

# Investigating Instructors' Perspectives towards Student-Centered Learning in Teaching English Language

Omar Awadh Salamah Idris \*

Academic Section, Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic (SPSP), Dammam, Saudi Arabia

\*Corresponding author: [omeridris9@gmail.com](mailto:omeridris9@gmail.com)

**Abstract** The objective of this research is to investigate the instructors' perspective towards student-centered learning in teaching English language as a second language in Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and to explore the difference made when applying student-centered learning. The study covered the teachers who teach Saudi Aramco apprentices. The study examines whether using Student-Centered Learning (SCL) is more effective in teaching English language than the traditional teaching approaches. To achieve the difference in teaching English language using SCL, educators or teachers have to re-evaluate the way they teach their classes and to review various course requirements that they impose. By designing instructional activities and materials, as teachers or education facilitators, we must think about how to facilitate the learning process for our students, prepare our students to think more than to use them as tools in our hands and shape them the way we like, make their learning easier, monitor them and give help when needed. The data was collected through a questionnaire given to thirty-five English language teachers from multinational backgrounds. The results showed significant change in teachers' perspectives regarding Student-Centered Learning SCL. More than 94.3% of teachers encompassed SCL in their teaching, though some of them were hesitating whether to use SCL in their teaching or Teacher-Centered Learning approach. The results showed also the positive impact of SCL and the shift from TCL to SCL is not major factor that hinders adoption of SCL in teaching.

**Keywords:** *student-centered learning, teacher-centered learning, perspectives*

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## 1. Introduction

This study examined the significance of shifting from (TCL) teacher-centered learning to SCL and to which extent does SCL make the difference in teaching English language as a foreign language. The significance of SCL is that; it is the most modern trend in the field of teaching. Most of the educational institutions still use TCL in which the teacher is the center of the learning process and the students are passive just listen and write down what the teacher or instructor says. There are many different reasons why instructors of SPSP adopt SCL. First, it is an energizing and exciting teaching method. Instructors who adopted SCL reported that they are energized and excited. Second, the outcome is clear in the trainees' performance, which has improved since the day they joined SPSP. The results of this study may be useful in encouraging instructors who use TCL to change to SCL for better students' performance. This study may suggest training the instructors more on SCL and providing them with useful activities that enrich the process of learning. For reasons mentioned above the researcher has conducted this research.

### 1.1. Significance of the Study

The significance of SCL is that; it is the most modern trend in the field of teaching. Most of the educational institutions still use TCL in which the teacher is the center of the learning process and the students are passive just listen and write down what the teacher or instructor says. There are many different reasons why instructors of SPSP adopt SCL. First, it is an energizing and exciting teaching method. Instructors who adopted SCL reported that they are energized and excited. Second, the outcome is clear in the trainees' performance, which has improved since the day they joined SPSP. The results of this study may be useful in encouraging instructors who use TCL to change to SCL for better students' performance. This study may suggest training the instructors more on SCL and providing them with useful activities that enrich the process of learning. Training programs can be held to instructors or trainers such as TTT (Train The Trainer) which is held by Aramco Training Center every three months to improve the trainers performance which will be reflected directly on the trainees' performance.

Lastly, there are some training centers which still adopt TCL in delivering education to Aramco apprentices. This

study can be useful for these training centers to adopt SCL in their programs for the welfare of the trainees and to qualify their trainers to be up-to-date in terms of pedagogy.

## 1.2. The History of Student-centered Learning Approach

The history of Student-Centered Learning takes its roots from a constructivist theory, in which students learn more by doing and experiencing rather than by observing. In this theory, students are the initiators and architects of their own learning and knowledge making rather than passive “vessels” who receive knowledge from expert teachers [4]. This theory was first developed at the start of 20<sup>th</sup> century and was influenced by the writings of Dewey and psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Its focus was on social constructivism, which means how meaning, connection and comprehensions are all influenced by social events. Students have better performance when they are asked to think about the matters instead of doing the thinking for them. In the other words, focus is on the learner’s thoughts rather than on their (teachers) own. In an ideal student-centered class, there is no impression from teacher on learners or any effort to persuade learners to what teachers sees. According to [13], the choices of what and how to teach should be made with reference to learners and purpose of language teaching in order to get learners actively involved in the learning process: learning by doing [14]. Most of these studies, however, used only a modest number of classroom activities defined in very broad terms like “conversation”, “error correction” or “discussion” which may provoke different understanding among respondents and not reflect precisely the classroom activities in reality [[15], p.246].

