THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LEARNER-CENTRED APPROACH AND THE TEACHER-CENTRED APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Ahmad Fayez Mutlaq Al-Zu'be

English Language Department, Majmaah University,
SAUDI ARABIA.

Dr.alzu3bi@yahoo.com, a.alzube@mu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT

The changes in the education industry especially with the emergence of online schooling has led to many controversies in the education industry as stakeholders argue about the approaches to education that are most efficient and effective. Among these controversies include the one between the learner-centred and teacher-centred approaches to education. The argument is on whether learning approaches and processes should be tailored to the needs of the students or whether the students should act just like knowledge receptacles in a situation where the teachers act as the sources of knowledge.

This paper researches on the differences between the two learning approaches in the teaching of English as a foreign language. This is approached through first examining the general differences between the two learning approaches in terms of the activities involved, the learning environment, and positions held by either the teacher or student in either approach. This was followed by an analysis of the teachers' responsibility in both approaches, where the actions and practices of teachers were investigated. This included the analysis of the way a teacher relates to the students, the choice of learning materials, and how the needs of the students are met by the teachers.

The responsibility of the students in both approaches was also investigated through the analysis of their actions and practices. This involved the research on how their approaches to leadership are in both approaches, their level of participation in deciding the content, their relationships with their teachers, and how involved the students are in ensuring that their needs are met. The comparison of the two approaches in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness in student's proficiency showed that each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, hence choosing one approach lead to avoiding the advantages of the other. The student-centred approach, however, was recognized as more suited for teaching English as a foreign language.

Keywords: Learner-Centred Approach, the Teacher-Centred Approach and English as a as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

While in the recent years the learner - centred approach of teaching English as a foreign language has been advocated, the teacher –centred approach is also put into practice (Good & Brophy, 2003; Edwards, 2004). By definition, learner-centred approach also known as child-centred learning is a learning that mainly majors on the needs of the students other than those of other involved parties such as administrators and teachers in the education system. In this approach, the teacher is placed to facilitate the learning, focus on the interests, needs, and learning styles of the students. On the other hand, in teacher–centred approach, the

curriculum relies on the teacher to use their expertise in helping the learner understand and make connections where the students take in a receptive role in the learning. While the teacher acts as a knowledge transmitter, the student acts as the receiving end.

THE GENERAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO APPROACHES

Of the two approaches, there are a number of ways in which they differ, each with its own strengths and weaknesses (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2003). First, there is a difference in the two on how the student works. Considering the teacher-centred approach, the students do their work alone where they do exercises related to the teacher's presentation during or after the lesson while on the other hand, in the student-centred approach, the students work together in groups or pairs as per the demand and purpose of the activity. This way, teaching and learning becomes an enjoyable and friendly active and rewarding activity hence making it easier for the students to understand the lesson since they are actively involved in the learning.

Secondly, the teacher-centred approach portrays students as basically passive while the teachers are active since teachers are the main focus in this approach which is considered sensible since the teachers are familiar with the language which the students are not. In this case, the students are less engaged during the learning process. However, with the student – centred approach, the teacher and the student are both active participants since they share the learning responsibility of the learner, helping to identify how the students should use the language.

Another considerable difference of the two approaches is that of the classroom situation where in the teacher –centred approach, there is little or no noise in the class. This is due to the fact that since it is the teacher who passes on the information, the students will automatically be quiet in order to grab the necessary knowledge of the language from the teacher. On the contrary, in the learner-centred approach the class situation is busy and noisy since it is mainly in groups and discussions (Jeanne, 2009). In this approach, the teacher is compelled to be comfortable with the fact that the students are more likely to make mistakes that he/she may not hear and correct. The teacher-centred approach focuses on desires and, where the teachers support them. Considering this, there is a difference on the beginning of analysis and emphasis in supporting learning.

In the teacher-centred approach, there is separation of the process of teaching from that of assessing or testing. In this approach, teaching occurs first then assessment comes later as a way of finding out whether the students grabbed the knowledge passed on to them by the teachers. Unlike the teacher-centred approach, the student-centred approach has both the teaching and assessment being done together. As teaching continues, the students do exercises in pairs or groups.

