

## THE EFFECT OF STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH VS. TEACHER CENTERED TEACHING ON KURDISH EFL UNIVERSITY LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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(Received: February 20, 2023; Accepted for Publication: July 12, 2023)

### ABSTRACT

The popularity of the student-centred learning approach that focuses on the learner as the main element in the teaching-learning process highlights a noticeable shift from the teacher-centred teaching where a teacher is viewed to be the only element that is operating such a system. On this basis, The current research attends to the investigation of the effect of the student-centered approach on Kurdish EFL university students' performance in English grammar. It is hypothesized that the student-centred approach positively affects performance in English grammar at university level. To bring about this objective, and validate the already stated hypothesis, 66 3<sup>rd</sup> year Kurdish EFL students were randomly chosen from among the students at the Department of English, College of Basic Education in Amedi, University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region. The selected sample of the students was divided into two groups: experimental and control. Both groups were subjected to a pre-test that comprised certain topics of English grammar and showed almost identical levels of performance. That was followed by carrying out the experiment of teaching the experimental group according to the student-centered approach, and the control group on the basis of the traditional method of teaching, i.e. teacher-centered approach. On the completion of the experiment, the two groups were retested by a post-test. On scoring the two groups' performance on the post-test, and applying the independent samples t-test and the SPSS for inferential statistics, it was found out that the student-centered approach had positively contributed to Kurdish EFL university learners' performance in English grammar compared to the teacher centered approach. Such a positive effect of the student-centred approach evidenced the importance of applying it by teachers of subjects other than English grammar at university level.

**KEYWORDS:** Student-centered approach; teacher-centered teaching; English grammar; EFL learners.

### INTRODUCTION

Student-centered learning (SCL) has frequently been viewed as a pedagogical approach for enhancing the goals of education by clarifying the subject matter and/or improving students' learning of the soft skills and transversal abilities, mainly utilizing critical thinking and collaborating with others; objectives that cannot be effectively achieved by the application of the traditional method of teaching and have been proved to be the driving force behind the noticeable advancement in educational institutions worldwide especially if we know that the significance of having these skills and competences is becoming more widely understood. This is enhanced by the fact that the traditional teaching, i.e. teacher-centred teaching

(TST) at educational institutions lacks the instruments required to bring about this transition and is duly unable to meet learners' develop of better critical thinking and other effective skills and abilities. On this basis, a number of higher education institutions have started using SCL approaches so as to dramatically influence how students build transversal and generic skills and abilities whose development is positively connected with the proportion of students who participate in class, their level of cognitive development, and the nature of their engagement (Altun, 2023).

#### The Aim of the Research

The current research aims at investigating the role of SCL in developing EFL university students achievement in English grammar as compared to TCT.

### **The Hypotheses**

This research hypothesizes that

1. SCL improves Kurdish EFL learners' performance in English grammar more than TCT.
2. There is a significant difference between SCL and TST approaches in improving Kurdish EFL learners' performance in grammar.

### **Research Questions**

This research further seeks answers to the following questions:

1. To what extent does SCL improve Kurdish EFL learners' performance in grammar?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the posttest of grammar at the significance level 0.05?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Student-Centred Learning: Definition**

According to Attard, Iorio, Geven, and Santa (2010), there is no universally agreed-upon definition of SCL, despite the fact that many educated policymakers use the word. Similar to this, Lea, Stephenson, and Troy (2003) claim that there are many different definitions of SCL and that numerous academics and practitioners have emphasized various facets of the learning and teaching process.

According to Collins and O'Brien, SCL is an educational strategy in which students have influence over the course material, activities, resources, and rate of learning (2003). The learner (student) is at the core of the learning process in this instructional strategy. The teacher gives students the chance to study independently and from one another while also supporting them in acquiring the necessary skills.

Felder and Brent (2003) state that, SCL has regularly been shown to be superior to the traditional TCT). SCL is expected to expand instruction to include new interests that provide great student achievement rather than diminish the importance of the instructional component of classroom activities.

