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## Asian EFL University Students' Preference Toward Teaching Approaches

Designing and presenting lessons is the center of the teaching process. Every day teachers must make decisions about the instructional process. A teacher's approach can have an enormous impact on the effectiveness of his or her teaching. Understanding students' preferences toward teaching approaches and teaching styles can create opportunities for teachers to make adjustments that better serve their students. Many teachers continue using traditional teaching approaches, so the question exists of whether or not these teaching approaches are meeting the educational needs of the learners. This article addresses this question and discusses a qualitative study involving the preferences of 225 Taiwanese EFL university students toward 3 main teaching approaches (instructor centered, student centered, and content centered) and offers pedagogical suggestions. Through a statistical analysis, the research findings indicate that the participants can clearly recognize the differences among the teaching approaches, have a clear preference toward the student-centered approach, and hold more positive attitudes toward student-centered learning.

### Introduction

**M**aking decisions is part of the daily process of teaching. Successful teachers weigh these decisions based on the needs of the students and the demands of the curriculum. These kinds of decisions guide teachers to design the instruction for individuals or groups in their classrooms (Longert, 2009). Because different teachers perceive the classroom environment in different ways, each teacher creates his or her own teaching style that is based on his or her beliefs about what defines good teaching. These styles are developed

through time. Teaching styles are different from teaching methods. Teaching methods may include lecturing, asking questions, grouping students, leading discussions, assigning homework, and testing. Most teachers use all or some of these methods at one time or another during their careers. However, a teacher's style is not the specific methods employed; it is the unique way in which teachers organize and use these methods (Mermelstein, 2010). Therefore, the term *teaching style* refers to the way various teaching methods are combined. Hoyt and Lee (2002) refer to this as a teacher's "recipe" and Mermelstein (2010) points out that different teachers may present the exact same materials or content in completely different ways. In general, a teacher's style is based on his or her personal preferences about learning, abilities, learning experiences, and cultural beliefs. Therefore, while many teachers are considering how to better teach their students, their actual point of reference may be themselves.

Many teachers' approach to teaching is also different. Some maintain that the classroom environment should be teacher centered (aka instructor-centered), where teachers are considered to be the experts and providers of all vital information. However, other teachers believe in a student-centered (aka learner-centered) environment where the teacher takes on the role of facilitator, assisting and guiding students toward the learning goals. Further, other teachers take on a content-centered (aka curriculum-centered) approach in which they are more like interpreters, explaining and following the curriculum that has been handed down to them, or they merely follow the pages of the textbooks that have been selected for their courses. Most successful teachers would agree that it is vital for teachers to select a teaching approach that promotes student success and these three approaches are the ones most commonly used.

### **Three Teaching Approaches**

The teacher-centered approach to teaching is the most traditional approach. In this approach, teachers are at the center of the learning process imparting knowledge, and the students are assuming a receptive role in their education. The teacher is making all of the decisions regarding content, instruction, and student assessment. In 1999, Nunan described this approach to teaching as a "transmission model." This approach puts the responsibility of student learning directly on the teacher, although it is often the case that teachers who use this approach do not accept this responsibility (Mermelstein, 2010).

In the teacher-centered approach, classes are often directed by the lecture model but sometimes have an emphasis on demonstration and/or modeling. Students are usually exposed to extrinsic motiva-

tors, such as grades or punishments, as a means of getting the students to complete the work. In addition, the students' work is usually evaluated by the teacher, a teacher-created method, or a standardized test. Within the teacher-centered approach, information is usually given at a fast and steady pace and this may be useful for conveying large amounts of new information to either small or large groups. For this reason, several researchers (e.g., Blue, 1986; Kauchak & Eggen, 1995) believe that the teacher-centered approach is sometimes viewed as similar to the content-centered approach. However, in the teacher-centered approach the teacher is in control of the content and of setting the pace of instruction. There is not a specific amount of information that *must* be covered in the course unless the teacher requires it.