When it comes to assessments, the teacher-centred approach uses assessments to monitor the student's learning (Hayo, 2007). This way, the teachers are able to discover the weaknesses of the students or areas they did not understand in the course of learning and are therefore able to find a way of bringing the point home. This is different from the student-centred approach, where the assessments play the role of diagnosing and promoting learning among the students.

The two approaches differ in the way they test the desired learning with the learners. In the teacher-centred learning approach, the desired learning is tested indirectly by use of objectivity scored exams, while in the student-centred learning approach; the desired learning

is directly tested through portfolios, performances, papers, and projects (Good & Brophy, 2003).

The Teacher's Responsibility in the Two Approaches

In the teacher-centred approach, the teacher who is the instructor takes time to listen to the manner in which the students pronounce and utter words in order to make corrections where necessary (Brophy, 2006). On the other hand, in the student-centred approach, the teacher does not do a lot of monitoring on the student pronunciation. Instead, the teacher only makes the corrections whenever a question arises.

The student-centred approach focuses on the method where the students act as a source of answer to each other. In this case, the students ask and answer one another's questions and end up taking the teacher/instructor as a resource of information, while in the teacher-centred approach, the students direct their language questions to the teacher who answers them.

When it comes to the teacher-centred approach, it is the teacher/instructor who chooses and decides on what topics to teach the students. The instructor also exercises the power to decide how and when to teach the topics depending on the ability of the students. Unlike the teacher-centred approach, the student centred approach gives the student the mandate to take the topics of their choice considering the fact that their ability and strengths in some topics could be better than others.

In the teacher-centred teaching approach, planning is carried out all around the content that is to be delivered to the students, rather than being based on the student's understanding and engagement in the content being delivered to them. Unlike this, the student centred-approach has planning revolving around the engagement and understanding of the students in whatever content they have chosen to take and learn. For instance when it entails learning English as a foreign language, the student engagement helps them evaluate their level of understanding.

In the student-centred approach, during the discussions, students get to learn some important collaborative and communicative skills from their group members through the group work. On the contrary, the teacher-centred approach does not give room for such interactive discussions since the instructor is in control of the class and he/she is the only one who passes the message to the students and there are no discussions in such a system.

When it comes to the two teaching approaches, the teacher has responsibilities to take into account in order to smoothly deliver and help the students benefit from the curriculum, whether teacher-centred or student-centred. In these teaching systems, the teacher's responsibilities differ (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Wolfgang, 2001).

In the teacher-centred approach, the teachers have more responsibilities than in the student-centred approach (Blumberg, 2009). Some of these may include responsibilities such as imparting to the students the knowledge of their subject. This does not only involve passing on what they know but are required to gather more from different sources and deliver the information through different methods and strategies as per the needs of the students. With the student-centred approach, the teacher's responsibility is less demanding since the teacher only gives the information when asked to by the students.

In the teacher-centred approach, the teacher has the responsibility to meet the needs of the students depending on their abilities. The teacher has to strive to know the abilities of different students and how to handle them since some are fast learners while others are slow learners. Unlike the teacher-centred approach, the teacher has a less demanding task since the

students get to learn from each other within their discussion groups. This way, the teacher only addresses issues that the students raise as challenging to them.

To the teachers, common sense is a very essential trait in conducting and managing the lessons and topics in the teacher-centred approach of teaching. According to Szybnski (2006), common sense helps the teachers to make decisions that will not jeopardize the learning but make it more effective and enjoyable. Without this, teachers may not be able to give the required information as expected and some students could be at a loss. Though not very different from the teacher-centred approach, the student-centred approach does not require the teacher to be very keen on what topics to teach since that is the decision of the students on what topics to take.

Unlike the student-centred teaching approach where the teachers rarely interact with the students, teachers in the teacher-centred approach need to be a bit more organized in whatever they do especially when they have to interact with the students most of the time (Szybnski, 2006). This is because teachers act as role models to the students and this entails how they organize their topics, lessons and how they teach them. If teachers lack this kind of organization, the students may not take his/her lessons serious and this could lead to poor performance.

