The Effect of Teacher-Centeredness Method vs. Learner-Centeredness Method on Reading Comprehension among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of teacher-centered method versus learner-centered method on reading comprehension of the Iranian EFL learners. In order to do the current research, 120 Iranian EFL learners were selected from Mehrvarz Language Institute located in Tehran, Iran. In order to conduct the research, some steps were taken–administration of the QOPT, administration of the (pretest), the research treatment and administration of the posttest. To analyze the raw data of the research, independent samples t-test by the use of SPSS was applied for inferential statistics. The results revealed that learner-centered and teacher-centered groups had positive results on the improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. However, it was concluded that learner-centered instruction was more effective than teacher-centered instruction in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. The findings of the present study may be beneficial for materials developers in designing syllabi that are more adaptable with those learner-centered method which help language learners to use language communicatively.

Keywords: learner-centered Method; teacher-centered method; reading comprehension; EFL learners

Introduction

Today, in all over the world English language was considered as an international language. So, many people try to learn this important language. In general, English language can be considered as a communication instrument which can be used for transferring information. For many years, the traditional teaching style of teaching English or specifically, teacher-centered instruction has been dominant in higher education in Iran. In a traditional classroom, students become passive learners, or rather just recipients of teachers' knowledge. Teachers make all the decisions concerning the curriculum, teaching methods, and the different forms of assessment. Duckworth (2009) asserts that teacher-centered learning actually prevents students' educational growth.

In contrast, in a learner-centered classroom, students are actively learning and they have greater input into what they learn, how they learn it, and when they learn it. This means that students take responsibility of their own learning and are directly involved in the learning process. Learner-centered teaching style focuses on how students learn instead of how teachers teach (Weimer, 2002, and Wohlfarth et.al, 2008). In a learner-centered classroom, teachers abandoned lecture notes and power point presentations for a more active, engaging, collaborative style of teaching (Wohlfarth et.al, 2008).

During the last few decades, teacher-centered teaching style has been replaced by learner-centered teaching style in higher education (McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Weimer, 2002). Learner-

centered instruction is most suitable for the more autonomous, and more self-directed learners who not only participate in what, how, and when to learn, but also construct their own learning experiences. The learner-centered approach reflects and is rooted in constructivist philosophy of teaching (Brown, 2008; McCombs & Whistler, 1997; Weimer, 2002). In Constructivism, the learners are learning by doing and experiencing rather than depending on the teachers' wisdom and expertise to transmit knowledge (Brown, 2008). Constructivism was strongly influenced by the writings of John Dewey who emphasized learning by doing and direct experience. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of learner-centered method vs teacher-centered method in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Literature Review

Nowadays, the importance of English language as an international language is increasing in all over the world. So, the need for learning the important language is growing. In general, English language is a communication instrument which plays the important role in transferring information. In recent times, the fields of teaching English as a second language (TESL) and teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) have advanced promptly and have been the essential topics to modifications and discussions. English language has four main skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. In order to be able to use the language successfully, English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) learners should be competent and proficient at those skills.

Among all main skills of English language, reading skill is supposed to be the main skill of teaching language in our country where English is taught as a foreign language. According to Nuttal (1982), reading is the most important language skill in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Basically, its importance is increasing when Iranian language learners who study English as a foreign language further their academic education, especially at the higher education. The EFL learners need acceptable reading skill for acquiring knowledge and learning new information.

In general, in order to improve the EFL learners' learning progress especially reading comprehension, language teachers should encourage and motivate their EFL learners in the process of language learning. One of the most important problems in the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching is how to motivate the EFL learners to engage in L2 language learning. Therefore, the role of language teachers is so important in solving the problem. In this regard, William (1966) states that the mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires. Regarding the Arthur Ward's statement, the best teachers are those who inspire their learners to participate in learning process and learn actively.

As a matter of fact, the reform of the teaching language in Iran focuses on improving the EFL learners' communicative approaches and learner autonomy in language classrooms. Over the last three decades, with the emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT), learner-based approach as a reaction to teacher-based approach was taken into consideration in teaching English as a second or foreign language (Richards, 2006).

Lynch (2010) claims that learner-centered approach (active learning) is a method of teaching in which the learner is in the center of learning process and the teacher has the least impression in (reading comprehension) language teaching and learning. According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), learner-centered approach is defined as "a belief that attention to the nature of learners should be central to all aspects of language teaching, including planning teaching, and evaluation. Learning is dependent upon the nature and will of the learners" (p. 326).