The content-centered approach has been described as an approach in which the primary task of instruction is to cover large amounts of the course material in a systematic design that emphasizes the students' acquisition of the materials (Bergquist & Phillips, 1975). Teachers must cover a certain amount of material in a certain amount of time. As in the teacher-centered approach, teachers are viewed as the formal authority because they are the ones who are often presenting a majority of the materials. However, the goals of the course are based on the demands of the material and the mandated curriculum. As in the teacher-centered approach, lectures and discussions are primarily used. This approach has sometimes been viewed as a more extreme approach, focusing on the course content possibly to the exclusion of the learners. According to Fischer and Fischer (1979), the goal of this style of teaching is to "cover the subject" even if the students do not learn (p. 251). Regardless of whether or not such an extreme stance is taken, there is a heavy reliance on textbooks and structured assignments and most of the talking in the classroom is teacher oriented. Assessment within this approach is often generated by the materials required by the course or some sort of standardized test.

The student-centered approach is quite different from the two previous approaches and is relatively new by comparison. It is based on the ideology of constructivism, in which students actively construct their own learning. Knowledge and meaning are generated from people's own experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. In the US, the concept of constructivism was first described around 1900 and is usually traced to the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, whose collective works have focused on, among other topics, how students learn and are primarily responsible for the movement toward student-centered learning.

According to Neil (2005), Dewey was a relentless campaigner for reform of education. He stressed that the authoritarian, preor-

dained knowledge approach (content centered) to education was too concerned with delivering knowledge, and not enough with understanding students' actual experiences. For Dewey, education also had a broader social purpose, which was to help people become more effective members of a democratic society. Dewey argued that the one-way delivery style of authoritarian schooling (teacher centered) does not provide a good model for life in a democratic society. He believed that for education to be more effective, content should be presented in ways that allow learners to connect new information to previously learned information and prior experiences. Therefore, students need educational experiences that enable them to become valued, equal, and responsible members of society (Neil, 2005).

The formalization of the theory of constructivism has been generally attributed to Jean Piaget, who described the ways by which knowledge is internalized by learners. He suggested that through the processes of *accommodation* and *assimilation*, individuals construct new knowledge from their own experiences. Piaget (1953) stated that the principal goal of education in the schools should be to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done. His theory of constructivist learning has had a broad impact on learning theories and teaching methodologies in education, and it has been an underlying theme of many education-reform movements.

Vygotsky (1978) argued that learning is most effective when students cooperate with one another in a supportive learning environment under the careful guidance of a teacher (student centered). He believed that language was generated from the need to communicate and was central to the development of thinking. He also emphasized the importance of sociocultural factors in the development of language and reasoning, and his work highlighted the importance of *talk* as a learning tool. Vygotsky (1978) introduced the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which describes the internal developmental processes associated with learning. Scaffolding, cooperative learning, and cross-age tutoring are just a few teaching methodologies used today as a result of research evolving from the work of Vygotsky.

Within the student-centered approach, planning, teaching, and assessment revolve around the needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles of the students, instead of around the other people involved in the educational process. To a degree, control of the classroom is shared by both the teacher and the students. Students are encouraged to follow their curiosity and experiment. According to Brown (2008), student-centered instruction is a method that allows for active learn-

ing to take place, one in which students are highly engaged and the teaching methods put a greater responsibility for the learning directly on the learner. Felder and Brent (2009) discuss three methods used in student-centered classrooms. The first is *active learning*. This involves students in problem-solving and/or question-generating activities. Students are highly encouraged to brainstorm and equally encouraged to discuss or debate in class. The second is *cooperative learning*. In this method, students work together in pairs, units, or groups to solve problems or work on projects. To be most effective, the conditions of the tasks will be designed to ensure both positive interdependence and individual accountability. Finally, the third method is *inductive teaching and learning*. In this third method, the students are engaged in and learn the course materials through strategically designed tasks that challenge the students with questions or problems. This approach to teaching will work best for students who are comfortable with independent learning, active participation, and collaborating with other students. Because more responsibility is usually placed on the students, it is important that students are aware of this and are encouraged to take the initiative in completing tasks and asking questions.

