

Importance of Student-Centred Learning Strategy in Developing English Speaking and Writing Competence at the Elementary Level of EBC. Selo-Craic, Aileu, Timor-Leste

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of student-centred learning (SCL) strategies for enhancing students' ability to learn English and their speaking and writing competence at the elementary level in Timor-Leste. The research employed a qualitative design to investigate how teachers focus on SCL strategies to enhance students' language skills and how these strategies are implemented in classroom practice, based on semi-structured interviews with one English teacher and three students at EBC Selo-Craic in Aileu. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, which included the participants' perceptions and experiences. The results indicate that the teacher focused on SCL and included systematic tasks like quizzes, dictations, sentence constructions, and classroom presentations, which gave the students opportunities to express their thoughts. Collaborative learning, differentiated assessment, and motivation support could promote students' confidence, fluency, engagement, critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. Students attested that SCL provided a supportive classroom atmosphere in which they felt free to communicate and learn from fellow pupils. The research finds that SCL is a useful pedagogy that can be successfully used to enhance English language proficiency in multilingual settings like Timor-Leste, and it has implications for teaching practice, curriculum, and teacher development.

Keyword : Student-Centred Learning, English Language Teaching, Speaking, Writing, Timor-Leste

1. Introduction

Language is the main approach of human communication, which allows people to communicate and share their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge through the use of symbols, rules, and expressions (Fedorenko et al., 2024). English as an international language has become prominent in the context of globalisation, where it offers possibilities for cooperation, mobility, and cross-cultural knowledge access. Therefore, in Timor-Leste, English is a working language, but it is a compulsory subject for junior and senior high school students. However, when the students finish their studies in junior high school, they meet many difficulties in learning English, especially speaking and writing. These problems are due to a lack of vocabulary, confusion about grammar, such as tenses and verbs, and habits of translating literally from Tetum or Portuguese, which result in inaccurate expression.

Some of the studies previously conducted emphasise that effective pedagogy is important for overcoming such challenges, particularly through strategies that engage

learners (Peña, 2025). Writers perceive writing as a process of thinking and expressing ideas in a coherent form, requiring more than just rote learning or teacher instruction. It is generally accepted that student-centred learning (SCL) is an innovative educational method that enables learners to become active participants, think critically, and personalise their learning processes (Nanney, 2020). Research indicates that, along with enhancing teacher-student relationships, SCL can boost the confidence of learners with regard to speaking and writing English.

Nonetheless, a gap in the Timorese situation exists in the perception and implementation of SCL strategies by teachers in enhancing the English language proficiency of students. Most English language teaching in Timor-Leste literature is related to language policy and curriculum development, while few studies concentrate on classroom practices with regard to learners' challenges in communication skills. To fill this gap, the current research study examines the relevance of student-centred learning approaches in supporting the

speaking and writing skills of students in the third cycle of Ensino Basico. The study aims to contribute theoretically by contextualising SCL in a multilingual educational context and practically by offering evidence-based findings for teachers and policymakers for the improvement of English language education in Timor-Leste.

The following research questions and objectives guide this study: (1) How did the teacher prioritise the S.C.L. strategy to enhance students' speaking and writing skills? (2) How was the S.C.L. strategy implemented to promote students' speaking and writing ability in English language teaching? These questions were aligned with the first objective, which was to identify ways in which teachers prioritised the S.C.L. strategy to enhance students' speaking and writing skills in English language instruction. The other objective is to explore ways to implement the S.C.L. strategy to enhance students' speaking and writing abilities in English language teaching.

1.2. Student-Centered Learning Strategy

Student-centred learning is considered one of the most effective instructional strategies in modern education. It focuses on active engagement of students in the learning process, making them the key participants in the process of constructing knowledge. Juhra (2024) stated that the introduction of student-centered learning may have a significant impact on many areas of student development, such as cognitive and psychomotor skills, knowledge acquisition, and learning processes in everyday life. This form of holistic change underscores the paradigm shift in pedagogy between the traditional paradigm of teaching with the teacher as the dominant figure and more interactive and active forms of teaching.

Overby (2011) also explained the nature of student-centred learning, as it brings life to the classroom and the students. Under this model, the teacher not only becomes less of an expert who provides knowledge but more of a facilitator or guide for students' learning success. This role involves assisting students in achieving their mutually agreed-upon learning objectives. The teacher not only teaches but also directs and encourages independence, mental faculties, and problem-solving skills. This teaching philosophy creates a deeper and more individual experience of learning. Student-centred learning improves academic performance, personal development, and lifelong learning habits by encouraging engagement. Therefore, it aligns closely with contemporary educational goals that focus on student autonomy, adaptability, and the practical application of knowledge.

