Teacher as a facilitator - different types of activities in student-centred classrooms

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Abstract: *Students cannot be 'taught' - they can only be helped to learn. In a student-centred classroom, the teacher's role is to help and encourage students develop their skills, but without relinquishing our more traditional role as a source of information, advice, and knowledge. In a student-centred classroom, the teacher and students are a team working together. A student-centred approach helps students to develop a "can-do" attitude. In a student-centred classroom, students are involved in the learning process and become committed to improving their English. The process is effective, motivating, and enjoyable without the role of the teachers and student-centred activities, which is focused in the article.*

Keywords: *Student-centred classroom, facilitator*

1. Introduction

In a student-centred classroom, students do not depend on their teachers all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice and praise. They do not ignore each other but look at each other and communicate each other. They value each other's contributions; they cooperate, learn from each other and help each other. When in difficulty or in doubt, they do ask the teacher for help or advice but only after they have tried to solve the problems among themselves. The emphasis is on working together, in pairs, in groups and as the whole class. Their teacher helps them develop their language skills.

A student -centred classroom is not a place where the students decide what they want to learn and what they want to do. It is the place where we consider the needs of the students, as a group or as individuals, and encourage them to participate in the learning process all the time. The teacher's role is more that of a facilitator than instructor; the students are active participants in the learning process. The teacher helps guide the students, manage their activities, and direct their learning. Being a teacher means helping people learn and in a student-centred classroom, the teacher is a member of the class as a participant in the learning process.

2. Content

2.1. Review Literature on Teacher's role as a facilitator

In recent years, teaching has shifted towards a more student-centered approach, where students take charge of their own learning (learner autonomy). However, this shift clashes with traditional teaching methods. Unsurprisingly, some teachers struggle to adapt to this new role, having spent years in the traditional system.

There's also confusion about whether autonomous learning means students learn entirely on their own, without any teacher involvement. This isn't the case. As Boud (1988) argues, students can still choose to be taught when they find it beneficial. Developing autonomy doesn't mean removing structure entirely; it might even require a different kind of structure than traditional methods.

Benson and Voller (1997) emphasize that teachers are still crucial. They play a vital role in helping students reach their full potential and offer ongoing guidance. Students need help developing their independent learning skills, so the need for teachers won't disappear. Instead, the role of teachers and how they teach will change (Little, 1995).

With learner autonomy becoming a growing focus in education, teachers, who play a key role in fostering this in English learning, need to adapt their approach to better support students' independent learning. Research by Ho & Crookall (1995), Reid (1996), and others highlights the various roles teachers can play in this context.

Unlike the traditional role of a knowledge provider, teachers in an autonomous learning environment take on a wider range of responsibilities. They act as guides, facilitators, assessors, and even peers, all while remaining a source of information

and a lifelong learner themselves. More specifically, teachers can:

● Help students understand and believe in the benefits of autonomous learning.

● Assess individual student needs and goals.

● Guide students in creating personalized learning plans.

● Introduce and integrate learning strategies with classroom instruction.

● Provide opportunities for students to practice and reflect on new learning strategies.

● Maintain open communication with students to monitor their progress.

● Offer feedback to help students evaluate their own learning.

● Create opportunities that nurture students' autonomous learning skills.

● Prioritize fostering positive emotions and motivation in students' English learning.

● Cultivate a harmonious classroom environment that supports learner autonomy.

While research (Ho et al., 1995; Reid, 1996) emphasizes the teacher's role in promoting learner autonomy, there's a gap in understanding student perspectives on this crucial aspect. Previous studies (McDonough, 2002; Nunan, 1988; Spratt, 1999) highlight the potential disconnect between student and teacher views on learning. Given the shift towards student-centered learning, it's crucial to understand student perspectives on teacher roles in fostering autonomy. After all, students are the ultimate beneficiaries of this skill. This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating teacher roles in developing learner autonomy from a student's point of view.

Before starting any group work, it's important to prepare students beyond just vocabulary and phrases. They need to clearly understand the task's purpose, instructions, and time constraints.