### **Learning Styles**

In the discussion of learning styles, there really is not any one particular point of view that best helps teachers in making decisions regarding instruction and the process of teaching. So many factors involved in the decision process can influence both teachers and learning styles. Some are based upon culture and are subtle and one's preferred learning style can change through time. Teaching methods also vary from person to person and from culture to culture. This means that learners may have been exposed to only a limited number of teaching methods and may not have been exposed to a method that they would otherwise prefer over others. Felder and Henriques (1995) point out that while some teachers may emphasize rote memorization, other teachers may emphasize individual understanding of larger concepts. Further, teachers often teach in the same style in which they prefer to learn. Therefore, if one has mainly been exposed to rote memorization and not to cooperative learning, he or she may come to believe that rote memorization is the best method of teaching, regardless of how successful he or she is in learning with this method. However, there are many differences in the preferred manner in which students learn (Mermelstein, 2012); they just may have not been exposed to it. According to Qin (2007), "Instructors need to acknowledge that each student is an individual who learns in a unique way" (p. 66). Woolfolk

(1998) stresses that students take in and process information in different ways and these differences have been called *learning style preferences* or *cognitive styles*.

Although there are always going to be students with multiple learning styles, successful teachers know that matching their teaching styles with the preferred learning styles of the students can promote student success. When teaching styles and learning styles are matched correctly, students can gain more knowledge, retain more information, and perform better (Felder & Soloman, 1992; Lage, Platt, & Treglia, 2000; Rao, 2001). Mismatches between the learning styles of students and the teaching style of the teacher can negatively affect the students' grades (Oxford, Ehrman, & Lavine, 1991; Wallace & Oxford, 1992), attitudes and behavior toward attending school (Felder & Henriques, 1995), and also have a negative impact on teachers (Mermelstein, 2012; Rao, 2001).

Therefore, careful consideration is vital when teachers are designing courses, lesson plans, and student assessment. According to Rao (2001), the goal of effectively matching teaching styles and learning styles can best be achieved when the teachers understand the needs, capabilities, and learning styles of their students. The current study is based on a similar belief and aimed toward looking into the minds and preferences of a group of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners.

### **Background and Statement of the Problem**

Taiwan is a modern and thriving Asian country where most people consider English a second national language. It is compulsory starting in elementary school and continues for two years at the university level. However, Taiwan is also a test-based education system (Mermelstein, 2013), so testing plays a dominant role at all levels and in all subjects within the education system and within society in general. It is so much so that one could argue that testing is a major part of the Taiwanese culture, and there are literally thousands of test-preparation institutes throughout Taiwan.

Huang (1995) points out that most of the English instruction taking place in Taiwan is still primarily using the traditional methods of teaching (i.e., teacher centered and/or content centered). It would seem that generations of teachers are using the same techniques they learned as students themselves. The way of thinking is that if it were good enough for them, it should be good enough for new students as well. This attitude is further highlighted in Chan's (2014) study of Taiwanese EFL student teachers (STs) graduating from Taiwanese universities. The study evaluated the STs' conceptions of English language

teaching (ELT) after a yearlong ELT practicum. Before taking the practicum, a majority of the STs believed it was the teachers' role to cultivate the learner or facilitate the learners' abilities (i.e., student centered). However, the results of the study after the practicum showed that the majority of Taiwanese STs believed that the teacher-centered and content-centered approach was more favorable for teaching than the student-centered approach. Their conceptions about teaching shifted toward presenting the curriculum and/or which methods work best for presenting content. Lin and Chiang (2008) point out that there is a great lack of motivation among Taiwanese EFL learners because of these approaches to teaching EFL. Therefore, there is a need to discover what Taiwanese learners' preferences are toward teaching approaches in Taiwan and to determine if they match the teaching approaches being implemented. The results could have a profound influence on learner motivation and learner success in the EFL classroom.

