

TESOL Methodology: Teaching English as a Second or Other Language

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Article Info

Article history:

Submitted Jun 12, 2020

Revised Jul 20, 2020

Accepted Aug 15, 2020

Published Aug 31, 2020

Keywords:

Learner Center

English Language Teaching

Second Language Acquisition

Learner's experience

Cognitive process

ABSTRACT

Approaches of language teaching and learning have always been created and developed over the time. This change could not be separated with the influence of both Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and pedagogical theories in ELT. Learner centre, a present day approach which is likely aligned with those theories, has become a key concept with regards to how languages are learned and taught despite some of the barriers of its implementation. Learner-centre is a perspective which focuses on the learners' experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs. Learner centre may offers benefits for promoting effective process of learning. It enables learners' cognitive process to be well-developed.

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Introduction

Approaches of language teaching and learning have always been created and developed over the time. Traditional approach has a number of weaknesses and it has no longer effective to reach a well-establish goal of English Language Teaching (ELT) at the present day, ability to communicate effectively (Hedge, 2000). This change could not be separated with the influence of both Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and pedagogical theories in ELT. Such theories provide a wide variety of concepts and explanation about language teaching and learning (Haley & Rentz, 2002). Learner centre, a present day approach which is likely aligned with those theories, is encouraged to be widely implemented as it is expected as a solution for numerous problems in teaching

(Schewesihfurth, 2011). Moreover, this approach is more likely viable to gain the goal of ELT. Therefore, it has become a key concept with regards to how languages are learned and taught despite some of the barriers of its implementation.

Traditional approach has a number of shortcomings. Shulman (1987) stated that this old approach is based on knowledge transmission principle, a principle which allow the teacher actively give the knowledge to the passive learners. Teachers initiate and control over the interaction as they hold the authority in the classroom (Anton, 1999), while learners passively response to the teacher. This learning mode makes learners have little space and opportunity to learn as the interaction is dominated by the teachers (Larsen &Freeman (1986) cited in Anton, 1999). Thus, the learners tend to memorize the received knowledge (Ur, 2014) which may cause them undergo short-term memory and stress. Ur added that learning goal of this approach is studying knowledge of language instead of practicing how to use it. As a result, learners might be unable to communicate with the language.

It is likely that the emergence learner centre approach is assumed to address the issues above and this emergence is influenced by SLA and constructivism theories. Halley and Rentz (2002), SLA theories explain about language acquisition process in which these theories give information about what learner usually do or do not do to learn and what can and cannot be taught. Meanwhile, Kaufman (2004) stated that the shift of pedagogy away from information transmission model to learner centre approach has coincided with the emergence of constructivism theories. It may indicate these theories influence learner centred. Constructivism theories explain cognitive development with two different approaches. The first approach was proposed by Piaget who accounted that learning is an individual active process of constructing knowledge and this process allows for consideration to level of complexity or readiness. It could be mean thinking of how ready a learner to receive knowledge.

Vygotsky, however, believed that to construct the knowledge, learners require intra cognitive process, meaning that they need other person which could be teacher or peer to interact with and scaffold them. Lier (1988) defines scaffolding as managing situation to make learner easy and successful in constructing knowledge and then gradually take back hold the role to the learners as they become skillful enough to manage it. In other words, scaffolding is as an assistance given to learners to rectify challenges that

could not be solved if the learners do it by themselves. Then, the teachers remove the assistance as learners are able to do the challenged by themselves. It could be said that knowledge may not be simply and individually constructed but should be co-constructed. Moreover, to construct the knowledge socially, language is used as a tool in interaction. It bridges learners' prior knowledge (actual zone of development) to the knowledge that they would construct (zone proximal development). Hence, collaborative process using the language to mediate the interaction is required for constructing the knowledge.

Method

It is the qualitative research. As Ary, et.al. (2010) said that qualitative research seek to understand a phenomenon by focusing on the total picture rather than breaking it down into variables. The kind of research is content analysis. Content analysis focusses on analyzing and interpreting recorded material such as public records, textbooks, letters, films, tapes, diaries, themes, reports or other documents to learn about human behavior (Ary, 2010). This research used written documents to gain the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Result and Discussion

Before going further, it seems significant to understand the definition of learner-centre. Despite it does not have any fixed definition (Attard et al., 2010), several proponents and experts have tried to claim their point of views on learner centre. According to Ahmed (2013), learner-centre is a perspective which focuses on the learners' experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs. His definition seems to be different with Benson (2012) arguing that it is the approach allowing learner to acquire language skill through participation in communication to construct knowledge rather than to master vocabulary and grammatical form. Similarly Nunan (1988) believed that the important of acquiring skills rather than a body of knowledge. However, Hedge (2000) viewed that learner centre as an approach allowing practice to give learner more control and responsibility to contribute in learning process. Based on these three different perspectives learner centre, it can be tentatively concluded that learner centre is as an approach responding to learner diversity and give them responsibility to control their process of acquiring the language.

