Designing Student-centered Classroom for Effective Teaching of the Target Language

Daw Ni Ni San
Department of Languages
University of Computer Studies, Yangon
ninisan70@gmail.com

Daw Yin Yin Kyi
Department of Languages
University of Computer Studies, Mandalay
yinyinkyi.mlw@gmail.com

Daw Soe Thandar
Department of Languages
University of Computer Studies, (Dawei)
soethandar23123@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to give the students opportunities to be active participants in any activities, to monitor their critical thinking, to improve their analytical skills, as well as skills in deep learning, lifelong learning, self-directed learning, reflective learning, and motivation. This study includes ninety intermediated students from University of Computer Studies, Yangon (UCSY). English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers implement to design student centered classroom using different ways of teaching and sometimes they use technological aids to be more attractive and more communicative. In designing student centered classroom, ELT teachers use task-based language teaching or learning process to encourage the students to be active participants and to promote students' language proficiency in the process of completing a task. This method increases students' motivation generally, as does their achievement and satisfaction through the academic year.

1. Introduction

This paper targets on the intermediated students for their critical thinking, responsibilities on their own learning, and decision making in the real world. This study based on Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) method. According to task-based language teaching, ELT teachers can encourage their students to activate and use language in the process of completing a task, or to simulate a natural desire in learners for improving their language proficiency. The teachers do not have to be hard to create a more student centered classroom. In more traditional teaching or traditional classroom, students sit in the classroom and they are passive learners or listeners. They work individually through the lecture and the teachers deliver their lecture standing in the front of the class. Student centered teaching process breaks through these boundaries and encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it. They can work together in discussions or in role-plays and can share ideas, opinions, and experiences. By working together, they can talk more, learn from each other, reduce their anxieties, and use language as a meaningful way. Student centered teaching also focuses on skills and practices to enable enduring learning and independent problem solving. In designing student centered approach, the teachers expect to not only be conscious of students learning but to also assume responsibility for their own learning.

2. Ways to Student Centered Learning

There are some ways to combine student centered techniques.
- Allow for student choice and autonomy
- Use open-ended questioning techniques
- Engage in explicit instruction
- Encourage student collaboration
- Encourage student reflection
- Get the students involved in community-based activities

The teachers need to provide project, classroom and homework assignment and allow the students to design their seating plan for the given tasks. The

teachers also need to provide more question types in assessments and give the students the chance for their own choices, and give a break for a few, minutes to think critically.

Open-ended questioning technique can support for the students for clear communication can provide to confirm their thoughts and ideas matter. This technique provides critical thinking and enhances their problem-solving skills.

As engage in explicit instruction, it moves away teaching from the skill and drill attitude and it is a direct method of instruction that grabs the students into the heart of the lecture. By this way, teachers can create their students to be active participants in what is going on, rather than observers.

Teachers encourage the students to collaborate for group work or group projects. When the students are allowed to work with each other, they can study more than their lesson and they can get different points of view from each other. They also get esteem for their diversity existing in their communities or schools. They can create a much greater opportunity to grow their ideas and spring their ideas back and forth.

Teachers also need to encourage the students for their reaction what they have learned. Reflection allows the students to take time for their brain processes. It also allows them to analyze things what they have been learning. All students cannot work at the same speed but they all need to know the concept and to get deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Community-based activities help the students as the important role in the classroom. The teachers give the chance to learn and to fulfill learning opportunities to become more authentic.

