiness, late works, and using mobiles to look up words during the lesson were negotiated in the classroom. The students complied with the rules more when they had a say in creating them. Moreover, they monitored whether everyone stuck to them. Similarly, Erwin (2004) developed a classroom constitution with the students in which behaviours and misbehaviours were negotiated considering universal ethical values. Another negotiation on classroom policies came from Weimer (2002) designing a classroom activity that aimed to create a policy for classroom participation. The students discussed the behaviours which could be accepted as participation in groups and a classroom participation policy was negotiated. Second, the current study has revealed that participating in classroom management improved student autonomy. Ting (2015) studied digital literacy in negotiated learning environment to improve autonomous learning among students. It was shown that the learning autonomy of the students demonstrated improvement. On the other hand, Myers (1990) examined a foreign language classroom in which the students were included in decisions on classroom management. It was found that negotiation helped to enhance a classroom environment that was motivating and conducive to learning.

Assessment is a salient process to negotiate with students. In the current study, the assessment criteria for compulsory speeches were negotiated with the students. The rubric for the speeches was modified depending on the nature of each speech topic and the way they needed to be presented. Since they were evaluated by the criteria developed together, they got to know what they needed to achieve. Besides, they could identify their strengths and weaknesses better. Hence, it was indicated that learner autonomy of the students was promoted through the negotiated curriculum. Likewise, Gömleksiz and Bozpolat (2012) argue that involving students in assessment decisions supports learner autonomy in foreign language teaching. Enright and O'Sullivan (2010), who investigated negotiated curriculum and its impact on engagement in physical education courses, allowed the students to make

assessment decisions. It was revealed that negotiated assessment promoted meaningful engagement of students and their ownership of their learning. Lastly, Hudd (2003) engaged the students in the development of assessment criteria for their introductory sociology course. The study revealed that the students responded positively to their involvement in the assessment process and reported that their participation increased.

Student-led activities refer to the activities guided by students and the student meetings. They helped the students improve their speaking skills, especially encouraging them to speak spontaneously which also contributed to their self-confidence. Marvell et al. (2013) argue that students learn better, build an awareness of their roles, and improve ownership of their learning in student-led activities. Uztsun et al. (2014) investigated an EFL classroom in which the students were given a voice at the university level in Turkey. The findings revealed that student negotiation influenced the quality of speaking classes and the students developed positive attitudes towards speaking classes.

Overall, the outcomes of the current study revealed that *student choice, participation in classroom management, negotiated assessment, collaborative dialogue, and student-led activities* need to be addressed in a negotiated curriculum. The negotiated curriculum enhanced the students' speaking skills, autonomy, and engagement. In addition, it was shown that the students felt more motivated, and self-confident and enjoyed the lesson. This study is novel in that it shows how to negotiate an EFL curriculum in practice and its outcomes. It highlights the importance of student voice to be heard through the negotiated curriculum.

3.1 | Limitations

There are several limitations to declare in this study. First of all, the study is a small-scale practical action research including a classroom of students in a higher education institution and the findings cannot be generalized. The action research design was chosen to investigate how to conduct a negotiated curriculum and elaborate its outcomes. Thus, rich data were able to be obtained expanding the scope of findings compared to quantitative designs. Another potential limitation is the fact that the researcher was also the instructor. As an insider, it was easy to do research other than being an outsider. Ethical issues were considered like gaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and not abusing power relations. Teacher journals enabled reflexivity which involves conscious and critical self-awareness about biases and assumptions (Check & Schutt, 2012). On the other hand, the length of time may be inadequate to implement a negotiated curriculum since a negotiated classroom environment may not be adopted by both students and teachers in a short time. Lastly, purely qualitative, this study lacks quantitative data to support the qualitative findings.

3.2 | Recommendations

There is a need for future qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-design studies to investigate negotiated curriculum further. While qualitative studies offer an in-depth examination of negotiated curriculum, quantitative data will produce generalizable and comparable findings. Mixed-design studies would provide both qualitative and quantitative data. Beside to the research design, negotiated curriculum could be investigated in different contexts of foreign language classroom since power relations have different manifestations in other cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, negotiated curriculum can be studied in other subject matters and education levels. The nature of the subject matter and the age of students may affect how curriculum is negotiated, its challenges, and outcomes.

This study has practical implications for practitioners since it details an action study of the negotiated curriculum in the foreign language classroom. Based on the conclusions of the study, it is recommended that practitioners give voice to students and negotiate the curriculum with them. Giving students choices is one of the indispensable parts of a negotiated curriculum. It should start at the beginning of their first meeting

and teachers should plan the syllabus with students. Students can also have the opportunity to benefit from their concerns, interests, and expectations in classroom activities and assignments. This can be in the form of choosing a project, assignment, or presentation topic. Secondly, collaborative dialogue is essential in foreign language classroom in which students need to communicate to practice a language. They need to work collaboratively and use the target language during the negotiation process which serves to develop their language skills. Using peer feedback can also enhance collaborative dialogue. Students should be encouraged to give feedback to their peers in a variety of ways. Third, students should participate in decision-making regarding classroom rules and policies. A student committee can be formed to develop rules and policies to be voted on by the whole classroom. Moreover, assessment requires student involvement in a learner-centred environment. Teachers should let students have a say in how they would be evaluated. Deciding assessment types and tools with students can exemplify negotiated assessment. Lastly, students can be involved in guiding classroom activities instead of their teacher. This enables them to speak spontaneously and use the language modelled by teachers.

To negotiate curriculum, teachers should consider the education level they are teaching and the elements that are negotiable based on their experience. Especially, in higher education, students and instructors can negotiate many aspects of the learning process. Doubtlessly, it is a demanding process in which the benefits would surpass the challenges.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest to the research and authorship of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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