Over the past century, society has required schools to prepare students for an increasingly complex set of social economic realities [6]. In response to these changing educational conditions, educators and researchers have developed new approaches to the systematic provisioning of learning. One line of inquiry and theory sought to develop an approach that provides an active, individualized and engaging learning experience: an experience which the teacher facilitates but does not dominate. One more of popular description of this approach is student-centered learning. The theory and practice of student-centered learning has been built over the past century. SCL was created as a concept within the field of educational pedagogy and has been a topic of discussion within many higher education institutions and within national policy-making for over the past few decades.

Guided by the learner-centered teaching philosophy, researchers around the world have developed various frameworks to facilitate the philosophy. As in [9] constructed a framework of twenty-six indicators in eight categories variables of engaged learning that included vision of learning tasks, assessment, instructional model, learning context, grouping, teacher roles and student roles.

## 1.3. Questions of the Study

Research Questions of this study are:

1. What are the teachers’ views in terms of Student-Centered Learning?

2. What are the positive results?

## 1.4. Hypotheses

The researcher hypothesizes the following:

- Instructors have encompassed SCL in their teaching.
- The instructors' views regarding applying SCL in their classroom are positive.
- SCL has positive effects on students’ performance and facilitates teaching and learning processes.
- There are some factors influences implementing SCL, however, they will not hinder encompassing SCL.

## 1.5. Student-Centered Learning

Student-centered learning approach is a shift that changed the students’ passive role in the classroom to active role in discussing, asking questions and answering them. They became effective participant instead of receivers.

In [12] SCL was defined as a learning model that places the student (learner) in the center of the learning process. In student-centered learning, students are active participants in their learning; they learn at their own pace and use their own strategies; they are more intrinsically than extrinsically. Student-centered learning develops learning-how-to learn skills such as problem solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking. Student-centered learning accounts for and adapts different learning styles of students. Student-centered learning is utterly different from teacher-centered learning. In student-centered learning, students are responsible for planning the curriculum or at least in the choosing. The individual is 100 percent responsible for his own behavior, participation and learning [3]. Student-centered learning as the terms suggests, is a method of learning or teaching that puts the learner at the center [[11], p.9]. With the application of an ACL approach in higher education, there is necessarily a shift in focus from academic teaching to the learner.

In her description of student-centered learning education, [2] includes a broad range of elements, from classroom practices to linking learning to the local community. Her definition partially reflects the breadth of literature on student-centered education and associated concepts.

Student-centered learning environments are designed to provide students with opportunities to take a more active role in their learning by shifting the responsibilities of organizing, analyzing, and synthesizing content from the teacher to the learner. These environments allow students to examine complex problems using a wide variety of resources, develop their own strategies for addressing these problems, and present and negotiate solutions to these problems in a collaborative manner. Student-Centered Learning is one of the most recent modern methods of language teaching adopted by many educational institutions. SCL is defined in [9] as an approach that helps students to develop a “can-do” attitude. It is effective, motivating, and enjoyable. In a student-centered class, the students do not depend on their teacher all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice, or praise. They do not ignore each other, but look at each other and communicate with each

other. They value each other's contributions; they cooperate, learn from each other, and help each other. When having difficulty or in doubt, they ask the teacher for help or advice but only after having tried to solve the problem by themselves. It is a problem based teaching methodology, where the students depend on themselves and depart the spoon-feeding methodologies. SCL approach has summarized in [16] into: promoting interaction among learners using the native language when possible and appropriate, connecting instruction with learners' live and teaching learning strategies explicitly. Among this theory, in a study of adult ESL classes found positive gains in reading and oral English communication for students whose teachers used their native language for explanation, introducing new ideas and clarifying the materials during instruction. Some studies revealed significant differences in learning outcomes, using learners' native language or giving the opportunity to interact in their own language, can enhance learners' sense of competence and self-worth. Research also suggests that literacy, knowledge and other skills transfer across languages. "If you learn something in one language, you either already know it in (i.e., transfer it to) another language or you can easily learn it in another language" [[7], p. 15].