Figure 1. Task-based Instruction

3. Task-based Language Teaching

Task-based language (TBL) teaching is a student-centered approach to English language instruction. It is a branch of the communicative approach, wherein the teachers focus on activities for the students to use target language in the real world. In task-based teaching the learning center process moves to the students themselves and allows them to realize the language that is a tool to solve the problems in the real world. In task-based language teaching process, a task helps the immediate needs of the students and supports a framework for creating classes. It gives the students a chance for natural learning in the classroom and motivates naturally. TBL brings teaching to real world and gives the students a specific goal. So TBL is useful for moving the focus of the learning process from the teacher-centered approach to the student-centered approach. This approach emphasis on natural, creative language use, whether spoken or written, rather than on accuracy, and assessment is based on task outcome. In addition, task-based teaching provides students to complete the real-world tasks wherein how to introduce themselves, how to talk about themselves, their families, their interests, etc. in the right social and cultural matters. The teachers emphasize on their teaching techniques comprising role-playing, class discussion, problem solving, cooperative learning, group projects, think-pair-share, debates and short demonstrations. Today language teaching focuses on communication and interaction using appropriate language. The framework for task-based language teaching can be seen in figure (2).
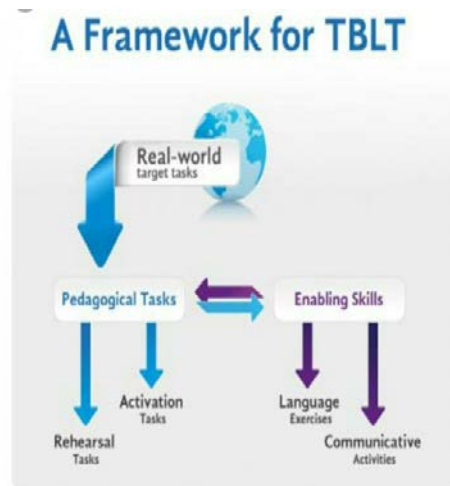

Figure 2. Framework of Task-based Language

3.1. Student-centered Learning

Student-centered learning is also known as learner-centered education in which methods of teaching that shift the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. Student-centered instruction focuses on skills and practices that enable enduring learning and independent problem solving. When the teacher operates a classroom with student-centered instruction, students and teachers interact or share their opinions instead of listening to the teacher passively. The students are encouraged to collaborate and communicate with one another within group work. Through group work students can learn the role of important collaboration and communication skills. They can also learn to direct their own learning, ask

questions, and complete tasks independently. They are more interested in participating activities and can interact to each other actively. By this way, the number of anxious students can be reduced. They don't need to put all of their focus on the teacher as teacher-centered education. The views in relation to student-centered instruction are that student construct knowledge and the teacher is a facilitator of learning process. Students' perceptions are important and their concepts are their choices in their learning to be relevant and appropriate to the circumstances (O'Neill et al. 2005). Some of the literatures on student-centered learning include the following principles (Lea et al. 2003).

• Reliance on active rather than passive learning
• Emphasis in deep learning and understanding
• Responsibility and accountability on the part of the learner
• Interdependence between teachers and students
• Mutual respect between teachers and students
• Reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process

In student-centered instruction teachers need to create more activities in the classroom to reduce the number of anxious students, to encourage being confident and being active participants, to promote language proficiency, to be decision makers or negotiators or sharers in the class and in the real world (see in figure 1 and 3).

Figure 3. Learner-centered Design

3.2. Necessary Types of Activities

Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. Teachers should create a classroom environment where students have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks to promote language proficiency. English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers use a variety of classroom activities to give practice for different aspects of language proficiency. So teachers need to select classroom activities on the basis of problems that learners experience. Consideration needs to be given as for how students will receive feedback on the language

they use during completing tasks. ELT teachers use some necessary types of activities such as information gap, problem solving, role-playing. These activities types are appropriate in designing student-centered classroom. By using these activities in the classes, students will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language.

3.2.1 Information Gap Activity

Information gap is used in order to promote real communication and facilitate acquisition between students (Richards, et al: 1992). It is easy to design the activities so that students rehearse knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and structure of sentences. Information gap activities give students opportunities to use English appropriately inside and outside the classroom. Unlike teacher-initiated display questions, which do not reflect real life language use, information gap activities have genuine communicative value. In this activity, students are supposed to be working in pairs. One student will have the information that the other does not have and the partners will share their information. These activities serve many purposes such as solving a problem or collecting information.

3.2.2 Problem Solving Activity

In problem solving activity, the student is given a problem and must work out a solution. This activity usually requires group work rather than pair work which involves more interaction compared to information gap activities. The language is needed for problem solving activities depends on the topic of each exercise, however, generally students will have to make suggestions, give reasons, and accept, modify or reject suggestions and reasons given by others (figure 4). Thus, this type of activity is more creative use of language.

Figure 4. Problem Solving

4. Active Learning Classroom

Active learning is a student approach in which the students take responsibilities for their own learning. In active learning, teachers are not only one way providers of information and also expeditors or instructors. English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers from UCSY select easy ways or different techniques to enhance students' active learning through discussion. As one of the teaching techniques, the teacher talks about a particular topic for ten minutes and then pauses for the learners to unite their notes, to find gaps and to work with their classmates through discussion (see in figure 5).

