

Student-Centered Course Design: Reinforcing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Four Skills towards Student-Centered Learning through Classroom Activities

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on the use of classroom activities to reinforce EFL students' four skills in the student-centered course. Students play the center role in the student-centered learning process. They actively engage in classwork activities and collaborate with their peers under the guidance of the teachers in the student-centered classrooms. Moreover, students are active participants for their educational goal, while teachers are educators and they act as facilitators or activators in the student-centered learning. Eventually, a student-centered classroom is a place for students to create a positive environment for learning, where they can choose and do classroom activities effectively. Thus, student-centered learning environment is one of the most effective ways to help students develop their four skills independently. The competency in four skills is also vital for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students and the integration of the four skills in their learning process helps them to be active learners. Therefore, developing students' competency in four skills means reinforcing their communicative competence so that they can communicate in real life situations.

Keywords: classroom activities, student-centered learning, educational goal, facilitators, competency.

1. Introduction

English has become a compulsory language for most countries in the world. Educators from foreign language learning countries develop teaching and learning methodologies to promote EFL students' ability and to make their language learning process more interesting. Eventually, a classroom is a place to impart a great deal of knowledge for teachers and students by collaborating with practical activities. Activities can make students become a thinker, analyzer, judge and educator, and help them fit in accordance with the situation. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can be learnt in various creative ways. Creativity helps learners to use language relevantly and instantly. Researches show that students can absorb materials better and recognize how to apply and extend their new knowledge more effectively when participating in learning process. Engaging altogether actively in student-centered course promotes learning more effectively for students from different levels of ability.

2. Literature Review

Student-centered learning, also known as learner-centered education, extensively includes teaching methodology in that the main task of teaching instruction is changing from the teacher to the students (Wikipedia). The primary goal of student-centered classrooms is to help students become independence and thus, students are directly involved and invested in the discovery of their own knowledge. They are also engaged to use their prior knowledge to develop new learning by participating in classroom activities. Students' coordinated efforts play vital role in participating with team-mates in classroom activities and they also involve in experimental learning that is authentic, holistic, and challenging for them (MeTEOR Education).

2.1. Description of Student-Centered Learning

Student-Centered Learning has been defined most simply as an approach to learning in which learners choose not only what to study but also how and why that topic might be of interest (Rogers, 1983). The founder of Student-Centered Theory of Education was a French theorist, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). According to the main idea of his theory, teachers should not start an instruction by focusing on enormous amount of information that they want their students to learn, and they should begin an instruction by regarding for the students' capability of learning and their interest in learning (Asmara, Eritrea, 2006). Student-centered learning intends to create student self-directed learning by taking responsibility for their learning process. The heart of student-centered approach is skills and practices that allow lifelong learning and independent problem solving. This is dissimilar from traditional education, namely 'Teacher-Centered Learning', in which the teacher is taking the responsibility of 'active' role while students take a more 'passive', receptive role. Unlike teacher-centered learning, student-centered learning requires students to be active, to participate responsibly in their own pace of learning. In order to actively participate in the learning process, students need guidelines and opportunities to learn and engage in self-assessment with or without the help of others, set learning goals, identify learning resources, select the

appropriate learning strategies, and review learning outcomes.

There are ten characteristics in student-centered learning. Students:

- work harder than their teachers.
- learn from classmates.
- learn more by experiences and active involvement.
- apply new learning to real-life, authentic expressions.
- receive frequent directed, and timely feedback.
- are encouraged to explain material to themselves and others.
- regularly engaged in communication.
- know what they are learning and why.
- use personalized technology to produce.
- involve a higher degree of engagement.

There are some pros and cons of classroom activities in student-centered learning as shown in the following table 1.

Table 1. Pros and Cons of Classroom Activities in Student-Centered Learning

Pros	Cons
-Students learn to collaborate and communicate.	-Rooms get noisy.
-It keeps students' interest.	-There are too many distractions.
-Students are independent.	-Details can be missed.
-Students and teachers interact.	-Not all students are comfortable.
-It develops critical thinking.	-Teachers can get flustered.