### **The Study**

The study took place in Taiwan at a middle-upper-ranked private university. This is the only American-accredited university in Taiwan. The participants ( $N=225$ ) of the study were sophomore-, junior-, and senior-year students with a mean average of eight prior years of studying English as a foreign language (EFL). This particular university is unique in that all of its non-English-majored students are required to study EFL for four years unless they opt to test out of the program. The participants represented five different classes and five different declared majors of study within the university (e.g., accounting, information management, etc.). In addition, all of the participants were participating in a student-centered learning environment for an entire semester (18 weeks) before responding to the study's questions.

The process of the study was twofold. First, the participants were asked to read three separate descriptions of classroom environments representing the three different teaching approaches: content centered, teacher centered, and student centered (see Appendix). They were then asked to identify their previous and current EFL classroom environments and state their preference among the three environments toward any future EFL course they might take. It should be noted that although three teaching approaches are being addressed in this study, there may have been some perceived overlapping of the three approaches among the participants. An example of a perceived overlapping between the teacher-centered and student-centered approach may be with teacher-initiated or teacher-led tasks. To overcome this phenomenon, during the study an intentional effort was put forth



to use 11 different descriptors for the participants to consider when evaluating the three different classroom environments. For this part of the study, frequencies of responses and percentages were analyzed.

For the second part of the study, the participants were given a short survey and asked questions regarding their attitudes and feelings toward their past and present EFL classroom environments. For these questions, a 5-point Likert scale was used, ranking from 0 to 4 points in value. Student responses for these questions ranged from *I hated it* to *I really liked it*. The student responses on the survey were specifically designed to extend to the extremes for two main reasons. First, EFL is a compulsory subject for most students starting in elementary school, so all of the students have been learning English long enough to have strong opinions about the topic. Second, throughout the 15 years before the study, the teacher/researcher had heard thousands of Taiwanese university students express strong opinions regarding learning English. Therefore, because one of the goals of the study was to analyze the participants' attitudes and feelings toward English, it was necessary to provide for the broadest range of answers. For this part of the study, the mean scores of the survey's answers were analyzed using *t* tests.

In addition, a correlation analysis between the participants' responses on the survey and their preferences toward their future EFL classrooms was conducted. To better ensure reliability in the participants' responses, both the classroom descriptions and the survey were translated into the participants' native language, Mandarin Chinese. Further, both the initial classroom descriptions and the Mandarin Chinese translations were evaluated by three additional EFL teachers and there was full agreement on both the content and translation.

## Results

The first set of questions was designed to determine the students' current and past learning environments and their preference toward their future learning environments. The results can be found in Table 1, where the reported frequencies are listed with their equivalent percentages. The reported frequencies indicate that the majority, 59%, of the participants' previous EFL classroom environments were content centered, with 32% being classified as teacher centered and 9% being classified as student centered. The reported frequencies also indicated that 84% of the participants were able to correctly identify that their current EFL classroom environment was student centered, with 14% being classified as teacher centered and only 2% as content centered. In terms of the participants' preference for a possible future EFL learning environment, the reported frequencies indicate a strong prefer-

ence, 83%, toward a student-centered learning environment, with 15% preferring a teacher-centered environment and 2% preferring a curriculum-centered environment.

**Table 1**  
**Frequency of Learning Environments**

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Current classroom environment		
Content-centered	4	2
Teacher-centered	32	14
Student-centered	189	84
Previous classroom environments		
Content-centered	132	59
Teacher-centered	73	32
Student-centered	20	9
Future classroom environment preference		
Content-centered	5	2
Teacher-centered	34	15
Student-centered	186	83

(*N*=225)

The survey questions were intended to gauge the participants' attitudes and feelings toward their previous and current EFL learning environments. An analysis of the participants' responses regarding their previous classroom environments indicated a mean score of 1.5. This score indicates a response directly between *I hated it sometimes* and *It was just okay/I have no real feelings about it*. An analysis of the participants' responses regarding their current classroom environment indicated a mean score of 2.8. This score indicates an almost direct response to the option *I liked most of it*. The difference between the mean scores is 1.3. A statistical analysis of this data using a *t* test revealed  $p < 0.000$ , indicating a high level of significance.

