

An Investigation into Teachers' Views toward Using the Student-Centered Approach in Teaching English Language

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Abstract

This study explores English language teachers' views toward using the student-centered approach in teaching English. Traditional teaching generally involves limited student participation, with learners often expected to receive knowledge rather than actively question or evaluate it. In recent years, educational reforms have encouraged the adoption of student-centered learning (SCL), which places learners at the center of the educational process. This qualitative study explores the views of eight English language teachers at the Faculty of Languages, Surman Sabratha University, through individual semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The findings indicate that teachers view SCL positively, believing that it encourages students to participate actively in learning, develops a stronger sense of responsibility, increases learner autonomy, and supports learning through meaningful experiences. Despite these advantages, teachers identified several challenges that limit the effective implementation of the approach in classrooms, including large class sizes, limited time, curriculum and examination pressures, insufficient training and teaching resources, and institutional and cultural constraints.

Keywords: Student-centered approach, learner autonomy, English language teachers.

ملخص البحث

يهدف البحث إلى استقصاء آراء معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بشأن توظيف المنهج المتمركز حول الطالب في التدريس اللغة الإنجليزية ويستند التدريس التقليدي في الغالب، إلى مشاركة محدودة من جانب الطلاب، إذ يُتوقع منهم تلقي المعرفة بدلاً من طرح الأسئلة أو تقويمها بصورة فاعلة وفي السنوات الأخيرة، شجعت الإصلاحات التعليمية على لتبني المنهج المتمركز حول الطالب، الذي يجعل المتعلم محوراً للعملية التعليمية، واعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً نوعياً لاستكشاف آراء ثمانية من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية اللغات بجامعة صبراتة، وذلك من خلال مقابلات فردية شبه منظم ومعمق وأظهرت النتائج: أن المعلمين ينظرون بإيجابية إلى المنهج المتمركز حول الطالب؛ إذ يرون أنه يشجع الطلاب على المشاركة الفاعلة في عملية التعلم، ويعزز إحساسهم بالمسؤولية، وينمي استقلاليتهم، فضلاً عن هذه النتائج، أشار المعلمون إلى مجموعة من

التحديات التي تحد من التطبيق الفعال لهذا المنهج داخل الفصول الدراسية، من أبرزها ارتفاع أعداد الطلاب، وضيق الوقت، وضغط المناهج والامتحانات، ونقص التدريب والموارد التعليمية، إلى جانب بعض القيود المؤسسية والثقافية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنهج المتمركز حول الطالب، استقلالية المتعلم، معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية

Introduction

In recent years, student-centered learning has received increasing attention as an approach to language education, particularly in English language teaching. Rather than positioning the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, this approach gives learners a more active role in constructing and developing their understanding. In English language classrooms, this may involve activities such as pair and group work, classroom discussions, problem solving, and collaborative learning.

Richards and Rodgers (2014) explained that contemporary language teaching approaches increasingly emphasize learner participation and communicative competence. Similarly, Weimer (2013) argues that learner-centered teaching involves a shift in classroom roles, with students assuming greater responsibility for their learning. Brown (2017) also emphasizes the value of interaction and learner participation in language development. In addition, Nation and Macalister (2010) point out that language learning can be strengthened when learners are given opportunities to use language in meaningful and communicative contexts. Richards and Rodgers (2014) further explained that “learning is not necessarily a mirror image of teaching” (p. 331), emphasizing that learning cannot be assumed to occur simply because teaching has taken place.

Accordingly, the teacher’s role in a student-centered classroom extends beyond simply transmitting information. The teacher can serve as a facilitator who organizes learning opportunities, supports interaction, and guides students throughout the learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Borg (2003) describes teachers as “active, thinking decision-makers” who make instructional choices based on their knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs (p. 81).