The Responsibility of the Students in the Two Learning Approaches

Just like teachers, the students also have a number of responsibilities in learning and learning strategies in the two approaches (Wolfgang, 2001). Since students are more involved in the student-centred approach, they have the responsibility of taking leadership in their classes may it be in the groups they form or the class as a whole. Students ensure that they effectively carry out their responsibility in class such as reading, doing their homework as expected, and testing their understanding. On the other hand, students in the teacher-centred approach do not have to major in taking leadership of the class since the teacher takes a better control of the class and whatever activities take place in the class.

Students in the student-centred approach have the responsibility to often develop concepts, reasoning, and ideas on their own as they strain to tackle the tasks they have. To achieve this, students have to learn to listen to one another and direct questions to the teachers where they are not able to handle the task. Although they also have a responsibility in the teacher-centred approach, students do not actually take it as their responsibility to develop any concepts or ideas unless asked by the teacher to do so. This is because it is the teacher's responsibility to choose the concepts and decide what topics to teach the students.

In the teacher-centred approach, the students have the responsibility to obey and take orders from their teachers who are the main instructors in the class. The teachers make all the orders and decide when and which topics to teach to the students. Unlike in the teacher-centred approach, the students in the student-centred approach do not have many orders to take from their instructors since most of the activities are based on what the students plan themselves. If anything, the teachers are just there to supervise what the students are doing and give help where necessary.

The teacher challenges and supports the students at their accepted level in learning, in the teacher-centred teaching approach. This entails making the topics that they have chosen clear for the students. On the contrary, the students challenge and support one another in the topics they have chosen to take in student-centred teaching approach. They pose queries to other members of their groups so that those with the answers can help their classmates. Here, the teacher is only there to help where it is very essential (Gabriel, 2004).

When it comes to answer giving, the teacher-centred teaching approach puts more emphasis on the right answers. For example, when teaching English as a foreign language, the teacher does not give room for students to make mistakes and learn from them but teaches the right way to write and pronounce the English words. On the other hand, the student-centred approach advocates for generation of questions and learning from errors. Students try to write and pronounce the words even when they are not sure. This way, the teacher is able to make corrections from the mistakes made by the students in a bid to learn the language from each other.

The student –centred approach of teaching is interdisciplinary and does not mainly major on a single discipline. If it is on learning English as a foreign language, the approach will involve broad learning and may involve other disciplines to be learnt alongside English (Diane, 2013). Unlike the student-centred approach, the teacher-centred approach of teaching mainly emphasizes on a single discipline. It does not have other disciplines within the main discipline or teaching other disciplines alongside the discipline they have chosen to major on.

With the teacher-centred teaching approach, there is a culture of individualism and competition among the students, where each student wants to emerge the best in the competition. Whereas there is competing and individualism in the teacher-centred approach, the students in the student-centred teaching approach support, collaborate, and co-operate with one another in the learning. They help each other understand and be at par as a class.

The student-centred approach mainly majors on teaching the students how to use and communicate the knowledge they get effectively to handle and confront the emerging and upcoming issues in the real-life situations. If the students are learning English as a foreign language, it will involve learning whatever knowledge is necessary for use in the society that affects the day-to-day living. In the teacher-centred teaching approach, there is emphasis on getting knowledge which may be outside the context it will be used in. Students learn concepts they are not likely to apply in their real-life world.

In the teacher-centred teaching approach, the teacher solely takes the responsibility of managing all the paper-work as well as organization of the classroom. This may at times entail the formation of discussion groups and even the sitting arrangement. With the student-centred teaching approach, it is the opposite since the students have the responsibility to facilitate all the operations and activities taking place in the classroom.

In student-centred learning approach, all the students have a chance to be an integral part in the management of the classroom. This is because the students work together and do not consider any of them superior or inferior to another. Things are different with the teacher-centred learning approach where the teacher chooses only a few students to help in the management of the class, since it is the teacher who is the sole leader and makes all the decisions affecting the class (Doyle, 2008).

In the student-centred approach, the teacher joins hands with the students in setting the rules and making them effective. They do this as a compact or a constitution in order to come into an agreement since this rules mostly affect the students and not the teachers. This way, students are able to control the rules the teacher may put in the system especially if it does not favour them in any way. In the student-centred approach, the responsibility of making rules and regulations is only done by the teacher who then posts them to the students as a group or a class.