SCL is a responsive, collaborative, problem-centered, and democratic teaching technique where both students and the instructor decide how and when learning occurs (Dupin-Bryant,

2004). Contrarily, TCT is viewed as an autocratic, formally regulated type of instruction where the professor dictates what and when students study. Drill and practice-based lecture-based "transmission" modalities of instruction are usually linked to TCT. TCT typically uses textbooks and emphasizes teacher questions and discussion more so than student talk. The needs of the students are given priority in SCT as opposed to TCT. SCT is concentrated on the needs, skills, interests, and learning preferences of the students, where the teacher functions as a learning facilitator (Weimer, 2002).

### **Principles of Student-Centred Learning**

Just like any other pedagogical approach, SCL has a set of tenets and principles that, when soundly implemented, puts the teacher on the right track and facilitates the achievement of the planned for objectives. In this respect, Weimer (2002) lists the following five principles of SCL:

- SCL shifts the power dynamic from the teacher to the students; this promotes peer participation and active learning.

- SCL encourages critical thinking and helps students generate knowledge rather than memorization of a list of facts by building on and questioning prior learning.

- SCL positions the teacher as a facilitator and contributor rather than being an authoritarian and knowledge director..

- SCL offers students back control over their education by enabling them to recognize their own learning preferences, requirements, and strengths.

- SCL employs efficient assessment to promote learning and direct future practice.

Additionally, Attard et al. (2010: 3) put forward the following principles:

- A constant process of reflection is required by SCL as no context may have a single SCL style that may be applied indefinitely since according to the SCL philosophy, institutions, teachers, and students must frequently reflect on their teaching, learning, and infrastructure systems in order to improve learning experiences and ensure that the intended learning outcomes of a specific course or program component are satisfied in a way that promotes critical thinking and transferable skills.

- There is not a "One Size Fits All" solution at SCL. Understanding that all higher education institutions, all teachers, and all students are unique is a core tenet of SCL. These all have different purposes and cover a range of topics. SCL is therefore a learning approach that needs

to be taught using ways that are appropriate for the students who will be using it. Added to this, each context must be acceptable for these learning support systems.

-There are many different learning styles among students. Every student has different educational demands. Some students learn best by doing, while some learn best by making mistakes. Still some students find that reading books helps them learn a lot.

-Students' interests and requirements are diverse. Each student has expectations outside of the classroom. Others are drawn to cultural activities, while others are drawn to sports or organizations that represent them. Students may have mental health issues, be parents, or have physical or medical impairments.

- SCL views freedom of choice as crucial requirement for successful learning. Any offer should have a reasonable amount of variety because students like to learn new things; as such learning can be organized in a more traditional, disciplined fashion or in liberal methods.

-When developing learning, the learner's personal and professional situations must be taken into consideration. For instance, it is pointless to attempt to teach learners if they already have a thorough understanding of it; on the other hand, if they are adept at conducting lengthy research, it could be more beneficial to assist them with theory. By allowing students to offer personal tales to demonstrate a subject, personal experience can be leveraged to inspire them.

-Each student ought to be in charge of their own education. Student participation should be welcomed during the development of courses, curricula, and assessments. Students should be recognized as active participants who have a stake in the management of higher education. Engaging students in the design of their education is the best approach to ensure that each student's learning is more individualized.

-SCL emphasizes enabling rather than preaching. When it comes to merely imparting information and knowledge to students, the teacher is often in control of preparation and content (telling). By allowing individuals the flexibility to autonomously think, process, analyze, synthesize, evaluate, apply, and solve problems, the SCL approach attempts to empower students.

- Collaboration between instructors and students is required for learning requirements. SCL calls

for collaboration between students and professors in order to establish a shared understanding of learning difficulties and their concerns as stakeholders within their particular institution and to jointly suggest solutions that may benefit both groups. Students will gain from such teamwork as the two groups get used to working together as partners. SCL, which emphasizes that learning happens through a positive relationship between the two groups, values collaboration greatly.

To conclude, as viewed by Brandes and Ginnis (1986), some other fundamental principles of SCL are the following:

- The teacher plays the roles of facilitator and supervisor;

- The dynamic between learners is more equitable and fosters development;

- The learners become more self-aware as a result of the learning process; and

- Concurrent cognitive areas are active.

### **Student-Centred Learning Vs. Teacher-Centred Teaching**

Although SCL and TCT have many similarities, according to Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke and Curran (2003), they also differ in a number of crucial ways, each having their own advantages and disadvantages. The following are some of these differences:

- In TCT, students work alone on exercises related to the teacher's presentation during or after class, whereas in SCL, students cooperate in groups or pairs in accordance with the conditions and objectives of the activity. When teaching and learning are enjoyable, convivial, upbeat, and satisfying activities, the students are more likely to understand the lesson since they are actively engaged in it.