However, the adoption of student-centered teaching may vary according to teachers’ beliefs and the conditions in which they work. Therefore, examining teachers’ perspectives is important for understanding how this approach is interpreted and implemented in actual English language classrooms. The present study focuses on

teachers' views of student-centered teaching, the benefits they associate with it, and the challenges that may influence its implementation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore English language teachers' perceptions of student-centered teaching and to examine the factors that may facilitate or restrict its implementation in the classroom. Particular attention is given to teachers' understanding of the approach, its perceived value for students, and the contextual challenges that influence its practical application.

Problem Statement

The researcher has observed a possible gap between teachers' awareness of student-centered principles and their actual classroom practices. This gap may be related to contextual and institutional factors that make the approach difficult to implement consistently. Therefore, the present study explores teachers' views of student-centered teaching and examines the factors that may influence its implementation in English language classrooms.

Objective and Research Question of the Study

The study aims to explore English language teachers' views and perceptions of using the student-centered approach in teaching English.

Research Question:

1. What are English language teachers' views and perceptions of using the student-centered approach in teaching English?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides insights into English language teachers' views toward the student-centered approach and the challenges that may affect its implementation in Libyan higher-education classrooms. The findings may help teachers, curriculum developers, and educational administrators better understand the gap between positive perceptions and actual classroom practice and identify the need for appropriate training and institutional support.

Literature Review

The Student-Centered Approach: Definitions and Characteristics

Student-centered learning (SCL) places learners at the center of the educational process by giving them an active role in developing their knowledge and skills. The approach encourages learners to participate in classroom activities, work collaboratively, solve

problems, interact with others, and gradually assume greater responsibility for their own learning (Brown, 2001, p. 46).

Within this approach, the teacher continues to have an important role, but this role changes from the main transmitter of knowledge to that of a facilitator, guide, and organizer of learning. Such principles are closely related to constructivist perspectives, including the work of Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), which emphasize active involvement and the contribution of social interaction to learning and knowledge development. Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 331) similarly note that successful learners create their own learning pathways, emphasizing the importance of learner autonomy.

Benefits of Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered teaching can create opportunities for learners to use English through meaningful interaction and active classroom participation. Activities such as pair and group work, discussions, presentations, peer learning, and problem solving can encourage students to communicate and collaborate while using the target language. Nunan (1999) emphasizes the importance of learner involvement and meaningful learning experiences, whereas Dörnyei (2001) highlights the relationship between motivation and active participation. Tomlinson (2003) further stresses the importance of providing learning experiences that respond to learners' different needs.

In English language classrooms, these practices may contribute not only to language development but also to the development of communication, confidence, critical thinking, cooperation, and responsibility.

Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions

Teachers' beliefs and perceptions play an important role in determining how student-centered learning is understood and applied in the classroom. When teachers recognize the value of learner participation and autonomy, they may be more willing to use activities that give students greater responsibility for their learning.

Borg (2003) emphasizes that teachers' beliefs about language teaching can influence their classroom decisions and practices. In addition, Borg (2003) defines teacher cognition as "what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81), highlighting the importance of teachers' beliefs in understanding classroom practices. Consequently, teachers' positive attitudes toward an instructional approach may encourage its use, but positive beliefs do not

necessarily guarantee consistent implementation. Empirical studies support this distinction. Salleh and Mohd Yusoff (2017), in a study involving 147 primary school English language teachers in Perlis, Malaysia, reported generally positive attitudes and beliefs toward student-centered learning. Ganesha, Myartawan, and Agustini (2022) investigated 21 EFL junior high school teachers from 11 schools in Tabanan, Indonesia, and examined their perceptions of student-centered learning in English lessons. The issue is also evident in the Libyan context. Essid (2026), in a study of 100 Libyan secondary-school EFL teachers, found strong support for learner-centered principles, including the teacher's role as a facilitator and increased student participation. However, the study also found continuing elements of teacher authority, textbook control, and teacher-dominated classroom discourse. This suggests that teachers can support learner-centered principles while still maintaining traditional practices.