### 1.6. The Principles of Student-Centered Learning

It is known that every educational theory or teaching approach should have its principles, rules etc. Educators, teachers and students deal accordingly.

According to [10], the principles of SCL are taking responsibility for learners' learning, directly involving them in the learning process and raising social activities like collaboration, meaningful communication, choice and cooperation. Here are some of these principles:

- a. Students should develop their own knowledge by communication, critical thinking and problem solving.
- Instead of learning irrelevant materials, students could have this opportunity to learn directly related materials to their real life. Mostly, teachers have no answer on facing this question "Why do I have to know this?"
- b. In traditional method, students' performance is assessed based on a test. Some students are well on testing with average in school and some are weak test takers but well on their curriculum. While these factors are not considered in teacher-led learning, it is a positive tool to "promote and diagnose learning process in student learning-led learning" [8]
- c. "Providing opportunities to use target language in order to negotiate with teacher and other students in a group work, project work, also task-based interactions while providing guidance, modeling and feedback about progress" [1].

### 1.7. Ways to Incorporate Student-Centered Learning

According to [4], incorporation of SCL in teaching includes the following:

1. Start with small changes in the routine of teaching.
2. Asking more questions changes in the class from students rather than providing answers.

3. Teachers see themselves as guide on the side not as on the stage.

According to [5], teachers' roles on shifting from Teacher-Centered Learning (TCL) to Student-Centered Learning (SCL) are divided into several models:

1. Model thinking/processing skills.
2. Know where you want your students to cognitive.
3. Develop questions that facilitate student exploration.
4. Using visual tools to assist students in this progress.
5. Provide group-learning setting.
6. Use analogies and metaphors.

In order to plan a successful student-centered learning classroom it is useful to consider certain points:

- a. Ask don't tell.
- b. Focus on students' experience and interests.
- c. Communication over accuracy.
- d. Learning by doing.
- e. Students have choices.
- f. Focus on confidence building.
- g. Encourage interest in English.
- h. Tasks are open-ended.
- i. High exposure.
- j. Students learn.

### 1.8. Advantages of Student-Centered Learning

#### 1.8.1. Benefits for Students

- Enhancement of Students' Knowledge
- Equipping students with learning skills
- Integration of Students into the Academic Community
- Improving Learning Outcomes.
- Consideration for Students' Needs

#### 1.8.2. Benefits for Lecturers

- Lecturers act as facilitators
- Lecturers manage the growing and increasingly diverse student population.
- Self-Improvement Promotion
- Promotion of More Rewarding Teaching Experience.

## 2. Methodology

This current study was conducted in the Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic. SPSP is a polytechnic that provides technical education to newly hired employees by petroleum companies and particularly Aramco. The institute offers both technical English for companies other than Aramco and Interaction Access course series that covers the four skills. The first year is for English language only whereas the second year is for job skills. The first year is divided into three segments. Each segment last for ten weeks. The study was conducted during the second segment in the 2015. The questionnaire was administered in the seventh week of the second segment.

### 2.1. Subjects

The thirty five male teachers who actually involved in this survey work as English language instructors "multi-

national” for TQ Training and Education; technical training provider; for SPSP. The sample has been chosen conveniently and intentionally (target sample) from TQ instructors. Their ages range between 32 to 64 years old and all of them of long experience in teaching English language as a second language. Fifteen of these teachers had taken part in the piloting of the questionnaire. The number of teachers targeted for the questionnaire was 35. Thirty-five teachers responded and took part in the questionnaire. Among the teachers, the study specifically looked at different groups in language teaching: those who have The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) since both or any of mentioned certificates is a major requirement to be a teacher in TQ Training & Education. The study also targeted one specific group and their attitudes towards encompassing SCL in the classroom.