2.2. Description of Classroom Activities

One of the most important methods of teaching and learning English is concerned with students' participation in classroom activities. According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, the word 'activity' means something that people do, especially in order to achieve a particular aim. Classroom activities are important things done by students both inside and outside the class that help to enrich the process of teaching and learning. Activities inside class facilitate the students to do the practical work of the lesson with the guidance of the instructor. Activities outside class enable learners to explore more knowledge through visiting libraries, responding to and using electronic programs and accessing to the relevant site of the interest. The objective of all activities is to promote students' understanding, skill or effectiveness in a specific area by engaging multiple styles of learning. Classifications of classroom activities are as follows:

- *Subject-Based Activities
- *Technology-Based Activities
- *Carrier-Skill Activities
- *Collaboration Activities.

Activities inside the class are pair work, group work, and co-operative learning or role-play classroom activities.

2.2.1. Pair Work: The purpose of pair work is to improve listening and speaking skills for the students who need to share knowledge with each other. Pair work enriches the skills of listening and speaking. It creates fun and allows the teacher to use games, and increases learners' motivation concentration. Pair work will increase learners' attention, language fluency and the class dynamics as it enriches communication. Pair work can be used as an exam practice. It offers intensive, realistic practice in listening and speaking, and promotes a friendly classroom ambiance that is conducive to learning.

2.2.2. Group Work: In group work activity, students are divided into groups by gathering in accordance with their interest. In this group, the teacher is a witness, and she watches and evaluates their activities.

2.2.3. Co-Operative Learning or the Role-Play Classroom Activity: It is a fruitful teaching method with small teams, each with students of different levels. According to their different ability, the small teams choose different kinds of learning activities to upgrade their understanding of a subject. Every member of a team is responsible for learning themselves and at the same time, they help their team-mates learn to create an atmosphere of successful learning process. As a result, all group members gain experiences from each other's efforts, and know that mutual respect is essential not only for oneself but also for other team members. The role-play classroom activity is one of the most widely used communicative classroom activities to develop students' verbal communication competence and to simulate real-life situations in classroom. There are also relationships between student-centered learning and classroom activities as shown in Table 2.

3. Importance of English Four Skills for EFL Students

Teaching and learning process plays a vital role for the teachers and students in the academic world. Learning process in recent years has transformed from traditional ways to student centralized methods such as student-centered teaching and learning process. Students need to learn themselves, need to learn the skills with conscious, sustainable, active and creative. To facilitate the teaching and learning process, the teachers and students collaborate on the student-centered classroom and find efficient ways to reinforce their four skills. Language serves many purposes to communicate with each other. The four necessities in language are commonly known as the four skills. Reading, speaking, writing and listening are the pinnacles of any language to be skillful for learners. For teaching and learning English successfully, the four skills should be integrated effectively in student-centered approach. So, the integration of four skills such as listening and speaking with reading and writing makes learners to be good listeners, speakers, readers, and writers. Classroom activities are also used in practicing English four skills because four skills activities in student-centered course

serve many valuable purposes (Lorena Manja Shandiku PhD, 2015).

3.1. Reading Skill

Reading is an enjoyable approach to get knowledge and it brings wisdom. Among the four skills, reading is the most popular language skill for students, and even educators. When there were no TVs or PCs or different types of entertainment, reading was an essential relaxation activity for most people. Reading offers a receptive approach to improving language-vocabulary and word power for instance. Therefore, the need to build up a habit to read is significant. The best and simplest way to be successful EFL students is to read a piece a day at any rate thirty minutes of reading with a little attempt.

3.2. Writing Skill

Writing is a jewel for most students to pick and choose for communication. A person with good writing skills can be a successful student in his learning process. There are altogether five steps in the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Each step in the writing process can be exchangeable to be a perfect written text. Using the piece of writing correctly such as punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, and paragraphing is very important for a good writing.

3.3. Listening Skill

Listening is an essential skill in language. An effective audience can be later on a successful EFL student. Listening is not just hearing; it is a condition of receptivity that permits comprehension of what is heard and awards the audience from association in the correspondence procedure. Listening is an important skill for any member in the society since great listening is an integral part of communication process. Listening skill plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process. A student will be a better learner when he has a good speaking skill. As far as possible, listening skill should be upgraded for EFL students to be great speakers.

