
ENHANCING STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING APPROACH THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES

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Abstract

This study investigates the students' perceptions of student-centred learning approach through group activities. Mixed method was employed for the present study using a Likert Scale questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and observation checklist for data collection. The Likert Scale questionnaires were analysed quantitatively, however, the semi-structured interview questions and observation checklist were analysed qualitatively. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that students preferred group activities compared to individual ones because they found it more interesting and motivating. The findings of the study revealed that group activity is predominantly valuable for the students' learning English language. Group activities encourage students' interaction which supports student's development in language, concept and content learning. In addition, the results of the study showed that group activities are effective for all students with different levels of proficiency. This includes English language learners, special education children as well as mainstream students. It is recommended to high school teachers to

use various group activities which can be inculcated in the classroom in order to enhance students' participations which contribute to better learning experience.

Keywords: student-centred learning, students' perception, group activities

Introduction

The term Student-Centred Learning (SCL) is widely used in teaching and learning literature. In SCL, teachers focus on the learners and encourage them to share their responsibilities for their learning. In other words, "all students' activities involve active cognitive processes, such as creating, problem solving, reasoning, decision-making, and evaluation (Mason, 2013). In addition, students are intrinsically motivated to learn due to the meaningful nature of the learning environment and activities (Wolfe, 2013)". Traditional English teaching in which teachers teach and students merely listen, discourages students' participation in language learning as they need to work on individual task most of the time. Despite homework, classroom activities are either done individually or the teacher provide

the students with some learning activities with the answers due to time limitation. For over 100 years, famous philosopher has reported on the benefits of experiential, hands-on and SCL. "Learner-centered and learner-driven approaches have been seen as ways of addressing the challenges of sustainability education, such as the uncertainty and complexity of the sustainability issues as well as the need for interdisciplinarity in solving them" (Herranen, Vesterinen, & Aksela 2018).

The old notion of classroom where students used to sit quietly and neatly in the classroom, while the teacher is up front teaching and sharing knowledge. Students seem to be sceptical about direct instruction teaching which makes them feel bored and overall dislike the subject. Learning occurs when learners engage in tasks that they are likely to encounter in the real world. The objectives believe to contribute to the concept of student-centred learning that has been credited as early as 1905 to Hayward and in 1956 to Dewey's work (Mason, 2013) theoretically. The significance of the study is that it should deliver the richness of a case study situation to fortify the influence. This includes student centred activities in the classroom and lesson plans so that better student participation can be encouraged towards learning English despite looking at it just as a subject.

Some studies have recommended that, it can be done by reducing any gap between students and teacher beliefs through learning need analysis.

Nair (2014) proved that class activities used in his research were all based on language learning which were very helpful for the students' learning improvement. A holistic approach that stresses on student-based learning, as well as the use of authentic-material which encourages students' participation in language learning. The class activities included role play, jigsaw listening, and dictation which solely required student's efforts. Unlike teacher-centred activities whereby teacher spoon feeds the students in order to complete the task given. For learning to be successful, it must be conducted as a multi-dimensional activity which reflects to the main objectives of this study.

Besides, it is significant to know how the concept of student-centred education has led to perceptual changes in relation to education, learning and teaching (Wingard, 2014). He believes that in student-centred teaching, at the stages of decision making, planning, application, and evaluation during the teaching-learning process learners participate in the process willingly, showing interest with determination. It can be said that SCL has brought about the change in the question form. Furthermore, according to has stated that contradictions between adopted values and standards in exercise, influence teacher and student relationships. Usually occurs just because teachers who are afraid to let their students to work on their own and are too concerned about the syllabus rather than the student. This will lead the teachers from not using the student-centred activities in classroom (Rost, 2015).

In addition, a study by Honigsfeld(2012) proved that student-centred activities include active learning. Students do solve problems; compose questions by themselves, answering them, or even getting involved in brainstorming sessions during class. This encourages collaborative learning where students are given a chance to work in groups when case studies or projects are given to them as tasks. Honigsfeld(2012) also believes that SCL activities and student-owned areas of the room should be used. "This help to increase the student's involvement and enthusiasm for their own learning(Spooner, 2015)".