Since the definition of learner centre is more likely to remain tentative, it might cause misunderstanding. Having a relative matter, the definition of learner centred leads to multiple interpretations (Nunan, 1988). According to him, some teachers feel that

learner centre devalues their professional role while others think that learners take over their duty and responsibility as a teacher. In fact not all learners in the classroom know what and how to learn, the role of teachers, therefore, are really demanded as the assistance for this kind of learners. Another misunderstanding is that the extent to which learner centre really meets individual students' need, preference, and interest. Learner centre does not mean providing tailor-made programs for each student in a class and including them in designing their own learning, but instead setting up sources and process that allow learners to tailor make tasks and program for themselves (Benson, 2012). To illustrate, a teacher is going to teach advertisement. She or he may ask students in advance to search any advertisement they are interest in, and let them choose or negotiate kind of task that they prefer to do toward the stories. Thus, it does not mean teacher provide different stories for each students.

In order to avoid misunderstanding as above, it is necessary to look at a number of key concepts in learner centre. Firstly, learner centred is more likely to take into account learner diversity in the classroom. Coyle (2003) accounts this diversity as differentiation. It means that learners are individuals with different preferences and skills. This is echoed by Benson (2012) saying that learner centre teaching recognizes learner diversity and implies a rejection of one-size-fits-all methodology. He also added that this approach opens up space for discussion motivations, learning preference, and styles. This mirror argument was also made by Taron and Yule (1989) cited in Hedge (2000) proposing that learner centred is kind of eclectic approach emphasizing teacher knowledge of their students and ability to adjust teaching to individual and collective needs of their students. Therefore, in the face of recognizing learner diversity, teacher may use more than one method flexibly and be able to adjust the selected method to learners' needs and preferences.

Moreover, learner diversity may also be seen in term of readiness. As mentioned earlier, learners are also supposed to discover their own knowledge in learning in which this process relates to learners readiness. Precisely, learners might have different level of readiness to receive and discover the knowledge. Viewed by SLA viewpoint, readiness is important to be considered for adjusting input of knowledge (Kreshen, 1987). According to this theory, the knowledge is better constructed and internalized when it is slightly given above learners' prior knowledge. By considering learner readiness, the knowledge given to the learner would be well-adjusted.

The other principle is that learners have a control and responsibility in their own learning. Weimer (2002) prefer to say it as the balance authority between teacher and learner. This could be meant that teachers share their control and responsibility to students. Different to traditional approach, in this approach teachers do not hold full of control in the classroom. This is more likely enable students to be decision makers of their own learning. They may choose and decide material that they need and learning activities that they prefer to do. Even, learners are also responsible to set their own goal and take on teaching and assessment role (Coyle, 2003; Benson, 2012; Ertürk, 2014).

Furthermore, authentic communication would be highly emphasized in learner-centred classroom. According to Hedge (2000), authentic communication is real world communication and it occurs naturally. Since the aims of learning is for acquiring language skills (Benson 2012), learners are more likely to be prepared for real life communication and learning would be stress on meaning. To achieve this goal, teacher and learners should have Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) which is defined by Walsh (2011) as teachers and learners ability to use interaction as tool for mediating and assisting learning. The interaction is more likely enable both parties to negotiate meaning and engages learners to involve actively in the interaction. This could be proved through study on classroom interaction conducted by Anton (1999) and Cancino (2015). Both of them pointed out that in the interaction, a communicative teacher engaged learners to negotiate meaning and involve learner to participate in learning. According to Walsh, communicative teacher is the one who use communicative features in interaction, they are scaffolding (helping learner to consturct discourse such as provide the missing language by giving clue or pharaphrasing),checking for confirmation(giving clarification),content feedback (feedback focused on meaning), direct error correction (quicky correcting the error with minum interuption to facilitate oral fluency practice), and extended wait-time (give learner sufficient time to response). By contrast, non communicative teacher, the one who misuse these features which can also hinder the interaction.

Learner centre activities are mostly done in collaborative tasks. It is because learner would gain deeper understanding when it is co-constructed as Vygotsky have said in his theory above. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to include more pair work and group communicative activities in their lesson. According to Hedge (2000) these activities may nurture more linguistic production because it provides space for learners to practice their language .The space is the opportunity for learner to negotiate meaning and form during communicative exchange (Anton, 1999).

