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INTEGRATING A STUDENT-CENTERED APPROACH INTO ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES

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Abstract: This article examines the integration of student-centered approaches into English language teaching (ELT), highlighting strategies that actively engage learners and promote independent learning. It discusses practical techniques such as thematic questioning, pre-teaching vocabulary, podcast-based listening, post-listening text analysis, and classroom discussions or debates. These methods foster learner autonomy, critical thinking, collaboration, and communicative competence. By redefining the teacher's role from knowledge provider to facilitator, students gain greater responsibility for their learning, which enhances both comprehension and engagement. The article outlines the pedagogical rationale behind each activity and illustrates how student-centered practices can transform traditional classrooms into interactive, learner-focused environments.

Keywords: student-centered learning; English language teaching; active learning; listening comprehension; learner autonomy; classroom debate.

Introduction:

Over the past few decades, English language teaching (ELT) has gradually evolved from traditional teacher-centered methods toward more student-centered approaches. This shift recognizes that meaningful learning occurs when students are active participants rather than passive recipients of information. A student-centered classroom emphasizes learner autonomy, interaction, and reflection, encouraging students to construct knowledge through authentic communication and collaboration. Implementing such an approach requires thoughtful lesson design in which each stage actively engages learners in exploring, questioning, and expressing ideas.

Literature Review:

Student-centered learning has become a cornerstone of contemporary ELT, emphasizing the

active involvement of learners in the educational process. Nunan (2013) argues that student-centered instruction encourages learners to take ownership of their progress by engaging in decision-making and self-assessment. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory further supports this concept, proposing that knowledge is socially constructed through interaction within the Zone of Proximal Development, where teachers and peers provide essential scaffolding.

Brown (2007) highlights that meaningful learning takes place when students are cognitively, emotionally, and socially engaged. Benson (2013) adds that learner autonomy develops through opportunities for reflection, choice, and self-direction. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014) demonstrate that communicative and task-based methodologies—core elements of student-centered teaching—enhance motivation and language proficiency. Collectively, these perspectives affirm that student-centered approaches empower learners to become active, confident users of English.

Engaging Learners through Thematic Questioning

A student-centered lesson often begins with inquiry. Instead of introducing a topic through direct explanation, teachers can spark curiosity by posing thought-provoking, theme-related questions. For example, before exploring topics like environmental issues or cultural traditions, the teacher might ask:

"What comes to your mind when you hear this topic?"

"How is this issue reflected in your community?"

These questions activate learners' prior knowledge and personal experiences, creating an immediate connection to the lesson. Such interactions not only warm up the classroom but also encourage learners to think critically and take ownership of their learning from the outset.

Building Vocabulary Before Listening

Pre-listening vocabulary activities play a vital role in preparing learners for comprehension tasks. Instead of rote memorization, interactive techniques—such as matching words with meanings or images—help students internalize new vocabulary collaboratively [6]. Discussing word meanings, usage, and connotations deepens understanding and boosts confidence. When students are familiar with key vocabulary, they approach listening tasks with greater readiness and engagement, which leads to more effective comprehension and retention.

Guess what's happening

This task involves showing students a picture or a series of pictures (like a mini-comic strip) related to a listening topic and asking them to guess and discuss what's happening. If it's a series of pictures, you can ask students to tell a mini-story about what's happening in the pictures and how it might relate to listening.

Example: Students are listening to a dialogue about how to apologize properly in English. Teacher can show students this picture and ask them who they see, what's happening, how they think, what these people are saying, and what they might say.

Quotations

This is an excellent exercise not only as a pre-listening exercise but also as a warm-up. Choose a quote related to listening (or use quotes from the textbook, if available). For students at a slightly higher level, you can provide a list of quotes. Students discuss the quotes and try to connect them to the listening topic.

Example: Students will be listening to a text about education. Invite students to discuss these quotes before listening:

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.

Good teaching is part preparation and part theater.

The goal of education is to replace an empty mind with an open mind.

Active Listening through Podcasts

Authentic materials like podcasts provide learners with exposure to natural language and real-world contexts. After introducing essential vocabulary, students can listen actively by taking notes, completing gap-filling tasks, or answering guiding questions. These focused tasks promote attentive listening and analytical thinking.

Podcasts also cater to diverse learning needs: students can replay segments, clarify meaning in pairs, and share interpretations through discussion. In this way, they become active listeners who construct meaning collaboratively rather than passively consuming information [7].

Post-Listening Reflection and Text-Based Tasks

Providing a transcript after listening helps learners consolidate their understanding and analyze the text more deeply. Activities such as comprehension questions, True/False/Not Given statements, and short written responses encourage close reading and language analysis. Teachers guide students to notice key linguistic features, discuss alternative interpretations, and reflect on strategies that supported comprehension [8]. This reflective stage bridges listening and reading skills, reinforcing accuracy, vocabulary retention, and overall comprehension.

Concluding a lesson with a discussion or debate allows learners to synthesize information and express their viewpoints. Such communicative tasks foster fluency, reasoning, and confidence while encouraging students to defend opinions and respond thoughtfully to peers. Discussions and debates also nurture respect for diverse perspectives and help learners use English as a tool for meaningful communication and argumentation. Here, the teacher acts as a moderator, promoting balanced participation and maintaining a supportive learning atmosphere.

Conclusion

Integrating student-centered principles into English teaching requires more than new activities—it demands a transformation in mindset. The teacher becomes a facilitator of learning, while students take an active role in shaping their educational journey. Through inquiry-based questioning, vocabulary exploration, authentic listening, collaborative tasks, and reflective discussion, learners develop both linguistic competence and a sense of autonomy. A classroom grounded in these principles becomes an interactive, dynamic environment where students listen, think, and speak with purpose. Ultimately, student-centered teaching equips learners with the skills, confidence, and motivation needed to use English effectively beyond the classroom.

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