In addition, a correlation analysis using Pearson's *R* was used to measure the relationship between the participants' survey responses regarding their previous and current classroom environments and their preference toward a future EFL learning environment. The re-

sults of the analysis between their previous EFL environments and their preference for the future indicated that there was a negative relationship ( $-0.75$ ),  $p > 0.05$ . The results of the analysis between their current EFL environment and their preference for the future indicated that there was a high direct relationship ( $0.336$ ),  $p < 0.00$ .

### Discussion

Most notably, the first point of discussion should be the participants' ability to recognize the differences in the three classroom environments. As previously noted, there may have been some perceived overlapping of the three approaches. However, all of the participants ( $N = 225$ ) in the study were participating in a student-centered teaching environment and 84% of the participants were able to correctly identify this approach. The teacher-initiated activities may have led to the 12% of the participants reporting the environment to be teacher centered. However, with only 2% of the participants reporting the environment to be content centered, it seems clear that the majority of the students recognized the differences among the three different approaches. In this researcher's opinion, this is perhaps the most significant finding as it allows the participants to more accurately select their preference toward any future EFL classroom environment.

When evaluating the reported frequencies of the participants, at first glance one can notice without any statistical analysis one important characteristic. There is an almost perfect similarity between the participants' current classroom environment and their preference for future classroom environments. Because a direct correlation with a high level of significance was indicated through the Pearson's  $R$  analysis, one can conclude that the participants' four-month experience in the student-centered environment had a profound impact on their choice of classroom preference toward any future EFL environment. With a relatively low exposure in the past to a student-centered environment, only 9% reported, and a relatively high exposure to both teacher-centered and content-centered environments, it appears that the participants are now heavily drawn to the student-centered environment where they have more direct input over their learning.

The second set of questions was used to determine the participants' feelings and attitudes toward their previous and current classroom environments. A 5-point Likert scale was used ranging from 0 to 4 points with the following corresponding options: *I hated it all*, *I hated it sometimes*, *It's okay/no real feelings*, *I liked most of it*, *I really liked it a lot*. A descriptive analysis indicated a mean score of 2.8 points with a standard deviation of 0.7 regarding the participants' current classroom environment, indicating that many "really liked it a

lot.” A descriptive analysis indicated a mean score of 1.5 points with a standard deviation of 0.7 regarding the participants’ previous classroom environments. By averaging up, this score indicates that participants felt they were just “okay” and held “no real feelings” toward them. However, it should be noted that their responses also border along the lines of “I hated it sometimes.” Factoring in the standard deviation, it would appear that actually many of the students did hate their previous class environment at times. These results demonstrate that the participants of this study held more positive feelings toward their current class environment (student centered) than their previous class environments (content centered), which is supported by the statistical analysis.

The results of this study are also similar to those of other studies conducted using the student-centered approach with EFL learners in Asia. Two studies conducted in Taiwan are Lee and Chen (2010) and Chien (2014). Lee and Chen (2010) investigated EFL learners’ attitudes toward student-centered writing methodologies. They also explored other methods of writing instruction and the implications for teaching. The results showed that the participants had a positive attitude toward student-centered writing and a clear preference toward student-centered writing methods. Further, Lee and Chen suggested that teachers need to have a better understanding of students’ needs and learning styles to be more effective.