- The TCT shows students as largely passive while teachers are active because teachers are the main emphasis of this method, which is believed to make sense given that teachers are familiar with the content while students are not. The students' involvement in the learning process is reduced in this scenario (Al-Zube, 2013). However, with the SCL, both the teacher and the students are active participants as they jointly decide how the learners should acquire the necessary knowledge and share responsibility for learning.

- There is a big difference between the two approaches in a classroom situation where there is little to no background noise. This is due to the fact that since the teacher is the one who imparts knowledge, students will naturally keep

quiet in order to obtain the information they require about the subject from the teacher. On the other hand, class time is dynamic and boisterous because it is spent mostly in groups and discussions in the SCL (Jeanne, 2009). This approach requires the teacher to be comfortable with the risk that the students will make mistakes that they might not recognize and correct. The TCT places a strong emphasis on objectives and how much teachers support them. As a result, there are differences in the starting point of the analysis and the emphasis put on encouraging learning. The TCT distinguishes between the teaching and testing or evaluating processes. In this system, instruction comes first, and then an assessment is done to see if the students have understood what the teachers have taught them. SCL, as opposed to TCT, combines instruction and evaluation into a single process. As the lesson is being delivered, the students work in pairs or groups to complete assignments (Al-Zu'be, 2013). Evaluations are used by the SCL to monitor learning (Hayo, 2007). By recognizing students' areas of weakness, they do not comprehend during the learning process, the teachers can then come up with ways to make the concept more memorable. As opposed to the SCL, where assessments are used to diagnose and promote learners' learning,

- The two approaches also vary in how they put the students' intended learning to the test. The TCT examines the targeted learning indirectly through objectively scored exams, whereas the SCL tests it directly through portfolios, performances, papers, and projects (Good & Brophy, 2003).

- On comparing the effectiveness and influence of the SCL approach to TCT, the following differences become prominent. TCT instructional strategies do not help students in higher education acquire new soft skills or promote critical thinking. Students' ability to build general competencies and soft skills is favorably correlated with activities like group work, critical analysis, and increased peer contact. Any transition to a particular form of SCL, like group work, must be carefully watched to prevent unfavorable effects like a vocal minority dominating the discussion. Students who actively engage in both the teaching and learning processes as well as those who provide and receive more feedback fall into this category.

To conclude, Huba and Freed (2000) highlight the points of contrast between TCT and SCL as presented in the following figure:

<b>Teacher-Centered Teaching (TCT)</b>	<b>Student –Centered Learning (SCL)</b>
Knowledge is transmitted from the teacher to the students..	Students acquire knowledge through gathering and synthesizing and integrating with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and so on.
Students passively receive information.	Students are actively involved.
Emphasis is on acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used.	Emphasis is on using and understanding knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in the real-life contexts.
The teacher's role is to be primary information giver and primary evaluator.	Teacher's role is to coach and facilitate. Teacher and students evaluate learning together.
Teaching and assessing are separate.	Teaching and assessing are intertwined.
Assessment is used to monitor learning.	Assessment is used to promote students and diagnose points of difficulty, strength and weakness.
Emphasis is on right answers.	Emphasis is on generating better questions and learning from errors.
Desired learning is assessed indirectly through the use of objectively scored tests.	Desired learning is assessed directly through papers, projects, performances, portfolios and the like.
Culture is comparative and individualistic.	Culture is cooperative, collaborative and supportive.
Only students are viewed as learners	Teacher and students learn together.

All in all, whether employing TCT or SCL, the teacher has responsibilities to take into account in order to successfully teach the topic and help the students benefit from it. In these

educational systems, the teacher's responsibilities are varied (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Wolfgang, 2001). The TCT places more demands on teachers than the SCL

does (Blumberg, 2009). Giving the students information about their area of study may be one of these responsibilities. As a result, they must go beyond merely imparting what they already know and instead study new information from a number of sources and communicate the subject in a variety of ways based on the needs of the students. The teacher's obligation is lessened by the SCL because they only offer the content when asked for by the students.