Baldauf and Moni (2006) state learner-centered instruction refers to a fundamental change in teachers' behavior from their traditional roles to modern roles. According to Brown (2008), the

origins of learner-centered approach is rooted in a constructivist theory in which learners learn more by doing and experiencing rather than by observing. In other words, learners are the designers of their own learning and knowledge making rather than passive learners who receive knowledge from teachers. According to pioneers of the theory, including Dewey and Vygotsky, the focus was on social constructivism which means how meaning, connections, and comprehensions are all influenced by social events (Brown, 2007). In fact; the theory implies that learners have better performance when they are asked to think about the matters instead of doing the thinking for them.

Lynch (2010) offered four principles for learner-centered approach. These principles are based on the responsibility for learners' learning, directly involving them in the learning process and raising social activities like collaboration, meaningful communication, choice and cooperation. These principles are put forth as follow:

1. Learners should develop their own knowledge by communication, critical thinking, and problem solving.

2. Instead of learning irrelevant materials, students could have this opportunity to learn directly related materials to their real life. Mostly, teachers have no answer on facing this question "why do I have to know this".

3. Huba and Freed (2000) state that in traditional method, students' performance is assessed based on a test. Some students are well on testing with average in school and some are weak test takers but well on their curriculum. While these factors are not considered in teacher-led learning, it is a positive tool to "promote and diagnose learning assessment in student-led learning.

4. According to Adams (2008), providing opportunities for students to use target language in order to negotiate meaning with teacher and other students in a group work, project work, also task-based interactions while providing guidance, modeling, and feedback about progress.

In comparison with learner-centered approach, teacher-centered approach or learning (passive learning) is a method of teaching in which the teacher is in the center of learning process and the student has the least impression in (reading comprehension) language teaching and learning. In other words, teacher centeredness approach occurs in a situation that the teacher plays the main role in the process of learning and teaching. Accordingly, teacher-centered approach can be defined as a teaching style in which instruction is closely managed and controlled by the authority of the classroom (i.e., the teacher), where language learners often respond in agreement to teacher questions, and where whole-class instruction is preferred to other methods (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Jones (2007) states that in learner-centeredness learning, the learners are active participants in the learning process and the teachers are facilitators. Being a teacher means helping people to learn; and, in a student-centered class, the teacher is a member of the class as a participant in the learning process. On the other hand, in teacher-centered learning, teachers serve as the center of knowledge, directing the learning process and controlling learner's access to information.

Huba and Freed (2000) remark that teacher-centered learning can be described as students passively receive information, emphasis is on acquisition of knowledge, and teacher's role is to be primary information giver and evaluator. There is no room for student's personal growth. While learner-centered language teaching has been advocated in higher education in recent years, teacher-centered teaching styles may be still dominant in actual practice. Results of their study show that most instructors still use traditional, teacher-centered styles in university settings despite the call for a paradigm shift to learner-centered ones (Liu, Qiao & Liu, 2006).

Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourdiani (2012) have investigated the effect of leaner-centered approach compared to teacher-centered approach in teaching English grammar as a foreign language

in Iranian high school context. The findings showed that there was a significant difference between the mean of two groups allowing the researchers to confirm the null hypothesis. Therefore, the results support the implementation of teacher-centered process for the purpose of developing grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners.

Mutlaq Al-Zu'be (2013) examined the difference between the learner-centered approach and the teacher-centered approach in teaching English as a foreign language. The results of the research revealed that "the comparison of the two approaches in terms of their efficiency and effectiveness in student's proficiency showed that each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, hence choosing one approach lead to avoiding the advantages of the other. The student-centered approach, however, was recognized as more suited for teaching English as a foreign language.

Likewise, Khaled Ahmed (2013) conducted a research in which teacher-centered versus learner-centered teaching style was compared and identified the type of teaching style education instructors at a mid-sized, publicly funded Midwestern University. The results of the study revealed that there were two types of teaching style among graduate education instructors at the Midwestern University. Yet, the tendency was geared toward learner-centered rather than teacher-centered teaching style.

Similarly, Khuvasanond (2013) worked on three different techniques used for teaching vocabulary to English as Foreign Language students in Thailand in his doctoral thesis. The research study investigated the best possible match of instructional technique with selected cultural elements in Thai sixth grade classroom. The findings of the research study revealed that in terms of learning effectiveness, students who received Teacher-centered instructional technique performed better in some parts of vocabulary test than those who received Learner-centered instructional technique. Within Learner-centered instructional technique, students who received Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) instructional technique outperformed students who received Jigsaw instructional technique. In terms of cultural elements, the results indicated that CIRC and Jigsaw are better matched with Thai 6th grade classrooms than Teacher-centered.

Geisli (2009) conducted a study to determine the effect of student centered training approaches on student success. The results showed that measured success was significantly higher in the group where student centered methods were applied compared to the teacher centered group.

