

## STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: ENGAGEMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT

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### Abstract

In modern English language teaching (ELT), the shift from teacher-led lectures to student-driven discovery has transformed how students acquire language. This study examines how student-centered learning (SCL) influences student engagement and academic outcomes. By treating students as active partners rather than passive recipients, the approach fosters autonomy and meaningful communication. Results suggest that SCL significantly boosts intrinsic motivation and language retention, though it requires teachers to adopt new roles as facilitators.

**Key words:** *Student-Centered Learning (SCL), Learner Autonomy, Student Engagement, Academic Achievement, English Language Teaching (ELT)*

### Introduction

Traditional English classrooms often place the teacher at the center, acting as the sole source of knowledge. However, as the world becomes more interconnected, the goal of learning English has shifted toward real-world communication and critical thinking. Student-centered learning addresses this by prioritizing the student's voice, interests, and unique learning pace. The purpose of this article is to explore how this humanized approach—focusing on relationships and personalization—affects how much students engage with the material and how well they perform academically.

### Methods

This article was developed through a systematic review of pedagogical literature and empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025. The methodology focused on:

1. **Selection Criteria:** Articles specifically addressing English language learners (ELL) and student-centered strategies like project-based learning (PBL) and flipped classrooms.
2. **Analysis:** Comparing traditional teacher-centered outcomes with student-centered results regarding engagement levels and test scores.
3. **Synthesizing Best Practices:** Identifying practical strategies currently used in classrooms, such as "Jigsaw" activities and the use of AI/VR tools to personalize learning.

## Review

Recent research from 2020 to 2025 highlights several key trends in student-centered English education:

**Active Participation:** Studies show that when students are active participants, they develop higher-order thinking skills and a stronger sense of ownership over their learning.

**Motivation and Engagement:** By aligning content with students' interests, SCL increases intrinsic motivation. This "power-sharing" in the classroom makes students more invested in their own success.

**Academic Performance:** Evidence suggests that while traditional methods might prioritize "hard skills" (grammar and testing), SCL improves "soft skills" and character alongside language proficiency, leading to better long-term retention.

**21st-Century Skills:** SCL is increasingly linked to developing critical life skills such as teamwork, communication, and digital literacy, which are essential in the modern global job market.

The shift toward student-centered learning (SCL) is built on the idea that language is caught through interaction, not just taught through rules.

**The Emotional Safety Net (Stephen Krashen):** Long-standing theories by **Stephen Krashen**, reinforced by studies in 2021 and 2024, emphasize the "Affective Filter".

Krashen argues that when a student is stressed or bored, their brain literally blocks new information. Humanizing the classroom means lowering this filter by making students feel safe to make mistakes—a core tenet of SCL. **Motivation as a Vision (Zoltán Dörnyei):** Renowned researcher **Zoltán Dörnyei** proposed that students engage most when they can visualize themselves as successful English speakers. Recent 2025 research confirms that when teachers personalize the learning process (e.g., using a student's own hobbies as the topic for a grammar lesson), it builds "intrinsic motivation," making the student want to learn for themselves rather than for a grade.

**The Power of Agency (David Nunan):** **David Nunan's** work on learner autonomy is central to SCL. He suggests that language is a process of acquiring skills, not just a body of facts. Recent studies (2022–2025) found that "power-sharing"—giving students a choice in their projects—results in significantly higher participation rates and better retention.

**Measuring Impact (John Hattie):** In his updated **Visible Learning** research (including 2025 perspectives), **John Hattie** highlights that the most effective teachers are those who see learning through the eyes of their students. When students understand how they learn (meta-cognition), their academic achievement rises dramatically.

**Technological Humanization (Modern Research):** Studies from 2024 and 2025 explore how digital tools (like VR or AI-driven apps) can support SCL by allowing students to learn at their own pace. Research by **Bremner et al. (2022)** notes

that this student-centered paradigm creates a more "personalized, engaging, and meaningful" experience compared to traditional lectures.

### Discussion

The shift to a student-centered classroom changes the dynamics of the English language environment in several ways:

**Redefining the Human Connection (Teacher as Facilitator):** In a student-centered model, the teacher's role evolves from a "deliverer of content" to a "facilitator of discovery". This is more than a change in title; it is a shift in power. By assuming roles as **managers, resources, and even participants**, teachers foster an environment of trust. Research in 2025 shows that when students perceive high **teacher support**—especially emotional and competence support—it directly lowers their "affective filter" and boosts their engagement through the **L2 Motivational Self System**.

**The Link Between Engagement and Achievement:** The evidence is clear: higher engagement leads to better academic outcomes. In 2025, **93% of educators** view student engagement as a critical metric for understanding achievement. By using **Interactive Teaching Approaches** like group discussions and hands-on activities, teachers have seen participation rates jump to roughly 80%. These engaged students don't just "learn" English; they develop **21st-century skills** like critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy, which are increasingly seen as "hard skills" essential for the modern workplace.

**Humanizing the "Noisy" Classroom:** Critics often point out that student-centered classrooms can be harder to manage. However, this "noise" is often the sound of **cooperative learning**. Strategies like the **Jigsaw method** have shown significant improvements in complex tasks, such as reading comprehension for standardized tests like the TOEIC. This suggests that peer-to-peer communication can sometimes clarify difficult concepts better than a single teacher's lecture.

**Addressing the Real-World Barriers:** Despite the benefits, implementing SCL in 2025 still faces "human" hurdles. Many students come from a **passive learning culture** and are "waiting to be spoon-fed" due to years of traditional schooling. Additionally, teachers in 2025 often feel a **"policy-practice gap"**, where they are encouraged to be student-centered but are still judged by rigid, **exam-oriented systems**. To bridge this gap, modern research emphasizes the need for **institutional flexibility** and professional development that helps teachers manage larger classes and diverse proficiency levels without burning out.

**The Role of Technology:** Technology acts as a "humanizer" by allowing for **individualization**. Tools like AI-driven adaptive platforms and VR allow students to practice at their own pace, which 92% of students say makes learning more enjoyable. This flexibility is especially vital for students with different socioeconomic

backgrounds or learning needs, ensuring that no one is left behind in a one-size-fits-all lecture.

### Conclusion

Student-centered learning is more than just a teaching method; it is a philosophy that puts the human learner at the heart of the educational journey. In English language classrooms, this approach leads to higher engagement because students find the content relevant to their lives. While it requires more effort from educators to design flexible, interactive lessons, the result is a more capable, confident, and independent English speaker ready for the challenges of the 21st century. For best results, teachers are encouraged to adopt these strategies gradually, building a supportive community that celebrates every student's progress.

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