Figure 5. Discussion for a Given Particular Topic

The teachers also select the effective ways to be active learning classroom by using technological aids (TV, DVD, projector, computer, Internet, YouTube, etc.) for creative thinking, discussion, writing and speaking. The teachers use short films in the classroom for about fifteen minutes, and pauses for the students to collect their notes, grammar usage and mechanics language skills practice, vocabulary usage English and to work with classmates to recall the lecture (figure 6).

Figure 6. Films for Mechanics Language Skills

And the teachers also use language labs for students' listening practice (figure 7). In an active listening lecture, students give attention to audio script without talking or writing any notes and then they are allowed to work with a small group to recall and clarify the script. As another active listening lecture, the teachers give the lecture for about ten or fifteen minutes in the class. In this technique students just listen to the teacher without writing any notes and then they are allowed to work with classmates to recall, to explain, and to provide additional details.

Figure 7. Active Listening Lecture

ELT teachers also use alphabet cards and allow the students to choose one alphabet from A to Z cards, and then students have to make a word as a topic, and let them talk about their topics in the class. This method provides them for their free writing, critical thinking and speaking practice. According to task-based learning process, students can learn how to ask questions, how to negotiate meaning and how to interact and to work within groups. However, in this study a few students cannot satisfy and they cannot manage their time limit through using these methods because of different proficiency levels.

4.1 Motivation

The key to a successful learning environment is motivation. It is very important to give students the opportunities to be successful. Teachers give them tasks in which they can see the results of their effort. When they have done a difficult activity, teachers need to raise their motivation to be effective teaching-learning process. Teachers need to encourage them to work in pairs or groups and need to set a variety of engaging, meaningful activities, and also need to create friendly classroom for their free thinking, free talking, and asking questions. Students need to know clear idea what they are supposed to do. Teachers all know that their students prefer looking at a screen than at a book, so ELT teachers from UCSY use visuals, flashcards, and make use of new technology to capture students'

attention and to motivate them easily. Bringing technology into lessons is a great way to motivation students. So motivation is a sudden force or stimulation that brings the students to accomplish their activities. Motivation process can be seen in figure (8).

Figure 8. Motivation Process

To be successful learning process, ELT teachers from UCSY set a variety of engaging and meaningful activities to motivate their students easily for free thinking, free talking or critical thinking as the following sample activities.

Sample Activity 1

Teacher shows the pictures on the screen using projector and let the students make pairs or groups to discuss, to share ideas for expression of the pictures. It is targeted to communication, free thinking, free talking, and vocabulary or grammar practice. In this task, teacher should act as only instructor or monitor of the classroom.

Figure 9. Expression of the Pictures

Teacher: Look at the pictures and express emotion of each picture. You can discuss in pairs or groups and then talk about the pictures alternately.

Students: Yes, teacher. (making pairs or groups)
Student A: How do you think picture (a)?
Student B: She is confused!
Student A: Yeah! Her lesson may be difficult.
Student B: May be!
Student C: How about picture (b)?
Student D: She is talking about something.
Student C: Yes, her gesture is talking.
Student E: How can you express picture (e)?
Student F: She stares at something in surprise.
Student E: Wow! You are good!
Student C: How do you express picture (h)?
Student D: He is showing his phone.
Student C: I don't think. He gives his opinion.

By this way teachers can encourage their students to improve performance and language proficiency. Students can also get confidence, success and authentic learning situation due to task-based language learning.

Sample Activity 2

Teachers prepare flashcards or alphabet cards for task-based language teaching or learning process. Students are allowed to choose one card or one letter and they have to build one word using the letter and consider a topic. And then teacher let them write and talk about their topic.
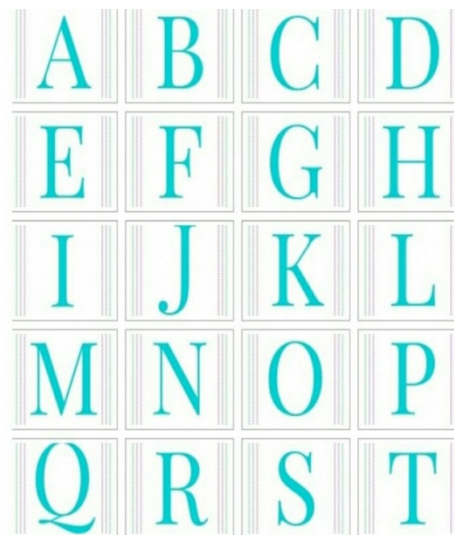

Figure 10. Language Practice with Alphabet Cards

Teacher: Here are alphabet cards. You can choose one card and give one word using letter on your card you have. After building your words, you need to prepare to talk as a topic. Just write down about your topic and talk clearly. But you have a

chance to discuss and give suggestion to each other. Let's start!