Challenges in Implementing Student-Centered Teaching

The implementation of student-centered learning can be affected by large classes, limited time, rigid curricula, assessment requirements, limited resources, insufficient professional development, and established educational practices. Oxford (2001) emphasizes the importance of contextual factors in language teaching. Huda and Lubis (2019) examined the implementation of student-centered learning from the perspectives of Islamic secondary-school EFL teachers in Indonesia and highlighted the importance of teachers' perceptions and practical implementation conditions. Bremner (2017), in a qualitative study involving five EFL teachers at a Mexican university, found that teachers' beliefs and classroom practices were influenced by previous educational experiences and contextual conditions. Although the teachers became more learner-centered in their beliefs, they continued to combine learner-centered and teacher-centered practices. These findings suggest that implementation difficulties should not automatically be interpreted as teachers' resistance to student-centered learning. Rather, teachers' practices may reflect an interaction between beliefs, professional preparation, classroom conditions, institutional expectations, and educational culture.

Previous research has shown that the implementation of learner-centered learning can be influenced by factors such as class size, limited resources, teachers' beliefs, lack of training, time constraints, and institutional conditions (Borg, 2006; Farrell & Ives, 2015).

These factors suggest that the successful implementation of a teaching approach depends not only on its theoretical advantages but also on the conditions in which teachers work. Although previous studies have examined teachers' perceptions and implementation of student-centered learning in different educational contexts, much of the research has focused on school settings or quantitative measures of teachers' perceptions. Bremner (2017) provides qualitative evidence from a university context, while Essid (2026) provides recent evidence from Libyan secondary education. However, there remains a need for qualitative research exploring how English language teachers in Libyan higher education describe the relationship between their positive views of student-centered learning and their actual ability to implement it. The present study addresses this gap by focusing on eight English language teachers at the Faculty of Languages, Surman.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive approach, to explore English language teachers' views on the student-centered approach. Qualitative methods were selected to gain in-depth insights into teachers' beliefs, experiences, and challenges.

Participants of the Study

The participants of this study were English language teachers at Sabratha University, Faculty of Languages, Surman. A purposive sample of eight teachers from the Faculty of Languages, Surman, participated in the study. The teachers had at least two years of experience in teaching English. This ensured that participants had relevant experience with different teaching methods and strategies. The purpose of this research paper is to explore teachers' views toward using the student-centered approach in teaching different English courses.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' views, experiences, and challenges related to the student-centered approach. Sample questions included:

- How would you describe your current teaching approach?
- What do you understand by a student-centered classroom?
- What benefits and challenges have you encountered when using student-centered strategies?

Data Collection Procedures

Participants were contacted via email and provided with an explanation of the study's purpose. Interviews were scheduled at a time convenient for them. Each interview lasted approximately 30–35 minutes and was recorded with participants' permission.

Data Analysis

The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher carefully reviewed the participants' responses, identified recurring ideas and patterns, and organized them into meaningful themes. The analysis resulted in four main themes: teachers' positive attitudes toward student-centered learning, limited application in practice, the need for training and support, and institutional and cultural constraints. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the research question and the findings of previous studies.

The Results of the Interview

The data collected through the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Four main themes emerged from the participants' responses and are presented and discussed below.

Theme 1: Teachers' Positive Attitudes Toward Student-Centered Learning

When students work in groups or lead discussions, they become more confident in using English. (Teacher 1)

Student-centered learning boosts my students' speaking confidence because they practice real communication, not just listen to me. (Teacher 2)

This approach develops critical thinking and teamwork, which are essential for my students' future careers. (Teacher 3)

SCL helps my students build both language skills and soft skills such as collaboration and problem solving. (Teacher 4)

I have seen remarkable transformation—my students are more engaged and responsible for their own progress. (Teacher 5)

Student-centered learning creates a relaxed, friendly atmosphere where students feel safe to interact and grow. (Teacher 6)

Research and my own experience confirm that SCL significantly improves learning outcomes and classroom efficacy. (Teacher 7)

I love SCL because it makes my students more motivated—they take ownership and become active participants. (Teacher 8)

Theme 2: Teachers' Attitudes Toward Limited Application in Practice

I want to use group work more often, but it is hard to manage in a class of 45 students. (Teacher 1)