To collect data for this study on teachers’ perspectives about the use of SCL approach in delivering English language to SPSP trainees; Aramco apprentices, a questionnaire was developed and implemented. Measuring reliability is an essential factor to ensure that the questionnaire is reliable in order to achieve what it was devised for. Therefore, the pilot questionnaire had been distributed to ten of English language teachers to check the content validity and measure reliability. The result was there is a strong relevance of the pilot questionnaire to the questions and hypothesis of the study. The split half method is used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, in which the statements of the questionnaire have a purpose, for this corresponding score.

### 3. Results

Based on the data provided in the questionnaire, it is obvious that 94.3% of the responds use SCL in the classrooms whereas 5.7% of responds do not use SCL. 80% disagree that the shift from TCL to SCL may hinder their teaching whereas 14.30% agree and 5.70% neutral. In terms of classroom management; (37.10%) disagreed that SCL can help the teacher in managing the classroom. However, 62.90% agree that SCL help in managing the classroom. One of the controversial aspects of SCL is adopting SCL in small classrooms is easier than adopting it in large classrooms? The results show that 77.10% disagree that SCL can – only – be applied to small classroom whereas 14.30% agree that it can be only applied to small classrooms whereas 8.60% are neutral. Nevertheless, this indicates that adoption of SCL is applicable to both small and large classrooms. SCL helps the students to talk more and speak English better than when using TCL or any other methodology. This is obvious in the result of the positive effects of SCL; 80% agree that SCL improves the students’ performance, however, 5.7% disagree and 14.70% are neutral. The responses approved that when applying SCL in the classroom; it enhances problem solving and reduces the margin of mistakes and this the most importance achievement that SCL has implemented. The results are as follows: 88.60% agree whereas 5.70% disagree 5.70 0% neutral. SCL enhances students’ cooperation as per the

results of the questionnaire; 88.60% agree whereas 5.7% disagree and 5.70% are neutral. According to the results mentioned above, many advantages and differences are made by adopting SCL. The students’ performance has improved and their readiness to accept SCL as a means of learning foreign language is encouraging. Different aspects of students’ such as their critical thinking, problem solving and brainstorming have improved in a distinguished way.

**Table 1. I always use SCL in teaching**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always	33	94.3%
Never	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

**Table 2. Shifting from TCL to SCL hinder my teaching**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	5	14.3%
Neutral	2	5.7%
Disagree	28	80%
Total	35	100%

**Table 3. SCL helps me to manage my classroom**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	22	62.9%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	13	37.1%
Total	35	100%

**Table 4. SCL is only applicable in small groups of students**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	5	14.3%
Neutral	3	8.6%
Disagree	27	77.1%
Total	35	100%

**Table 5. SCL helps students to speak better English**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	28	80%
Neutral	5	14.7%
Disagree	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

**Table 6. SCL improves students’ performance (critical thinking)**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	31	88.6%
Neutral	2	5.7%
Disagree	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

**Table 7. SCL enhances problem solving**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Agree	31	88.6%
Neutral	2	5.7%
Disagree	2	5.7%
Total	35	100%

## 4. Discussion

The conducted previous studies have indicated to the improvements achieved when adopting Student-centered learning approach. One of these studies is a study carried out by Elaine Sayre in 2013 and titled “integrating student-centered learning to promote critical thinking in high school social studies classrooms”. This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of integrating student-centered methods in high school social studies classrooms as a means of promoting critical thinking skills. All students were given the same pretest and posttests. Students were divided into three groups: one was taught using student-centered methods, one was taught using teacher-centered methods, and one was the control group and was not directly taught by anyone. The results of the study showed that all groups made some degree of increases from their pretest to their posttest, but the average change for the student-centered group was more than the teacher-centered group, and double that of the control group. What these scores are showing is that student-centered teaching did promote changes in a test that was composed of mostly higher-order thinking questions. The fact that the average change of the student-centered group was more than that of the other two groups proves my hypothesis that student-centered teaching can promote critical thinking in the high school social studies classroom. Another study titled (Factors influencing the Implementation of Student-Centered Learning in the Department of Occupational Therapy, a case of KMTC Nairobi Campus) conducted by Noel Tanui, 2012. In the results of this study the teachers stated that student – centered learning broaden the student knowledge, helps them to come up with study programs, make the students to be independent learners. They continue to state that in student – centered learning enable them to get knowledge not only passing knowledge to them, also it is one way where student read more and understand widely.