Thet Oo: Bless me! Oh, difficult letter for word!

Teacher: What letter do you get?

Thet Oo: "J"

Teacher: Oh, it's easy for one word using 'J'.

Thet Oo: 'J' for …? 'J' for ….? 'J' for 'Joker.'

Teacher: Ok! Prepare your talk. You can discuss with your friends for their ideas.

Thet Oo: Thanks, teacher.

Teacher: The next one for one card.

Johnton: Oh! Letter "K". 'K' for 'Kiss'

Teacher: What? Kiss? Choose another topic?

Johnton: No, teacher. This topic is easy to talk.

Teacher: As you like. Ok? Need other's opinion?

Johnton: hee… hee… (He is laughing.)

Teacher: Please draw one card, Jeniffer.

Jeniffer: Here's letter "S", teacher.

Teacher: What does "S" stand for?

Jeniffer: "S" stands for "Sampler".

Teacher: Great! Just write down and prepare for your talk.

This task is targeted to students' writing and speaking practice, discussion situations, problem solving, and decision making.

4.2 Analysis of Learning Classroom

During the current academic year, teachers have collected data as students' report based on evaluation form (Table 1 and 2). According to items number (6), (7), (8) and (9) of the evaluation form, nearly 40% of students (first year students and third year students from UCSY) do not desire to join in activities or group works and they like their own learning. This result made ELT teachers recognize to use appropriate language teaching methods to capture students' intention and to encourage or motivate easily.

Table 1. Evaluation Form of Learning Classroom

no.	Question items	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1.	Asking questions and contributing to class discussions		
2.	Working with classmates		
3.	Using supportive materials (computer, projector, TV, Internet, etc.) in your learning		
4.	Discussion with teachers		
5.	Working with others to prepare class assignments		
6.	Doing assignments on your own		
7.	Learning lesson on your own or yourself		
8.	Participating in class activities		
9.	Sharing your ideas or thoughts with classmates		
10.	Listening to each other's ideas		

Table 2. Results in Evaluation

Question no.	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1	72 stds	18 stds
2	70 stds	20 stds
3	90 stds	-
4	73 stds	17 stds
5	81 stds	9 stds
6	38 stds	52 stds
7	39 stds	51 stds
8	54 stds	36 stds
9	53 stds	37 stds
10	79 stds	11 stds

*stds - students

5. Conclusion

According to this study, the results show an inclination that student-centered teaching and teacher-centered teaching method should be carried out in English language teaching and learning processes. Both methods can be used to enhance effective teaching and learning at different levels. Teachers have to use student-centered and teacher-centered approaches appropriately based on the materials. The term student-centered learning includes active learning, choice in learning. Using supportive materials in task-based language teaching enhances to be student-centered learning. Task-based teaching or learning encourages the students to participate actively in collaborative work and inspires one to adopt it in the classroom. This study emphasizes on learning process, problem-solving, decision making, self-enquiry, and communication skills.

5.1. Problems

In this study, some students prefer to work alone, and team work or group work may be problematic for them. Sometimes the teachers have difficulties in the classroom because of different students' proficiency levels. The teachers do not always give instruction to all students at once because some students may miss important facts and they cannot catch up the lecture.

5.2. Solving

Teachers select appropriate strategies to promote their language proficiency and to capture attention of the students who prefer to work alone and who have different proficiency levels. Teachers also create a warm and comfortable situation in the classroom atmosphere. Using technological aids, they are encouraged to participate and to share their opinions within group work.

5.3 Findings

As the result, some of the students (about 40%) who prefer to work alone and in this process they can be encouraged to share their ideas, to solve problem and to make decision through the academic year. So the result showed students' positive attitude in group work. Dealing with difficulties encountered in student-centered learning, teachers need to concern with their teaching methods and to use appropriate teaching methods or strategies. According to the results of this study, not only student-centered teaching method but also teacher-centered teaching approach is needed to implement in effective teaching and learning processes. As the consequence of the result, task-based language teaching can enhance to be effective student-centered learning.

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