I believe student-centered learning is effective, but I cannot apply it regularly because of the limited class time. (Teacher 2)

Most of my lessons are still teacher-centered because I have to complete the syllabus before the end of the semester. (Teacher 3)

I try to use student-centered activities whenever possible, but large class sizes make classroom management very difficult. (Teacher 4)

I only use student-centered techniques occasionally because students are more familiar with traditional teaching methods. (Teacher 5)

Although I understand the value of the student-centered approach, I find it difficult to implement without adequate teaching resources. (Teacher 6)

I apply some student-centered activities, but not in every lesson due to assessment requirements and time constraints. (Teacher 7)

I think the approach is beneficial, but in practice it is limited by the educational system and the pressure to prepare students for examinations. (Teacher 8)

Theme 3: Teachers' Opinions About the Need for Training and Support

I value student-centered learning, but I was never trained to do it in a good way. (Teacher 1)

I believe more professional training is necessary to help teachers apply the student-centered approach effectively in English language classrooms. (Teacher 2)

I have attended very few workshops on student-centered teaching. More practical training would increase my confidence in using this approach. (Teacher 3)

Teachers need continuous support from the administration, including access to teaching materials and instructional resources. (Teacher 4)

I know the theory behind student-centered learning, but I need more hands-on training to implement it successfully. (Teacher 5)

Collaboration among teachers and sharing successful classroom experiences would make it easier to adopt student-centered learning. (Teacher 6)

Regular professional development programs would help teachers learn new classroom strategies and improve their teaching practices. (Teacher 7)

Without sufficient training, guidance, and institutional support, many teachers find it difficult to move away from traditional teaching methods. (Teacher 8)

Theme 4: Teachers' Attitudes Toward Institutional and Cultural Constraints

My faculty expects me to cover the syllabus quickly for exams, so there is no time for activities. (Teacher 1)

One of the main challenges is the traditional educational system, which still focuses mainly on examinations and content coverage rather than active student participation. (Teacher 2)

In the Libyan context, many students expect the teacher to be the main source of knowledge, so changing to a student-centered approach requires changes in their learning attitudes. (Teacher 3)

The curriculum is often overloaded, which does not give teachers enough time to use student-centered strategies effectively. (Teacher 4)

Large class sizes and limited classroom facilities make it difficult to organize group work and interactive activities. (Teacher 5)

Some parents and students still believe that a good teacher is one who explains everything, so they may not accept methods that give students more responsibility and may come to the college and complain about these teaching techniques. (Teacher 6)

The lack of institutional encouragement and support can prevent teachers from adopting new teaching approaches. (Teacher 7)

Our educational culture is mainly based on traditional teaching methods, and this makes the transition to student-centered learning challenging. (Teacher 8)

Discussion of the Results

The results of the study showed that while teachers generally supported student-centered learning strategies, practical challenges hindered their consistent use. Their perspectives highlight a gap between theory and practice and suggest the need for systematic changes and professional development.

The findings obtained from the first theme revealed that all participants expressed positive attitudes toward student-centered learning. Teachers associated the approach with greater

student engagement, increased confidence in using English, critical thinking, teamwork, problem solving, motivation, and greater responsibility for learning. These findings are consistent with Nunan (1999), Dörnyei (2001), and Tomlinson (2003), who emphasize the importance of learner involvement, motivation, meaningful interaction, and responding to learners' individual needs. The findings also correspond with Salleh and Mohd Yusoff (2017), who reported generally positive attitudes toward student-centered learning among English language teachers in Malaysia, and with Ganesha et al. (2022), who found positive perceptions of student-centered learning among EFL teachers in Indonesia. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Essid (2026), whose study of Libyan EFL teachers reported strong support for learner-centered principles. Taken together, these similarities suggest that teachers tend to recognize the pedagogical value of involving students more actively in the learning process.