3.4. Speaking Skill

Speaking skill is as significant as the other skills. The words from reading, written texts and listening can be expressed with speaking skill and communicated with each other. Therefore, proper pronunciation, dictation, and using a suitable vocabulary in speaking skill should be used effectively.

4. Roles of Teachers and Students in Student-Centered Classroom

Student-centered learning is actually an active search for meaning by the learners. This learning is constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it as well as being shaped by experiences.

4.1. Roles of Teachers

Teachers take the role of facilitators or instructors in student-centered classrooms, and support the students' learning process. Instructors recognize and accommodate different learning modalities. They provide structure without being directive overly and listen to and respect each learner's point of view. Teachers encourage and facilitate learners' shared decision-making and also help learners' work through difficulties by asking open-ended questions to help them arrive at conclusions or solutions that are satisfactory to them.

4.2. Roles of Students

Students are active participants in their own learning and make decisions about what and why they will learn. They construct new knowledge and skills by building current knowledge and skills. All learners understand their expectations and are encouraged using self-assessment measures. They monitor their own learning to develop strategies for learning and work in collaboration with other learners. Therefore, they can produce work that demonstrates authentic learning.

5. Ways to Develop Student-Centered Classroom Activities for EFL Students

In order to develop student-centered classroom activities, according to Becton Loveless, there are essential ways to:

- turn the classroom into a community.
- develop trust and communication.
- find ways to integrate technology.
- create an environment where mutual respect and a quest for knowledge guide behavior- not rules.
- replace homework with engaging project-based learning activities.
- develop ongoing projects.
- allow students to share in decision making.
- give students the opportunities to lead.
- get students involved in their performance evaluation.
- include peer learning and peer teaching as part of the instructional method (G.M Jacobs and H. L. Toh-Heng).

6. Benefits of Getting EFL Students to Participate in Classroom Activities

Participation in classroom activities is quite successful in accomplishing their learning goals and

beneficial for EFL students (Maryellen Weimer, PhD, 2011).

- Participation adds interest.
- Participation engages students.
- Participation provides the teacher feedback.
- Participation provides the students feedback.
- Participation can be used to promote preparation.
- Participation can be used to control what is happening in class.
- Participation can be used to balance who is contributing in class and how much.
- Participation encourages dialogue among and between students.
- Participation can be used to develop important speaking skill.
- Participation gives students the opportunity to practice using the language of discipline.

7. Methodology of the Research

The aim of this study is to reinforce EFL students' four skills with the use of classroom activities in student-centered course. In relation to the teaching method presented, the study was conducted with the teachers and students from the Technological University (Hpa-An) and the sample participants in this study were 36 students, specializing in Electrical Power Engineering second year course. This study is a quantitative research and English language teachers from the Department of English at the Technological University (Hpa-An) also participated in responding to the questionnaires. All nine English teachers are experienced and skillful, and their working experiences are generally about 10 years. Prior to data collection, the respondents were asked to complete the survey data. And then they answered the questions in accordance with their background knowledge and experiences.

8. Findings

According to the teachers' response, among nine English language teachers, 33% strongly agreed that teaching EFL students with classroom activities in student-centered course is very appropriate and effective, and four teachers 45% agreed that using classroom activities is important for EFL student towards student-centered teaching. The other two teachers 22% were neutral respondents for reinforcing students' four skills through classroom activities to student-centered approach.

Among the students' response, 53% of them strongly agreed to learn using classroom activities and 28% of EFL students agreed, while 14% were neutral students for using classroom activities in student-centered course. Only 5% disagreed to reinforce their four skills using classroom activities towards student-centered learning.

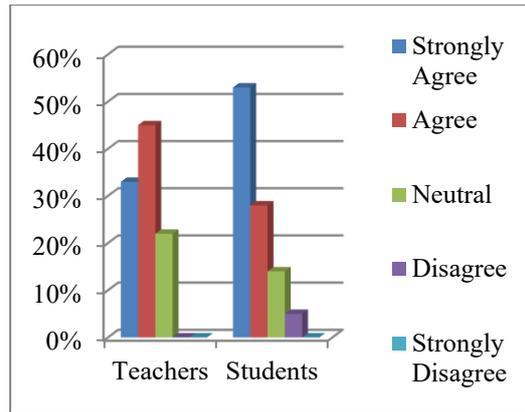


Figure1. Responses in Teaching and Learning EFL Students Using Self-Directed Learning in Student-Centered Course