In sum, Brown (2008) believes that students' strategies are more beneficial than teachers who lead them to a deeper understanding level and critical thinking, "teachers can be agents for change in a world in desperate need of change: change from competition to corporation, from powerlessness to empowerment, from conflict to resolution, from prejudice to understanding". Also, teaching is a complex activity influenced by teacher quality, which is a crucial factor in student's performance by initiating critical thinking. This means that teacher's success occurs with better knowledge of the concept.

Although the above investigations examined the the effect of learner-centered method and teacher-centered method , to the best of authors' knowledge, only few reference in the literature systematically describe the effect of learner-centered method and teacher-centered method in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. This was the motivation behind the present study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses
Based on the problem mentioned above, this study seeks to answer the following questions:
RQ₁: Does learner-centered approach improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

RQ₂: Does teacher-centered approach improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

RQ₃: Is there any significant difference between learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension?

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H0₁: Learner-centered approach does not improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

H0₂: Teacher-centered approach does not improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

H0₃: There is no significant difference between Learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Method

Participants

The present research was constructed at Mehrvarz Language School which is located in Tehran. Iran. The population of this research were 120 Iranian EFL learners. The Iranian EFL learners varied in age from 10 to 16 years old and they had the same native language which was Persian. The mean age of the participants was 13. The participants of this research have studied English for 1 to 2 years in the language school. The participants of the current study took the homogeneity test (*Quick Oxford Placement Test*). This test was designed to homogenize the language learners as intermediate level. 60 students who were in intermediate level were divided by random sampling into two experimental groups of the

Instruments

The QOPT (Version 2), the Homogeneity Test : It is a placement test for homogenizing the whole population of the study as intermediate EFL learners. This test consists of 60 questions and two parts: part one with the first 40 questions in part two which included the next 20 items.

Reading Test as Pretest: Reading section of a *PET Practice Tests* by Jenny Quintana was administrated as the pretest. In order to understand the reading comprehension ability of the learners before the instructional period (the treatments), the two experimental groups of this study were given the pretest. This test was *Test 1* of *PET Practice Tests.*

Reading Test as Posttest: In order to understand the reading comprehension ability of the learners after the instructional period (the treatments), the two experimental groups of this study were given the posttest. Like the pretest, reading section of a *PET Practice Tests* by Jenny Quintana was administrated as the posttest. This test was *Test 2* which was extracted from *PET Practice Tests; five tests for Cambridge English Preliminary* by Jenny Quintana presented by *Oxford University Press (2015)* which had five parts and 35 questions and 1-hour time to answer.

Procedure

In order to find out the possible effect of teacher-centered method versus learner-centered method on reading comprehension of the Iranian EFL learners, the following steps were applied: First, QOPT (Version 2) presented by *Oxford University Press* was performed to check the homogeneity of the participants. Next, In order to understand the reading comprehension ability of the learners before the instructional period (the treatments) Reading section of a *PET Practice Tests* by Jenny Quintana was administrated as the pretest. After that, the treatment was started. The researcher provided the learners in two experimental groups with the predesigned instructional treatment. The whole instruction for both experimental groups took place in 20 sessions (each group received 10 sessions) and each session lasted for 60 minutes. The instructional period held in 5 weeks. Both experimental groups received reading comprehension instructions in accordance with

the learner-based learning and teacher-based learning to measure their influence of the methods on the improvement of reading comprehension performance. Next, having finished the instructional period, the two groups took part in a reading test as the posttest. Like the pretest, the reading section had five parts and 35 questions and learners should answered the questions in 50 minute. Finally, In order to find out the possible effect of the above mentioned variables, descriptive and inferential statistics was employed.

Results

Table 1. Normality Test of the Pretests and Posttests

	Group		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk	
		Statistic	Df	P	Statistic	Df	P
Teacher-Centered	Pretest	.59	20	.96	.20[*]	20	.15
	Posttest	.17	20	.93	.10	20	.17
Learner-Centered	Pretest	.53	20	.96	.20[*]	20	.14
	Posttest	.46	20	.95	.20[*]	20	.14

Based on the results of normality test *in* table 1, the significance levels (sig) of the pretest for teacher-centered group is 0.96 while sig for posttest is 0.93.On the other hands the significance levels (sig) of the pretest for learner-centered groups is 0.96 while for the posttest its0 .95 which were greater than the error value 0.05 ($p> 0.05$). Therefore, it was concluded that the pretest and the posttest of teacher-centered and learner-centered groups had a normal distribution.

Paired Samples Test of Posttest and Pretest of Learner-Centered Group

To investigate the first null hypothesis, the pretest and the posttest of learner-centered group was explored by the paired samples t-test (Table 2).