Learner centre may offers benefits for promoting effective process of learning. It enables learners' cognitive process to be well-developed. Viewed by SLA perspective, it occurs because language is used as a tool for bridging teacher-learners interaction during negotiation process. In addition, authentic communication and integrated language learning which breaking down barriers between learning in and out of class enables learners to acquire language skills. For example, a teacher relates learners' holiday experience with the lesson discussing holiday destination place. Teacher may ask learners some questions about favourite place they like to visit for spending holiday or ask them to bring their holiday photograph as well as share their stories to others. As a result learners are more likely to be capable in using the language for real life communication.

Learning environment in learner centre may promote learner autonomy. Sinclair (2000) cited in Borg and Al- Husaidi (2012), defines learner autonomy as a learner capacity and willingness to be active and responsible to his or her own learning. As mentioned earlier, learner centre enable the learners to be responsible and hold control on their own learning. This environment is more likely to nurture learners' meta-cognitive awareness. It is an awareness to plan, think, reflect and evaluate learner own learning (Hedge, 2000). An autonomous learners has this kind of awareness and they are active in their learning (Coyle, 2003) .Indeed, learner centre seems to provide environment for the learner to be more active since they are engaged in collaborative interaction. The remarkable feature of that benefitted from learner centre is that learner active participation in their study (Tudor, 1992; Benson, 2012). This feature seems on the contrary to what is found in traditional approach by which learners passively receive the knowledge transferred by the teachers. Seemingly, what learner needs to be autonomous is present in learner centre environment.

Learner-centred creates inclusive teaching environment. Despite working collaboratively, this approach, as explained above, recognizes learners as individual learners and make the diversity as part of teaching and learning process. As learner differences are recognized, they would feel more engaged and included in learning process. Inclusive teaching environment respects to learner diversity (Imperial College London, 2017). The learners also might feel safe because their differences are accepted and this feeling enables them not to be hesitated to share their experience or even difficulties in learning with their teachers and the other students.

Despite having benefits, the implementation of learner centred approach has encountered with a number of challenges. The challenges are more likely to be varied depend on the context and culture where it is implemented. Even, Mtika and Gates (2010)

and Scheweishfurth (2011) and claim that the implementation has undergone with both small and big failure. On the one hand, small failure may be mean learner centre has partly implemented. It could be found in Mtika and Gates's study. For example, some of student teachers that are observed partly understand the concept of learner centre because they ask students to sit in groups but the student teachers did not know what should be done with the group. On the other hand, big failure might be meant that the approach could not be totally implemented due to some other constrains.

Different place would have different availability of learning sources and educational system. Limitation of material and institutional constrains might be the challenges in implementing learner centred (Tudor, 1992). Take in Nigeria and other Sub Saharan Africa regions, for instance. Thompson (2013) and Scheweishfurth (2011) report the curriculum of English in this countries were mostly exam oriented with a lot of learning objectives in the syllabus while duration for teaching was limited. Exacerbatingly, the number of students occupying the class was relatively big. As a result, it is difficult to implement learner centre in these places.

Moreover, contextual constrain may also influence teacher capacity. Sceweishfurth (2011) argued that teacher capacity in developing countries may be poor. They may not have enough knowledge about learner centre and do not or partly understand how to apply it. It might be because they did not get learner-centred education when they were student teachers or they learn it but do not get used to learner centre teaching. In addition, Thompson (2013) also found that teachers who work at private school have a pressure with a lot of professional responsibility out of subject classroom to be done and it can hinder the implementation of learner centre approach.

In term culture, teachers' beliefs are more likely to be influenced by the culture in their environment. In some culture, eastern culture such as in Indonesia, Malaysia and in other South East Asia countries for instance, a teacher is perceived as the one who has power and the one who control over the classroom. It is also believed that a teacher as an agent of knowledge who transfer their knowledge to students, while students are listeners and participants of teacher's presentation. This kind of culture is really contradicted with the concept of learner centre and it is more likely to be teacher centre.

In addition, traditional culture in viewing of language learning also impedes the implementation (Tudor, 1992). Traditional teaching culture used by the teachers at school probably make students do not get used to the learner centre. They may be unfamiliar and have misconception about the approach. Mtika and Gates (2010) via interview to the student teacher who failed implementing this approach found that some students were

slow, did not want to get involved and expect the teacher to give all information to them. As a result, learner failed to adjust the approach and eventually teacher failed to implement it.

Conclusion

Learner centred is an approach expected to address issues in old style teaching, it is based on theories how language should be learned and taught, and it offers a number of benefits reaching the ELT goal. However, the implementation of this approach apparently is not easy as it seems. It is challenged by cultural and contextual constraints. This implementation is mostly end up with a failure.

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