### **Methodology**

This main section on methodology is intended to shed light on the population and sample of the study side by side with the teaching materials represented by selecting 5 topics of English grammar to be taught to the experimental group. The research tools and procedures adopted to conduct the practical part of this research form further points of departure that this section aims to cover. This section also accounts for analysis the two groups', control and experimental, scores on the pre-and post-tests and the discussion of the results arrived at in the light of the analysis. It ends with a subsection that compares the results of the current research with those of a number of related studies.

### **Population and Sample**

The population of the current research comprises all the students at the Dept. of English, College of Basic Education in Amedi, University of Duhok, Kurdistan Region, Iraq. To achieve the planned-for aims, a purposive sample of 66 3<sup>rd</sup> stage students was selected excluding the absentees and those who participated in the pilot study. All the members of the sample completed their pre-university education in Kurdistan Region and came from different areas of Kurdistan Region-Iraq. The purpose behind choosing third stage college students is that they have been taught the subject understudy, i.e. English grammar and were supposed to be an advanced stage that studies EFL in Iraqi-Kurdistan Region. In other words, they are supposed to have satisfactory knowledge of EFL. Finally, the selected sample was divided into 2 groups, control and experimental.

### **Teaching Materials**

The teaching program included teaching some grammatical subjects selected from the third year curriculum prescribed by the Department of English language. The subjects were: determiners ( quantity terms ), subject-verb agreement( concord) , types of if-

conditionals , types of prepositions and their meanings and the voice ( active and passive).

Before starting teaching the English grammar course based on SCL, a question sheet consisting of 5 questions was prepared for the purpose of the pre-and posttests. To ensure the suitability and validity of the questions, the question sheet was presented to a panel of juries from different universities in the Region. Following the experts notes and feedback, some modifications were made to the question sheet. This was followed by piloting the question sheet twice, with an interval of 2 weeks, to a sample of students to ensure the reliability of the questions.

Accordingly, 5 grammatical topics were taught to the selected sample over 24 lessons and according to SCL. The teaching materials were represented by a text book, worksheets, presentations on the Power Point and data show, quizzes and assignment. Added to that, different teaching techniques such as brainstorming, peer discussion, group work, role play activities , flipped method, games in the form of competition and jigsaws were used in managing the teaching of such lessons. The reason behind choosing English grammar was that the students were supposed to have a satisfactory level of knowledge of English language; a point that made the program run flexibly and smoothly.

### **The Research Tools and Procedures**

The tools used in the current research included a pretest and a posttest that were designed in such a way to investigate the effect of SCL on the sample of students' progress and achievement in grammar. Additionally, certain procedures, represented by what has already been stated, were adopted to ensure the sound and appropriate preparation and administration of the two tests and the scoring of the tests papers.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion of Results**

#### **Analysis (1)**

**Aim (1):** Identifying the difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest of grammar.

**Research Question (2):** Is there any statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05 (the hypothetical significant degree for social sciences).

**Hypothesis (1):** There is no statistically significant difference between the control

and experimental groups on the pre-test of English grammar at the significance level 0.05.

To bring about the preceding aim, give answer to the research question and validate the hypothesis, the mean and the standard deviation

of the two groups ( control and the experimental) were extracted; then the (t-test) to the two independent samples (independent sample test) was applied and the following results were obtained:

**Table (1):-** The t-value results of the two independent sample-test of the pretest

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value		P Value	Sig.
					calculated	Tabular classifier		
Pre _ test	Control	30	37.17	9.759	0.315	2.00 (0.05) (64)	0.75	P > 0.05
	Experimental	36	38.14	14.345				

## DISCUSSION

It is evident from Table 1 that the calculated t-value (0.315) is less than the tabulated t-value (2.00) at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom (64). Also the p-value (0.75) is higher than the level of .05. This means that there is no statistically significance difference between the mean scores of both control and experimental groups on the pre-test as the scores of the two groups were almost similar. The reason behind such similarity of the scores is that before the pre-test (in the previous years of study) both groups were taught according to the same teaching approach, namely TCT. This affirms that any one of the two could be selected as the experimental or the control group since both of them had the same chance to learn according to the the new adopted approach, viz. SCL. According, hypothesis no.1 which reads: There is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on

the pretest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05 is accepted.

### Analysis (2)

**Aim (2):** Identifying the difference between the control and experimental groups on the posttest of grammar.

**Research Question (3):** Is there any statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the posttest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05?