1.3. Importance of Student-Centered Learning Strategy

One of the key benefits of student-centred learning (SCL) is its ability to improve student engagement and motivation. Engagement is the level of active student investment in learning behaviour; motivation is the energy that drives the engagement. In learner-centred environments, students are no longer passive recipients of information but are active co-constructors of their own knowledge. Senior et al. (2018) suggested that such engagement promotes learners' full participation in the learning process, with much enthusiasm and meaning. By integrating student interests, needs, and points of view in teaching, SCL creates intrinsic motivation and sustained academic engagement that leads to more successful and rewarding learning experiences.

Another important result of SCL is the development of critical thinking skills, which are invaluable for success in academic and societal life. Critical thinking is a process that enables someone to evaluate information, ideas, and arguments in a systematic way to make informed judgments based on logic and evidence. Guzzo and Guzzo (2015) pointed out that while critical thinking is not an automatic process of thought, it can be developed consciously through structured teaching opportunities. Student-centred learning through questioning, discussion, thinking, and problem-based learning provides a favourable learning environment for the development of these intellectual skills. In turn, the approach prepares students for critical reflection on complex issues, responsible decision-making, and informed citizenship in a democratic society.

Additionally, SCL provides customised learning experiences that cater to the individual goals, strengths, and learning preferences of students. Consider this – personalisation allows students to take ownership of their own education, as described by Patrick, Kennedy and Powell (2013), by providing a challenging and supportive environment. This approach helps students develop effective learning goals, choices, and self-direction. This independence builds self-confidence for students and encourages them to take on more responsibility and ownership for their education.

Lastly, SCL is linked in important ways to better teacher-student relationships, which are a key component to developing emotionally supportive and academically productive classrooms. As Jones (2022) explained, this means teachers being interested in what is going on in the students' lives, listening intently, offering regular support, and celebrating their efforts and achievements. These positive relationships foster trust, respect, and empathy – driving students' emotional well-being and engagement in learning. Student-centered learning plays a crucial role in promoting engagement, critical thinking, personalised learning, and meaningful relationships with teachers, which can lead to a more inclusive, responsive, and effective learning environment.

1.4. Type of Student-Centered Learning Strategy

Student-centred learning (SCL) is an umbrella term for several different instructional strategies that emphasise the learner rather than the teacher, promoting active learning, independence, and engagement. One of the most notable approaches under the SCL framework is blended learning, a method that combines face-to-face learning with online learning components. This blended model is designed to help maximise benefits from both instructional delivery modalities while reducing the limitations of each. Blended learning combines the best features of different learning environments that are increasingly common in higher education (Halverson & Graham, 2019). By providing flexibility and accessibility, it caters to different learning styles and allows for a more personalised learning experience.

One important strategy for this student-centred learning paradigm is flexible seating. This includes offering students a range of seating options within the classroom environment that are able to accommodate different learning styles and physical requirements. According to Swofford (2021), flexible seating acknowledges that not every student learns best at a desk or chair. From standing desks to floor cushions to collaboration tables, students choosing where they want to sit can help create a more inclusive and responsive learning environment. This model creates comfort and focused attentiveness and encourages agency in students, as they become invested in their learning space.

Collaborative learning is another form of student-centred learning that focuses on cooperation and shared responsibility between learners. According to Laal and Laal (2012), collaborative learning is a process by which students solve problems, carry out tasks, or come up with common results in groups. This approach helps to develop critical thinking, communication, and interpersonal skills while creating a sense of community in the classroom. Through the process of mutual enquiry and dialogue, students build upon their knowledge and gain insights from various other points of view, in line with the very tenets of student-centred learning.

1.5. Student-centred Learning Strategy Implementation Stage

The adoption of student-centred learning (SCL) strategies must be planned and deliberated to create effective learning environments. An essential first step is the building of an enabling environment. Teachers need to create a classroom climate of safety, inclusivity, and emotional well-being to protect students from trauma and stress. A safe learning environment can help students to feel valued and respected, which in turn can improve their ability to engage with the content and feel a sense of accomplishment. As Johns et al. (2018) pointed out, classrooms must be safe environments where students can flourish, emotionally and academically.