Chien’s (2014) study sought to compare the effectiveness of teacher-centered and student-centered teaching methodologies in university EFL classrooms. It also sought out the preferences of Taiwanese learners toward these practices. The reported results were that both styles of methodologies produced significant improvements, although no specific data were provided. However, through the use of surveys and interviews, it was determined that the Taiwanese students had a clear preference toward the student-centered teaching methodologies. Further, the students felt that they had improved more in their vocabulary learning, reading, and listening skills through participating in student-centered activities. Another component of this study that is similar to the current study is that the participants in Chien’s (2014) study also reported that the majority of their previous EFL classrooms in Taiwanese high schools were teacher centered or content centered.

Another Asian study involving the student-centered teaching approach and EFL students is that of Dang (2006). Like the current study, his study took place at a Vietnamese university comparing the differences between student-centered classrooms and traditional teacher-centered and content-centered classrooms and investigated the feelings and attitudes of both EFL teachers and EFL learners. Be-

cause student-centered teaching was not the standard in Vietnam at the time of the study, the student-centered classroom was established by the Vietnamese government and was part of a program to test the effectiveness and feasibility of the student-centered approach in order to determine if the national education policy of Vietnam should be changed. Data were collected through direct classroom observations, interviews with both students and teachers, document reviews, and group discussions with students. Dang observed and reported on the students in the student-centered classroom as “being allowed and encouraged to make decisions, reflect on and evaluate experiences, and think critically” (p. 603) and described them as highly motivated, having self-confidence, and open-minded. This statement was further supported by the student interviews and group discussions. Dang described the classrooms as democratic and cooperative and observed both the teachers and the students appearing happy with the curriculum. In fact, teachers commented during interviews that they felt more comfortable using the student-centered approach because they did not have to follow the national curriculum so strictly. Overall, both students and teachers reported being more satisfied with the student-centered teaching environment and preferred it to the traditional classroom. Based on the data collected during the study, Dang concluded that the student-centered approach was more successful than the traditional approaches being used in most Vietnamese EFL classrooms and suggested that a shift be made toward implementing this approach across Vietnam. However, Dang also reported that there would need to be a real commitment to social and educational reform in Vietnam and a commitment to improving both the teaching and learning taking place in the classrooms. In other words, all stakeholders need to be involved and actively participate in making a shift in this type of change.

The findings in this current study may also suggest a link between teaching approaches and learner motivation. Because the student-centered approach sees the learners as individuals who have the right to participate in the process of deciding course and learning goals, it is believed their intrinsic motivation can thus be enhanced when the learners’ experiences, skills, needs, and learning styles are appreciated (Dörnyei, 1997). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), “A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated” (p. 54). Although there was no direct motivational analysis carried out in this study, judging by the participants’ responses on the survey regarding their previous classroom environments, it would appear that their attitudes and feelings do not

reflect a high level of intrinsic motivation within that environment. Deci and Ryan (1985) referred to intrinsic motivation as doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable. Therefore, using this definition and evaluating the participants' response toward their current student-centered environment, as "really liking it," suggests that the participants may possess a higher level of intrinsic motivation in the student-centered environment, as was reported in the similar studies noted above. The opposite could also be said toward their previous classroom environments, because some of the participants responded that they "hated it."

One can hypothesize that perhaps one reason the participants reported that their previous EFL classrooms were just "okay" or that they held "no real feelings" toward them is that the Taiwanese educational system is primarily a test-based system with a content-centered approach. If the majority of their EFL classrooms have continued with this approach throughout their years of study, it would appear that the participants have actually become desensitized to this approach to teaching and have merely accepted it as the *norm*. It could also be why 15% of the participants selected the teacher-centered approach as their preference for any future EFL classroom. In other words, given the choice, the participants would not want to be in a content-centered environment. However, they may also have not wanted the added responsibilities placed upon them in the student-centered environment, instead preferring that their teachers take on these added responsibilities.

### **Pedagogical Suggestions**

Successful teachers have the ability to make adjustments to their teaching styles that can better match diverse groups of students, but that also better match up with individuals within a group. Teachers who are unfamiliar with the student-centered approach can learn more about this and adopt teaching methodologies that better focus on the learners' needs. Adopting a new approach to teaching and adding new teaching methodologies may prove challenging for many teachers who have been teaching the same way for many years. However, teachers can start by making changes slowly. Perhaps approaching one lesson or unit at a time would fit into the comfort level of the teacher.