**Hypothesis (3):** There is no statistically significant difference between the ontrol and experimental groups on the posttest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05.

To bring about the preceding aim, provide answer to the research question and validate the hypothesis, the mean and the standard deviation of the two groups (control and the experimental) were extracted; then the (t-test) was applied to the two independent samples (independent sample test) and the following results were obtained:

**Table (2): -** The t-value results of the two independent sample-test of the posttest

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t- value		p-value	Sig.
					Calculated	Tabular (classifier)		
Post _ test	Control	30	57.07	14.147	2.74	2.00 (0.05) (64)	0.008	P < 0.05
	Experimental	36	67.36	16.002				

## DISCUSSION

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value (2.74) is higher than the tabulated t-value (2.00) at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom (64). Also the p-value (0.75) is less

than the level of .05. This means that there is a statistically significance difference between the mean scores of both control and experimental groups on the posttest in favor of the experimental group. Such a difference proves the effectiveness of applying the adopted SCL approach in teaching English grammar to the experimental group and hence improving their performance compared to the control group. A further reason behind the experimental group's better performance is the implementation of various student-centred activities in teaching English grammar to the experimental group. Accordingly, hypothesis no.2 which reads: there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the posttest of English grammar at the significance level 0.05 is rejected.

In light of the two preceding analyses including their pertinent aims, research questions and hypotheses, it can be claimed and as answer to the Research Question no.1 which reads: To what extent does SCL improve Kurdish EFL learners' performance in grammar? that SCL improves Kurdish EFL learners' performance in English grammar at university level.

### **The Current Research Results Compared to the Related Studies Results**

In this section, the results of the current research are compared to those of a number of related studies:

The results of the present study are in agreement with those of Ruda's study (1975) as two groups of students were compared; a group was taught according to the SCL approach and another on the basis of TCT. The results showed that the SCL class was more engaging than the TCT one. Also, the SCL course provided more learning than the TCT one as the final grades demonstrated their greater accomplishment.

Similarly, the findings of the current research agree with those by Gravoso and Pasa (2008) who conducted a study to investigate the influential effects of SCL on the learning quality. The environment of SCL course tended to make the majority of the students engage in knowledge construction; just opposite to those who joined the TCT course where the

environment enhanced only the amount of information sent via the teacher.

Additionally, the findings of the current research are in line with those by Geisli (2009) who focused on discovering the effect of SCL on learner's success and Bell (2010) who obtained similar findings by applying one of the activities of SCL, namely Problem-Based Learning in a three-year British study in the subject of arithmetic. Both researches concluded that by dividing the participants into control and experimental groups, the percentage of success of the SCL groups was remarkably higher than the group where the TCT was applied.

The findings of the present research tally with those arrived at by Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourdiani (2012) who conducted a study to investigate the effect of SCL and TCT within the Iranian context. The researchers concluded that there was significant difference between the mean scores of two groups taught by the two referred to approaches. As such, they recommended the implementation of the process of SCL so as to develop the Iranian EFL learners' writing skills.

Finally, the current research has come out with findings that agree with those by Al-Zu'be (2013) who explored the differences, if any, in the effect of SCL and TCT on teaching English as a foreign language. The researcher concluded that each approach had its own strengths and weaknesses yet the SCL approach was recognized as more suited for teaching English as a foreign language.

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of the current research is to identify the effect of SCL compared to the TCT on Kurdish EFL learners' performance in English grammar at university level. The results obtained from the two tests (pre and posttests) revealed that the teaching of the experimental group according to the SCL approach and the control group on the basis of the TCT affected students' performance in the selected topics of the English grammar in favor of the experimental group. It is true that both approaches improved Kurdish EFL learners' performance in grammar, yet the SCL, in the light of the significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups, proved to be more effective in improving the learners' knowledge of English grammar represented by the 5 topics to be taught. In other words, the

hypothesis affirmed that SCL and TCT were different in improving Kurdish EFL learners' performance in English grammar.

In the light of the positive effect of the implementation of the SCL approach in teaching English grammar at university level, it is recommended that teachers of other subjects, whether English Language specific or not, should teach according to this updated approach that is getting much popularity in the universities of KR, Iraq as it has been set as a focal module that is taught at the Pedagogy Centres throughout the Region.

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