Therefore, the process includes the implementation of various instructional approaches. Teachers need to understand the diverse learning styles, needs, and backgrounds of students and deliver instruction in a way that caters to their individual differences. These steps may involve differentiated activities, using multimedia resources, and independent or collaborative approaches to work. According to Lee and Picanco (2013), using multiple instructional strategies will increase the number of opportunities and results of students' learning activities. It is inclusive because it allows all students to share their ideas and engage with the content in ways that suit their strengths.

Assessment practices are another key step in implementing SCL. These practices include collecting, analysing, and using data about students' learning gains to guide instruction and support them. In addition to traditional testing, assessments should incorporate formative and summative assessments, as well as self-assessments, to provide a comprehensive picture of student understanding. On the other hand, according to the principles of accurate assessment, Yin et al. (2022) indicate that the kind of assessment practice is crucial in defining the capacity of students to learn and in providing evidence for their progress and the achievement of the key concepts.

Finally, adaptive learning and reflection are important parts of SCL implementation. Reflection helps students learn what they need to improve and how they can better understand it. Moon (2007) has described reflection as a goal-directed mental process built on prior knowledge and experience. Reflection is closely related to changes in behaviours and strategies that people use to respond to their environment. Adaptation is a vital survival mechanism that allows individuals to effectively respond to new challenges and remain resilient in learning situations (Fullerton, 2021).

2. Research Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design to study and understand the participants' experiences and their perceptions. Qualitative research is a natural method for exploring complex social phenomena in the real world, as it concerns the complexity and richness of human behaviour and meaning-making processes. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research strives to know the phenomena experienced by the research subjects, such as behaviours, perceptions, motivations, and actions, holistically and descriptively, through language and contextual understanding in the natural setting.

This approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to work directly with the people and the place being studied and to gain a more insightful understanding of the meanings and patterns of social interaction that are taking place. Qualitative research focuses on descriptive data gathered using techniques, including interviews, direct observations, and document

analysis (Bazen et al., 2021). These techniques have a particular value, as they make explicit the relations between the different components that are being studied when these are viewed as part of a process that unfolds. The qualitative design used in this study allows for a flexible, adaptive and interpretive study, in which the researcher is a major data collection and analysis tool. This enables a more nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of the research problem that would be laborious to develop using quantitative methods. Furthermore, the focus on naturalistic inquiry is in line with the purpose of the study to document genuine ideas from the participants in their own natural setting. Overall, the qualitative research design was chosen to allow the data collected to reflect the complexity and richness of real-world experiences, which will add to a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the phenomena being explored.

2.2. Research Site

The research site refers to the location that the researcher has selected to conduct research and address the research problem. The researcher was directly collecting data from relevant informants in the school. Similarly, Rachmawati et al. (2022) stated that the research environment often directly influences the researcher to focus only on specific phenomena for exploration and examination within the study's scope. In this study, the location used was EBC Selo-Craic, in Selo-Craic Village in Aileu City, Aileu Municipality. The selection of this place was done based on its relevance to the topic of research and the observation of facts that could be measured and met the objective of the study. The use of EBC Selo-Craic allowed the researcher to recapture richness and contextual information directly from the field, thus generating a greater depth and accuracy of results.

Research Subject

The informants are the subjects of research who supply vital information concerning the conditions of the research site and are thus recognised as important sources of the researcher's observation and discovery. In this study, the researcher has used the purposive sampling technique, where the researcher selects the participants according to their relevance and knowledge of the topic of study (Khoa et al., 2023). Specifically, the sample was composed of the English language teacher who teaches the subject and three students from the 8th grade of the third cycle of the elementary school. These individuals were selected specifically because of their direct involvement in the implementation of student-centered learning strategies. Their findings could also be considered important for investigating the perceived effect of such strategies on students' oral and written performance in English. This purposeful approach was used to ensure the data collected would be rich, specific, and directly relevant to the research question.

Data Collection Method

Data collection is an important research function that helps gather data systematically for general and

scientific purposes. According to Maesaroh et al. (2025), data collection techniques not only constitute a systematic procedure through which researchers can obtain data for analysis but have also been used as a tool for gathering information that is directly related to the research objectives and title. In qualitative research, the researcher is usually regarded as the main tool because he or she is involved in collecting and analysing the data directly in the field. It is generally the function of this person to construct a structured guide for the interview to make the data collected reliable and relevant (Waruwu, 2023). Therefore, for this study, the researcher used interviews as the main data collection method. This approach was chosen so that the authors could go deeply into the participants' opinions on the use and significance of student-centred learning methods in the improvement of English language skills (specifically speaking and writing) among students enrolled in the third grade of Ensino Basico.