The first step should be to assess the students' abilities and evaluate the requirements of the course to be taught. Simply accepting that because students were placed in the course they should be *prepared* for any/all curriculum requirements is not part of a student-centered approach. Often, the reality of the EFL classroom is that it is full of

mixed-ability learners. Other measures teachers can take are to allow students more responsibility and ownership for their own learning and provide opportunities for more peer interaction. Teachers can have students design tasks and can also allow the students some direct input on how tasks should be assessed or what is considered good or acceptable. Ideally, students could help in the creation of grading rubrics. Therefore, it is also recommended that when teachers are planning lessons and assessment, they should deeply consider the theory of multiple intelligences put forth in 1983 by Howard Gardner. He argued that individuals have a wide range of cognitive abilities: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Teachers can make their classrooms more student centered by designing lessons and tasks that allow students to demonstrate their comprehension and abilities in a variety of modalities. For example, teachers could do so by allowing students to demonstrate their comprehension by performing a drama or short skit, allowing them to create and sing a song, or allowing them to make a collage.

Some specific student-centered methods that teachers can adopt are cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, 1999) and peer-led team learning (Tien, Roth, & Kampmeier, 2002). Cooperative learning is having a small group of students work together to increase their own learning and the learning of the other members of the group. There are two types of cooperative learning: formal and informal. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (2008) defined formal cooperative learning as having a group of students work together over an extended period of time, perhaps weeks or months, to achieve the shared learning goals and complete specific tasks and assignments. They defined informal cooperative learning as having a group of students work together toward the learning goals in a temporary group to complete a task or assignment for a shorter duration of time, perhaps only a few minutes or one class period. Peer-led team learning is when a more knowledgeable and experienced student leads a group of less knowledgeable and experienced students through various tasks. In this scenario, the more experienced student is not an expert, simply one who has previously accomplished the goals of the task or the course.

Two more student-centered teaching methods that teachers can apply in their classrooms are problem-based learning (PBL) and active learning. Essentially, PBL is when a problem leads to learning (Woods, 1994). Usually working in small groups, students must engage a complex and challenging problem that requires them to evaluate what they already know and what they need to know in order to

solve the problem. PBL works best when it is related to the students' real-world interests. Active learning is when students are actively engaged in the learning process; they are doing more than simply listening in class. Active-learning tasks could include class discussions, group work, debating, think-pair-share tasks, and writing. However, to be actively involved, students should be using higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

No matter which student-centered activities are adopted, teachers need to be aware of their role in the classroom. Teachers who adopt a student-centered teaching approach should not be the center of attention or the source of all knowledge in the classroom. Teachers who adopt the student-centered teaching approach should be more like a coach, a mentor, or a facilitator of the acquisition of knowledge.

### **Conclusions**

It appears that the Taiwanese EFL university students in this study do have a clear preference toward the student-centered teaching approach and that most of them are ready, and willing, to accept a change. Although the number of participants in this study, their age, and the geographical and cultural background of the participants were limited, the previous studies mentioned taking place in Taiwan demonstrated similar preferences and attitudes. It appears that Taiwanese EFL university students are not that interested in being passive learners in the classroom and would prefer to be more actively involved in the learning process. If these learners are allowed to be more actively involved and if the formats of EFL courses are more student centered—focusing on the needs and abilities of the learners—then the change that could take place could be very empowering for the students. They could become more autonomous learners, gain more self-confidence in their abilities, and also gain more cooperative social skills, which could help them become better team players at their future jobs. Therefore, it is suggested that further studies be conducted in Taiwan, and other similar EFL/ESL environments, and their findings shared.