The table below shows students' perceptions on doing activities.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions on Doing Activities in Student-Centered Classroom

No.	Statements	%	
		Yes	No
1.	I like classroom activities to promote learning.	81	19
2.	Doing classroom activities reinforces students' four skills.	78	22
3.	Doing activities in student-centered classroom create a positive environment for learning.	83	17
4.	I feel more relaxed and fun using activities with student-centered learning to promote four skills.	86	14
5.	My English four skills are improved.	83	17
6.	I can give out more ideas faster and easily.	78	22
7.	I am motivated to share knowledge with my group members.	83	17
8.	I am more confidence when speaking in groups.	78	22
9.	I can work with anyone in class I like.	89	11
10	I can communicate better doing activities in student-centered classroom.	81	19

The above table is EFL students' perceptions on doing activities in student-centered classroom. The result of the classroom observation was conducted to second year electrical Power Engineering students (36 students) at Technological University (Hpa-An). According to their comments, 89% students enjoyed doing classwork with their classmates because they could communicate better with anyone in class and share knowledge in group works. About 83% said doing activities in student-centered classroom can create a positive environment and their four skills are improved.

However, some students commented that they want to have more confidence to speak fluently in classwork. During their class work, about 22% students need to give out more ideas faster to communicate with each other. This is because some students have language barriers and some need to be motivated. Nevertheless, most EFL students are eager to do classroom activities in student-centered learning approach.

The following table is lesson plan for classroom activities in student-centered classroom.

Table 3. Lesson Plan for Classroom Activities in Student-Centered Classroom

Course	Intermediate to Advanced Level
Date	DD/MM/YY
Lesson	Reading the text 'Green Homes'; Listening to audio script; Writing down Exercises; Discussion about 'Green Homes'
Topic	'Green Homes'
Lesson Aims	-to develop the English four skills of learners -to improve their critical thinking skill, fluency, accuracy, vocabulary and grammatical usage, -to participate actively in group work, classwork -to collaborate with peer-learners using student-centered learning
Material	Sheets of reading passage and Audio script
Summarizing Paragraph of lesson	The students will be able to construct new knowledge and create discussion about 'Green Homes'.

The following table is sequencing and timing for classroom activities in student-centered classroom.

Table 4. Sequencing and Timing for Classroom Activities

Procedure	Activity	Time
Introduction	-Ask them to have any experience in 'Green Homes'	5 mins
Warm-Up/ Leap- in Activity	-Ask a volunteer from each group to share some knowledge of 'Green Homes'	15 mins
Pre- Activity	-Play the audio script about 'Green Homes' from prescribed text	10 mins

While Activity	-Ask them some strange words if they can catch up or not -Ask some students to explain voluntarily about 'Green Homes' -Let them read the passage about 'Green Homes' and answer the questions themselves -Let them discuss about 'Green Homes' with group work activity	15 mins
Post Activity	- Let them write down about 'Green Homes' individually from each point of view about one paragraph	5 mins

The following table is rubric for classroom participation using self- directed learning in student-centered course.

Table 5. Rubric for Activities in Student-Centered Classroom

Items	Excellent 2points	Good 2points	Poor 1point
Attendance	75% and above	50% to 74%	less than 50%
Pre- Learning	do effectively	do Actively	do rarely
Participation	do effectively	do actively	do rarely
Feedback	do effectively	do actively	do Rarely
Assignment	do all 100%	do more than 50%	do less than 50%

- *Point 21-25 -3 marks
- *Point 16-20 -2 marks
- *Point 11-1 -2 marks
- *Point 6-10 -2 marks
- *Point 1 -5 -1 mark

9. Conclusion

Educators have found the most effective ways of teaching and learning process for centuries to meet the required competencies for today's world. The aim of education today is not to transfer knowledge but to learn how to learn. Thus, EFL students are responsible for their own learning and they can choose the effective ways for them. They can also upgrade their four skills with the use of classroom activities. They should be active in their learning process and they can transfer new skills and competences to each other through student-centered learning. The four skills of language make them with good grades since the skills form a chain cycle and all rings of the chain can be used effectively to meet the whole cycle of their learning purposes.

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