Interview

The interview, as a data collection method, consists of intentional verbal communication between the researcher and research participants. An interview is a communication process whose goal is to obtain information through a series of questions that are structured or semi-structured (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). In this study, interviews were carried out with the English teacher and chosen representatives of students from Grade 8. An interview guide, which consists of six open-ended questions, was prepared for each informant. This gave participants the opportunity to voice their opinions openly and in depth, enabling the gathering of rich and descriptive data. The purpose behind the interviews was to gain an understanding of how student-centred learning teaching methods affect the development of students' speaking and writing proficiency in the English language classroom.

2.5. Data Analysis Method

Data analysis is an integral part of the research process; it involves the organisation, classification, coding, and interpretation of the collected data to produce findings that respond to the research's focus or questions. Rachmawati (2022) describes that data analysis refers to the process of grouping, sorting, labelling, and categorising the information so that it may be interpreted. In this study, the researcher collected qualitative data through interviews and utilised thematic analysis as the primary tool for data analysis.

The qualitative research method of thematic analysis enables researchers to identify, analyse, and report on patterns or themes within the data. Thematic analysis can be understood as a foundational method that is used to help researchers go beyond surface-level descriptions and probe deeper meanings that the participants' experiences embody (Ahmed et al., 2025). Researchers particularly find it useful in studying complex phenomena and gaining in-depth insights into the views, behaviours, and motivations of participants. The

thematic analysis approach was used to systematically code the transcripts of interviews and identify themes of student-centred learning strategy implementation and its effect on the students' performance. This process included reading and rereading the data, creating preliminary codes, searching for meaningful patterns, and revising themes to verify that they accurately represented the participants' stories. Thematic analysis not only provided a structured approach to interpretation but also helped to develop a rich and nuanced understanding of the effects that student-centred strategies have on students' English language development, specifically in terms of speaking and writing (Ahmed et al., 2025).

Ethical Consideration

Research ethics includes the researcher's behaviour toward research subjects as well as responsibility for the knowledge produced for society (Pruzan, 2016). Before data collection, the researcher attempted to establish a rapport with the respondent by respecting the respondent's preferences as to when and where to complete the questionnaire, which ensured the respondent's privacy was not disturbed. The researcher expected the respondents to provide accurate, comprehensive, and objective information. In this regard, the researcher had the responsibility to communicate information truthfully and transparently to ensure the study participants understood the purpose and procedures.

In this research, ethical considerations were given high priority, and all activities were carried out following established research standards in schools and communities. Before the start of fieldwork, permission to conduct research was obtained from ICFP by a formal permit for research, addressed to the director of EBC SELOI School. This authorisation granted permission to carry out the study within its designated setting. Importantly, ethical protocols forbade the researcher from forcing teachers, community members, or families to participate in the data-gathering process. Instead, the researcher respected participants' autonomy and willingness to contribute so that their involvement was voluntary and information provided was treated with respect and integrity.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. The Importance and Priority of Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning is an important strategy in which teachers give students more opportunities to express their ideas. An English teacher stated that a student-centered learning strategy is important for developing students' ability to speak and write in the language because it gives them more time and opportunities to practice speaking. The teacher provided guidance while the students independently explored and expressed their ideas based on their understanding. The teacher affirmed that using a student-centred learning

strategy can motivate students to feel free so they can express their ideas with confidence. A student-centred learning strategy is one of the most important strategies that helps the students develop their capacity and improve their ability and mentality of speaking. Additionally, students have the opportunity to independently explore speaking and writing confidently during the learning process. When the teacher prioritises the SCL strategy, it creates a secure environment, provides clear instructions for the assessment task, and offers motivation. The English teacher explained that implementing the SCL strategy in learning requires preparing a satisfactory lesson plan that includes quizzes, a clear structure, instructions, and a variety of activities. These elements make students actively involved in the learning process.

3.2. Assessment Practice and Self-confidence

To improve students' speaking and writing ability, the teacher should prepare the task and allow them to solve the problem. The English teacher mentioned that they should prepare the tasks according to the lesson plan and then organise them into different groups. The teacher affirmed that she gave the text to the student for reading and then gave a dictation. In addition, the teacher provides the opportunity for the student to create their own sentences and present them to the large classroom so that they can improve their self-confidence in speaking the English language. Therefore, student-centred learning is a strategy that gives students more opportunities to express their ideas, which helps them increase their self-confidence. The students affirm that this strategy provides them with more opportunities to write and speak during lessons, which helps them develop their writing and speaking skills in the classroom. Student-centred learning is one of the teaching strategies that makes students eager to learn and feel free to share their ideas during the lesson.