Only few community members are allowed into the classrooms in the teacher-centred learning approach, while on the other hand, the student-centred teaching approach allows formation of partnerships with the community as well as business organizations as a way of

broadening and enriching the student's opportunities of learning. This helps to promote the learning of the students hence making it more effective.

The student-centred approach is intrinsic. This is where the students work out of their own internal desires because they have pleasure in doing it and developing their skills. The students do and perform much better since they enjoy the learning. On the other hand, the teacher-centred approach is extrinsic where the teachers might have to motivate the students using material things such as money. This may not be the best since the moment the teacher withdraws the reward, the students may end up losing the psyche and track of good performance in the class.

In the teacher-centred teaching approach, the teacher may put into practice an instructional technique of questioning the students on the topic covered in the previous lesson as a way of motivating the student's exploration and critical thinking as well as trying to know how much the students have understood and the areas they did not get well (Liane, 2008). Unlike the teacher-centred teaching approach, the student-centred approach may not involve referring to the previously learnt topics by any way such as asking questions to test the student's understanding of the past topics.

There is guided discovery in the teacher-centred approach where the teacher structures a question or an experience providing a number of steps on how to get the desired results or answer (Martin, 2004). This way, the students are able to accurately discover the rule, generalization or principle. On the other hand, in the student-centred teaching approach, the students discover the rule, principle, or generalization on their own without the direction of the teacher.

Of the Two Teaching Approaches Which is Better and What Effect has it on the Student's Proficiency?

There are a number of factors to consider before deciding which approach is the best to use in teaching English as a foreign language (Ernesto, 2005; Diane, 2013). First, one has to consider which of the two is more advantageous to both the teacher and the learner who is the main beneficiary from the learning. To start with, the student-centred teaching approach has advantages such as shared leadership where the students take the role of presenting their assignments, writing, tests and they also facilitate their groups (Walters, 2011). The students share responsibilities in the class. This may entail other responsibilities other than studies although they also help one another in the studies too.

The students are actively involved since they work in groups to arrive at the desired principles or results. They take part in communication hence developing their communicative skills as they learn from their own mistakes. Another advantage is that both the teacher and the students learn together. The students in the course of discussion engage their teachers and this way, the two parties learn from each other. The teachers also get to learn from the students and the activities they carry out.

In this approach, there is the aspect of collaborating, supporting, and co-operating with one another where all the students get challenged as well as supported at their own level in learning, an aspect that is very essential even in the society outside the classroom environment. The students are self motivated and enjoy the learning since it is an activity they are actively engaged in and they choose the topics they are comfortable to take without any strain or possibility of failure since they take what they can best understand.

According to Weimer (2013), this approach is based on multidisciplinary system where the students do not only major on one topic and are therefore able to acquire more knowledge in

taking these studies. This way, the system supports inclusion of all kinds of students even those with disabilities. Students assess themselves and can also get assessed by their instructors for group-work, product, and process. This helps them realize their weaknesses and know where to put more effort in the studies.

Just like the student-centred teaching approach, the teacher-centred approach also has the positive side of it (Jeanne, 2009; Doyle, 2008). One is that the class is usually orderly and quiet since the teacher is usually in full control of the class and the activities taking place in the class. This is because the teachers understand the strengths and weaknesses of their students better. Students learn independently without having to rely on their classmates, a property that helps them to think critically and are able to make their own decisions.

In this approach, the students will rarely miss an important topic since it is the teacher who plans what topics to teach and may be in a better position to know which topics are most essential for the students. They receive expert knowledge since the teachers are trained on whatever field they choose and therefore have well based knowledge to deliver to the students.

After going through the advantages and disadvantages of the teacher-centred and the student-centred teaching approaches, it is clear that the student-centred teaching approach is more advantageous than the teacher-centred approach. The students tend to have an easier time taking their studies in the student –centred teaching system especially because they have the freedom to be their own leaders and learn from their mistakes.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is worth mentioning that the two teaching approaches are essential in any school curriculum since each has its own strengths and weaknesses. For a very effective system of learning, the two approaches should be used together to achieve the best. Teachers should also engage the students in the leadership of their class in order to create a friendlier environment between the students and the teachers.

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