Method

Mixed-method was employed for the present study. The sample were 80 secondary school students in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan in Malaysia. The students' levels of proficiencies were intermediate and advanced. The students were streamed into classes in the beginning of the year based on their final semester results which has conducted last year. The research instruments were employed to collect detailed information about the phenomenon under study which were semi-structured interview, Likert Scale questionnaire, and observation checklist. This method was not only used to cross check the data obtain from various research instruments, but also to obtain rich data. It is worth noting that the data collected using semi-structured interview were recorded, transcribed, and finally analysed qualitatively. The data were collected within a term which was three months. Alternatively, activities were

incorporated in the lesson to observe students' participations and they were recorded as reference. Recorded observation underwent textual and content analysis to analyse the elements which contributed to students' participations closely.

Results And Discussion

This study investigates the students' perceptions towards student-centred learning approach through group activities, which contributes to better learning and provide recommendations for several engaging activities. Based on the students' feedback in Likert Scale questionnaire, most of the students (75 participants) had positive perception towards the group activities conducted in the classroom. They justified their opinions by affirming that these new activities of learning English Language have a positive impact on their interest and understanding towards the topics taught.

Besides Likert Scale questionnaire, the researchers interviewed 15 teachers to get their views and opinions on conducting group activities to teach English in the classroom. Based on their responses, group work permits students to interchange more eagerly to absorb information in producing knowledge. Through conversation during the group activities, the students were able to customise their understanding which support their intellectual progressions. The results of the study revealed that jigsaw listening, discussion, role play activities, and the approach to them have significant effects on alleviating students' participation and improve their language learning. All

students agreed that they feel calm while participating in the group activities and that motivates them to learn more. The students expressed conclusive feelings such as enjoyment and gratitude to the learning environment for using group activities and having a learner-centre classroom to learn English. This technique assisted the students to improve their receptiveness towards English language learning. The results of the study indicated that these activities were effective in improving their academic performances as well.

Through group activities all the students agreed that they can easily discuss and obtain the answers to the questions. The researchers recorded one of the role plays which was acted by the students which they truly managed to portray the characters that they had chosen to act out. They were supposed to write the dialogues in groups before acting them using the dialogue format which was taught to them. They took only 15 minutes to prepare and they acted efficiently. Working in groups with few members using collaborative learning approaches supported the students who are low achievers to think out of the box, take risks, and develop better understandings. This helps the students to activate the higher order of thinking skills and become more self-confident in order to make progress in their oral communication skills.

The results by past studies such as (Nair, 2014; Rost, 2015 ; Spooner, 2015) showed that instead of having groups to complete a task, teachers can modify the activity also if the teacher wants as an individual task. Example as using concept

web and Plus Minus Intriguing (PLC) method which is in line with one of the researcher's idea on how to increase students' participations in learning (Nair, 2014). However, the above studies included role play, discussion, and jigsaw listening activities in increasing students' participations as conducted in the present study. To clarify further, more studies should be conducted on collaborative activities/learning to enhance English language learning using student-centre learning approach.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study showed that group activities are effective for all students with different levels of proficiency. This includes English language learners, special education children as well as mainstream students. Despite the diverse ethnic background of the students, this study proved to enhance learning and nurtures respect and friendship. Students do learn more than there is diversity in a group.

In addition, the findings of the study revealed that group activity is predominantly valuable for the students' learning English language to encourage students' interaction which supports their development in language, concept, and content learning. Moreover, positive group involvements have been shown to support student learning, retaining and overall their performances' in tertiary education (Mason, 2013). Group activities can also help students' progress skills precisely to collaborative efforts, allowing students to tackle more complex problems than they are able to do on their own. This contributes in segregating roles and responsibilities, share diverse perspectives,

pool knowledge and skills, accountable, and receive social support. It also helps in developing new approaches to resolving differences, establish a shared identity with other group members. Based on the results of this study, the students found it more effective working with their peers to emulate and develop their own voice and perspectives in relation to peers in order to improve their English language.

Group activities can turn out to be chaotic if it is not designed, supervised, and assessed in a way that promotes meaningful teamwork and deep collaboration. Although this study had a curb due to its number of participants and it was only conducted in an urban school, it could aid as a footstep in the field of English as a Second Language. Further study needs to be carried out with larger sample from different states in Malaysia in order to examine the efficiency of jigsaw listening, discussion, and role play in learning English language.

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