Table 2.Paired Samples Test of Posttest and Pretest of Learner-Centered Group

	Paired Differences					T	df	P (2-tailed)
	M	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Post-Learner-Centered Pre-Learner-Centered	5.533	2.030	.371	4.775	6.291	14.932	29	.000

According to the results of Table 2, there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of learner-centered group (t (29) = 14.932, P < 0.05). The results revealed that learner-centered group had positive results on improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. Therefore, the first null hypothesis was rejected and learner-centered approach did improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Paired Samples Test of Posttest and Pretest of Teacher-Centered Group

Table 3.Paired Samples Test of Posttest and Pretest of Teacher-Centered Group

	Paired Differences					T	df	P (2-tailed)
	M	SD	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Post- Teacher-Centered Pre- Teacher-Centered	3.267	2.935	.536	2.171	4.363	6.096	29	.000

According to the results of Table 3, there was a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest of teacher-centered group (t (29) =6.096, P<0.05). The results revealed that teacher-centered group had significant effect on improvement of Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was rejected and teacher-centered approach improved Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

T- Test in the Pretest

Table 4.Independent Samples T- Test in the Pretest

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means						
.	T	Df	P. (2-tailed)	MD	SED	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	-.64	58	.52	-.33	.52	-1.37	.71
Equal variances not assumed	-.64	52.03	.52	-.33	.52	-1.37	.71

According to the results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances in Table 4, the data of the first row were reported (Levene's F = 2.89, P>0.05). With regard to the results of the first row of Table 4, there was no significant difference between the two experimental groups (i.e., teacher-centered and learner-centered) (t (58) = -.64, P>0.05).

Table 5..Independent Samples T-Test in the Posttest

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means						
	T	Df	P. (2-tailed)	MD	SED	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	2.05	58	.05	1.93	.95	.04	3.83
Equal variances not assumed	2.05	52.89	.06	1.93	.95	.04	3.83

According to the results of Levene's Test for Equality of Variances in Table 5, the data of the first row were reported (Levene's F = 2.972, P>0.05). With regard to the results of the first row of Table 5, there was significant difference between the two experimental groups (i.e., learner-centered and teacher-centered) (t (58) = 2.05, P<0.05). In addition, the upper and lower levels were positive. It meant that the mean score of learner-centered group was more than the mean score of teacher-centered group. Also, the effect size of learner-centered group was more than the effect size of teacher-centered group. Therefore, it was concluded that learner-centered instruction was more effective than teacher-centered instruction in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance**.** For that reason, the third null hypothesis was rejected and learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches are significantly different in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Discussion and Conclusion

The main purpose of this research was to explore the effect of teacher-centered method in comparison with learner-centered method on reading comprehension of the Iranian EFL learners. The research questions inquired whether teacher-centered and learner-centered method had any significant effect on improving reading comprehension of the Iranian EFL learners. The results revealed that the two groups (teacher-centered and learner-centered) acted noticeably on the improvement of reading comprehension of the learners. Therefore, the first and the second null hypotheses were rejected. In other words, learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches did improve Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. Although the two groups were acted positively in improving reading ability of the learners, but there was a significant difference between the mean scores of two groups. It means that learner-centered group was more effect than   teacher-centered group in the posttest stage. Based on the results, learner-centered instruction was more effective than teacher-centered instruction in improving the learners' reading ability. In other words, the third research null hypothesis was rejected and learner-centered and teacher-centered method were different in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension.

The results of the present research are in line with Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourdiani (2012) who conducted a research study on investigation of teacher-centered and student-centered learning in Iranian context. Like the findings of the present study, "the findings obtained in this research led to the conclusion that there was a significant difference between the mean of two groups allowing the researchers to confirm the null hypothesis. Therefore, the results support the implementation of teacher-centered process for the purpose of developing grammar learning in Iranian EFL learners' (p. 28). Similar to the previous study, Mutlaq Al-Zu'be (2013) conducted a research study on

exploring the difference between the learner-centered approach and the teacher-centered approach in teaching English as a foreign language. The findings of the research showed that each approach had its own strengths and weaknesses but the student-centered approach was recognized as more suited for teaching English as a foreign language.

Likewise, Geisli (2009) conducted a study to determine the effect of student centered training approaches on student success. The tool for data collection was an achievement test developed by the researcher. The results showed that measured success was significantly higher in the group where student centered methods were applied compared to the teacher centered group .Gravoso and Pasa (2008) in another study showed the positive effects of learner centered approaches on the quality of learning. The results also showed that the learner-centered environment tended to engage students in knowledge construction, while the teacher-centered environment fostered the mere absorption of information.

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