3.3. Motivation and Critical Thinking

During the learning process, teachers motivate and encourage the students to practise writing and speaking so that they can improve their English skills. The students described that the teacher always provides motivation and courage during the learning process, and they were not too afraid of making mistakes while writing and speaking the English language. This approach enabled them to enhance their writing and speaking skills in English. In addition to improving students' critical thinking, the teacher should assign the students writing and speaking tasks. The students reported that writing and speaking tasks help them develop their critical thinking by creating their own sentences, completing dictation exercises, translating sentences from other languages into English, and presenting their work to the entire class. Through this activity, they can improve their critical thinking during

the lesson and develop their writing and speaking skills in the English language.

3.4. Collaboration and Work Presentation

Organising the students into pairs or groups encourages collaboration and allows them to assist each other in solving the exercises. Additionally, this strategy could foster unity and friendliness among students during the lesson, which helps them achieve their learning objectives. According to the students' statements (2025), when the teacher puts them in pairs or groups, it is important because they help each other solve exercises together, learn from one another, and create positive friendships during the lesson. The students affirmed that the teacher consistently provides opportunities for them to write about their personal identity or family composition and present it to the entire class in English, thereby enhancing their writing and speaking skills. Through this strategy, students achieve better cooperation and unity by listening to each other's ideas and opinions related to the lesson. Additionally, these tasks help students develop their critical thinking and creativity skills, as well as their self-confidence, by presenting them to the whole class.

3.5. Discussion

The research results indicate that the English teacher at EBC Selo-Craic emphasised student-centred learning (SCL) strategies by focusing on educator-learner interaction, opportunities for self-practice, and creating favourable classroom conditions. The teacher emphasised the lesson plan design, where activities like quizzes, dictations, sentence construction, and class presentations were included. These exercises were well planned, providing the students with several chances to practice speaking and writing, which not only improved their language abilities but also enhanced their confidence. This prioritisation is consistent with the existing literature, which orders SCL as a learning methodology that develops a sense of autonomy, motivation, and individual ownership of learning (Nanney, 2020; Pena, 2025).

Collaborative tasks, differentiated assessment practices, and motivational support enabled the implementation of SCL strategies. Teamwork and working in pairs allowed students to support one another, which enhanced teamwork and critical thinking. The introduction of assessment activities, including dictation, sentence construction, and self-expression through written and oral presentations, demonstrates that the teacher tried to make tasks relevant to the needs of the students and, at the same time, provide motivation to contemplate and to solve problems. The students reported that these strategies have given them valuable chances to express ideas without any inhibitions, thereby alleviating anxiety and encouraging risk-taking in language use. It is not the first time that this observation has been resonated by

Senior et al. (2018), who point to the fact that active engagement contributes to increased motivation and more effective learning outcomes.

The teacher's motivation and encouragement played a significant role in the successful implementation of SCL. The teacher fostered a classroom environment that promoted experiential learning and development by consistently encouraging students and normalising mistakes as part of the educational process. This method enabled the students to think critically as they initiated and delivered their sentences and translations, which further improved their writing and speaking level. On the same note, collaboration and presentation skills instilled in each learner a sense of responsibility and social bond, which concurs with the statement of Laal and Laal (2012) that collaborative learning achieves interpersonal and academic competence.

In general, the results show that prioritising and enacting SCL strategies in this regard not only enhanced speaking and writing abilities among the students but also fostered confidence, motivation, critical thinking, and collaboration, which are important attributes for effective language acquisition in multilingual settings, such as Timor-Leste.

4. Conclusion

Student-centred learning strategies could be prioritised and implemented to improve the speaking and writing skills of students at EBC Selo-Craic. The results indicate that the teacher valued SCL, as it combined structured activities with offering the possibility of independent practice and encouraging a safe and motivating classroom environment. The practices of collaborative learning, tasks, formative assessments, and motivational support served as implementation and played a major role in helping students to be confident in their abilities, express themselves, and develop linguistically.

The research has found that student-focused learning is a viable pedagogical technique to enhance the abilities of English communication in the Timor-Leste school environment. The CLT promotes independence, interaction, and critical evaluation of learning; it intensifies teamwork and thinking. As an exercise, teachers are advised to continually develop divergent and interactive activities, provide constructive feedback, and give collaborative chances that can result in the increase of language proficiency as well as learner confidence. As a policy and further research suggestion, the study recommends training programmes that could help teachers adopt SCL strategies more systematically across schools in Timor-Leste, thereby improving English language education in general.

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