Despite these positive attitudes, the second theme showed clear differences between teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. All participants reported that they could not apply student-centered strategies consistently because of factors such as large classes, limited instructional time, syllabus coverage, assessment requirements, insufficient resources, and students' familiarity with traditional teaching methods. The finding is consistent with Borg's (2003) view that teachers' beliefs and practices are shaped by broader contextual conditions. It also supports Huda and Lubis (2019) and Bremner (2017), who found that teachers may hold learner-centered beliefs while continuing to use teacher-centered practices because of practical and contextual limitations. Similarly, Essid (2026) found that Libyan teachers could support learner-centered principles while maintaining elements of teacher-centered classroom practices. Therefore, the limited use of student-centered learning identified in the present study should not necessarily be understood as teachers' unwillingness to adopt the approach. Rather, it reflects the gap between teachers' pedagogical beliefs and the conditions under which they are expected to teach.

The third theme highlighted teachers' need for professional training and institutional support. Participants emphasized the importance of practical training, continuous professional development, access to appropriate teaching materials, administrative support, and opportunities to share classroom experiences with colleagues. The findings



suggest that understanding the theoretical principles of student-centered learning may not be sufficient to ensure its effective implementation. Teachers may require practical guidance on classroom management, group work, activity design, student participation, and assessment. This finding is in line with Borg (2003), who emphasizes the relationship between teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom practices, and it is also consistent with the findings of Salleh and Mohd Yusoff (2017). The participants' responses therefore suggest that professional development should focus not only on explaining the concept of student-centered learning but also on providing teachers with practical strategies that can be adapted to their actual classroom conditions.

The fourth theme concerned institutional and cultural constraints. Participants identified examination pressure, overloaded curricula, large classes, limited facilities and resources, traditional expectations among students and parents, and insufficient institutional encouragement as major barriers to implementation. These findings support the contextual perspective discussed by Oxford (2001) and are consistent with Bremner (2017), who found that teachers' practices were influenced by previous educational experiences and the wider educational culture. The findings also correspond with Essid (2026), which reported that learner-centered beliefs may coexist with teacher authority, textbook control, and teacher-dominated classroom discourse. This suggests that changing teaching practices may require changes not only at the individual teacher level but also within the broader educational environment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate a strong relationship between teachers' positive perceptions of student-centered learning and the contextual factors that shape its implementation. The participants clearly recognized the educational benefits of the approach, yet they experienced difficulties in applying it consistently. The central issue, therefore, is not a lack of awareness of student-centered learning but a gap between positive beliefs and classroom practice. This finding extends previous research by providing qualitative evidence from English language teachers in a Libyan higher-education context. Addressing this gap may require a combination of practical professional development, appropriate teaching resources, supportive institutional policies, and classroom conditions that allow teachers sufficient time and flexibility to use student-centered strategies effectively.

Conclusion

This research paper aimed to investigate English language teachers' views toward the student-centered approach in teaching. The findings reveal that while many teachers hold positive attitudes toward this approach, several factors hinder its full implementation in practice. These include large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, limited training, and institutional expectations.

The study concludes that teachers recognize the benefits of student-centered learning, such as increased student engagement, confidence, and improved communication skills. However, without adequate support, resources, and training, many find it challenging to shift from traditional teacher-centered practices.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Providing professional development opportunities:

Organize continuous training workshops that focus on the practical application of student-centered teaching strategies, classroom management in large classes, and interactive assessment methods.

2. Reducing class size where possible:

Work, where possible, to reduce the number of students in classrooms, improve facilities, and equip classrooms in flexible ways that support group work and interactive activities.

3. Reviewing curricula and assessment policies:

Review overloaded curricula and assessment policies, with greater emphasis on continuous and formative assessment rather than relying entirely on final examinations. This may provide teachers with greater time and flexibility to apply student-centered teaching strategies.

4. Encouraging Reflective and Collaborative Practices among Teachers:

Establish professional learning communities within the faculty to enable teachers to share successful experiences, discuss challenges, and collaborate in developing modern teaching practices.

Suggestion for Future Research

Future studies could examine:

- Student perceptions of student-centered learning in English classrooms.
- A comparative study between public and private colleges.
- The impact of teacher training programs on student-centered teaching practices.

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