### 4.1. The Findings

- The findings of this study showed that teachers were largely motivated and ready to encompass Student-Centered Learning in teaching English language as a foreign language.
- Despite the challenges and the factors that may hinder applying this new method, the teachers and the students are ready to adopt this methodology.
- Comparing SCL to TCL, it is clear that SCL is the best methodology that can be applied and meet the needs of the curriculum designed by specialized educational companies such as Pearson.
- According to the findings, applying SCL has made big difference in learning styles and improved communication skills needed by the trainees since they work in the field of petroleum, which needs high competency and proficiency in dealing with English language as a means of communication.
- The majority – if not all – of the instructors has applied SCL in their classrooms since it is one of SPSP and TQ policies to deliver English language.

- SCL improves the trainees’ performance and enriches critical thinking, enhances group work to better results and problem solving. Applying SCL is not such an easy job, it needs training courses such (TTT, Train The Trainer) which is held by Saudi Aramco, one of SPS founders and a major shareholder. Other - on the job - training courses have been held in the institute. These courses resulted in teamwork application to SCL and that reflected on the trainees’ performance and made SPSP reputable polytechnic.
- The curriculum designed for the trainees to assist them to acquire English language and be able to communicate in English; that meets SCL target in making the trainees good English speakers when they finish the first year of pure English, then they move to job skills and later graduate and join their companies such Saudi Aramco
- Regarding the factors that may hinder implementation of SCL in SPSP, the expected factors are refuted by the results of the fifth part of the questionnaire.
- Large classrooms, social backgrounds, restrictions, and the administrative work burden do not hinder implementing SCL in the classrooms.
- After identifying the factors that hinder implementation of SCL, the performance continuous development courses should be conducted to overcome such factors.
- The innovative and challenging nature of SCL, as it continues to change and expand, will require teachers to adapt and change the way they approach teaching and learning.

### 4.2. Recommendations

Based on the results obtained from this study, the researcher recommend the following:

- This study examined the readiness of teachers to encompass SCL approach in the classrooms, the difference SCL makes in trainees’ performance and the factors that hinder implementing SCL. The relevant authorities should regard to what extent, and how English teachers actually apply SCL in the classrooms.
- Observations may also help reveal the positive impacts of Student-Centered Learning.
- Also, case studies can be conducted to understand how teachers plan the integration of communicative approaches and examine the students’ feedback regarding communicative approach as well.

### 4.3. Suggestions for Further Studies

- This research has revealed some views and experiences of a group of teachers of English Language work for TQ Training and Education / SPSP Dammam Project concerning their views on the implementation of Student-Centered Learning Approach to Saudi Aramco Apprentices.
- Due to the scope of the issue and the limitations of the study, the results are not able to represent the generalized condition for all English Language

teachers in any Aramco ITC. This study only looks at the experience and views of thirty-five English Language teachers in TQ Training and Education / SPSP Dammam Project. However, further studies need to be conducted with different groups of teachers of English Language in Aramco ITCs all over the KSA, so that generalization can be made.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the questionnaire conducted, it is clear that SCL approach has great effect on the competences and skills of the learners. The improvement of the research can be concluded that the adoption of SCL approach into teaching in SPSP is regarded as a distinction. Compared to TCL, SCL has made great difference when applied despite the alleged hinders. The awareness of the importance of SCL in teaching has paved the way for the academic department in SPSP to adopt and then impose this approach as a distinction factor. The importance of mastering English language for polytechnic students and the importance of English as a means of communication in the field of oil and gas industry were major factors to encompass SCL in teaching. Since that, the students will move to the technical department to receive technical training where all the equipment and machines with labels, user's guide and instructions in English language, more attention and care must be given. The students' competence has improved according to the results and according to reports received from the polytechnic's sponsors. Collaboration among students is in an integral component of the SCL approach. Working as a team according to Kohen, (1992) can create a positive interdependence and individual accountability among learners as each member to contribute to the team product and thus is in charge of helping team mates. They should create a learning environment that stimulates and challenge learners, foster critical thinking and the process of knowledge construction. Despite all that SCL could make the difference in English language teaching if it is adopted by motivated teachers, appropriate curriculum and willing students.

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