### **Author**

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## Appendix

### Descriptions of Classroom Environments

English Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 MCU I.D. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Seat No. \_\_\_\_\_

The information below is about three different classroom environments. Please read the following three sections carefully before answering the survey questions. The three sections are similar, but not the same. On the survey, you will be asked questions about these three sections.

#### **Classroom No. 1**

Focus is on the curriculum, often times the materials and information inside a textbook

Focus is on language forms and structures (what the textbook describes about the language)

Instructor talks; students listen

Students work alone

Instructor monitors and corrects every student utterance to the book's standards

Instructor answers students' questions about language or students look for answers themselves

The curriculum or book chooses the topics

Instructor evaluates student learning based on established norms from the book or curriculum

Classroom is quiet, except for teacher talk

Assessments are tests

Knowledge is general, not connected to the students

### **Classroom No. 2**

Focus is on the instructor telling the students what to learn or what is important

Focus is on language forms and structures (what the instructor knows about the language)

Instructor talks; students listen

Students work alone

Instructor monitors and corrects every student utterance to the instructor's standards

Instructor answers students' questions about language or students look for answers themselves

Instructor chooses the topics

Instructor evaluates student learning based on the teachers standards

Classroom is quiet, except for teacher talk

Assessments are tests

Knowledge is general, not connected to the students

### **Classroom No. 3**

Focus is on both the students and the instructor working together

Focus is on language use in typical situations (how students will use the language)

Instructor demonstrates or models; students interact with the instructor and with each another

Students work in pairs, in groups, or alone depending on the purpose of the activity

Students talk without constant instructor monitoring; instructor provides feedback/correction when questions arise

Students answer each other's questions, using the instructor as a source for information

Students have some choice of topics or the freedom to expand the topic based on their own interests

Students evaluate their own learning; instructor also evaluates based on what has been taught and the individual student's abilities

Classroom is often noisy and busy

Assessments may include tests, but vary based on student's abilities

Knowledge is connected to the students and through direct experience in the class

English Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class No. \_\_\_\_\_

MCU I.D. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Seat No. \_\_\_\_\_

本問卷將請你請回答有關下列課程學習環境相關問題。下面資訊是有關三個不同的教室學習狀況。在回答問題之前，請仔細閱讀以下三個部分。三個部分大致相同，但非都一樣。

#### 教室 1:

著重在課程，大多為教科書內之教材與資訊

著重於語言形式與架構（著重於語言與教科書本身）

教師講(授)課，學生聽課

學生自行/獨自作業

講師觀察與糾正每位學生言談以達到課程要求標準

講師回答學生有關語言的疑問或學生自行找答案

課程與書籍決定授課主題

教師依據書籍或課程之規範來評估學生的學習

教室除了教師講課外，都是安靜的沒有其他聲音(沒有人可以講話)

只透過考試做評核

較一般的知識，和學生本身沒有關連性

#### 教室 2:

教師著重於告訴學生該學些什麼，什麼是重要的

著重於語言形式與架構(教師了解語言本身)

教師講(授)課，學生聽課

學生自行/獨自作業

講師觀察與糾正每位學生言談以達到教師要求的標準

講師回答學生有關語言的疑問或學生自行找答案

教師決定課堂主題

教師依據其標準來評估學生的學習

教室除了教師講課外，都是安靜的沒有其他聲音(沒有人可以講話)  
較為一般的知識，和學生本身沒有關連性

### 教室3:

著重於教師和學生兩者共同合作

著重於情境下語言的運用(學生該如何使用語言)

依課程學習活動目標，學生會分成倆倆一組或一群

當問題產生，教師給予回饋，學生間的對談不受到教師觀察而中斷

透過教師為資訊來源，學生們回答彼此間的問題

學生有某些主題或可根據本身興趣去自由擴展主題的選擇

學生自行評核自己的學習表現，教師也會根據所教授內容及學生個別能力來做評核(估)

教室內總是互動頻繁

評核也許包含考試，但多為根據學生個人能力表現

知識是與學生和本身在教室經驗有直接關連性