2.2. Research Design

2.2.1. Participants

Four teachers of the Foreign Language Faculty (FLF) at UFM agreed to be observed during their teaching of classes with the aim at monitoring how teachers and students perform the tasks. Those classes were learning and practising the activities from a textbook "Personal Best – B1+ Intermediate – Student's Book A – Unit 5C" by Jim Scrivener and Graham Burton (2017).

2.2.2. Data collection and analysis

When observing the teachers' teaching, notes were taken and described to serve data analysis.

2.3. Findings and discussion

After monitoring classes, different types of activities are conducted in learner-centred classroom by teachers. Some activities, like discussion and role play, are quite clearly suitable as working together activities. Others, such as writing tasks or multiple-choice and fill-the-blank exercises, may not seem suitable at first glance, but they may be just as effective and enjoyable when done in pairs or groups. Brainstorming and comparing answers can lead to very lively discussions, but they have to be in English, and we may have to convince students that it is desirable.

Reading a text is something people prefer to do on their own, without interruptions, and at their own speed if possible, looking up unfamiliar words in a dictionary from time to time. To save time in class, we may ask students to read the text before the lesson. If there are comprehension questions, we may ask them to do those at home, too. But reading together in class can be enjoyable, with students helping one another to understand and sharing reactions. Even multiple-choice questions can be the basis for discussion in pairs. It is much more interesting for students to discuss their answers than to just be told the answers.

Listening is also something people usually do as an individual activity. Comprehension tasks or questions help students understand better, but doing such tasks alone can make them feel isolated, especially when they do not understand the content of the conversation too well.

Discussions are typical of any student-centred classroom. The best discussions involve students talking about personal experiences and giving opinions. Discussion work best in pairs or small groups because then more people can give their views. In larger groups or in a whole class, once one person has given his or her view, everyone else can only agree or disagree.

Some students feel less inhibited if they have a role to play and can escape from 'being themselves' for a while. Role plays may involve one student playing in a tourist/customer/boss, interacting with another student playing a tour guide/sales assistant/ post office clerk/employee. Such non-realistic roles can be problematic for some students, but fun for

others.

A lot of communication involves bridging an information gap. You know things I do not know, and I know things you do not know. Often this is hard for students to do naturally in class, either because they might not know enough facts or because everyone knows the same facts. We can simulate the information gap by giving two participants different information, which they have to share.

value of such activities and are willing participants in the game.

Longer writing tasks are best done as homework; this saves time in class and allows students to spend as long as they need on them. However, writing tasks also can be prepared by working together, brainstorming ideas, marshalling your thoughts, and making notes. The actual writing will be done as homework, then, back in class in groups, students read one another's work, react to it, and perhaps suggest small improvements.

Puzzles, problems, and brainteasers can also stimulate meaningful communication if students work together to solve them. Some students are less adept at solving problems than the others, and maybe it is kind of 'unfair' to make them use their brains in what is supposed to be an English class, where smartness or math skills should not be favoured. But a student-centred approach has to be a 'whole person' approach; otherwise, students will be 'just practicing' rather than really communicating.

3. Conclusion

As students become more confident, they will do more and more student-centred work, but we must strike a balance between leading the students and letting them have control of their learning. This balance may be different from class to class. Some classes may not respond so well to autonomy and demand that all their activities be teacher-led, but giving in to students may not be in their best interests. It is to persuade and cajole them into spending an increasing amount of time on student-centred activities. Thus students can be greatly encouraged to get involved in class activities. At the same time, teachers are supposed to devote more energy to developing students' interest and enthusiasm in communicative activities.

It therefore follows that facing different students, to be exact, students with different English proficiency, teachers should offer appropriate guidance, instruction and help in developing learner autonomy after knowing and understanding more about students. In other words, in different contexts, teachers should provide corresponding guidance for students in terms of their different English proficiency in an attempt to promote students' English autonomous learning ability and eventually facilitate students' progress in English learning

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