## Teacher vs. Learner-Centered Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher-Centered</th>
<th>Learner-Centered</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on instructor</td>
<td>Focus is on both students and instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus is on language forms and structures (what the instructor knows about the language)</td>
<td>Focus is on language use in typical situations (how students will use the language)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor talks; students listen</td>
<td>Instructor models; students interact with instructor and one another</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students work alone</td>
<td>Students work in pairs, in groups, or alone depending on the purpose of the activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor monitors and corrects every student utterance</td>
<td>Students talk without constant instructor monitoring; instructor provides feedback/correction when questions arise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor answers students’ questions about language</td>
<td>Students answer each other’s questions, using instructor as an information resource</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor chooses topics</td>
<td>Students have some choice of topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor evaluates student learning</td>
<td>Students evaluate their own learning; instructor also evaluates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom is quiet</td>
<td>Classroom is often noisy and busy</td>
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These ten guidelines will help you make communicative language teaching and learner-centered instruction part of your own instructional approach.

1. **Provide Appropriate Input**

Input is the language to which students are exposed: teacher talk, listening activities, reading passages, and the language heard and read outside of class. Input gives learners the material they need to develop their ability to use the language on their own.

Language input has two forms. *Finely tuned* input

- Is matched to learners’ current comprehension level and connected to what they already know
- Focuses on conscious learning of a specific point: the pronunciation of a word, the contrast in the uses of two verb tenses, new vocabulary, useful social formulas
- Is controlled by the instructor or textbook author
- Is used in the presentation stage of a lesson

*Roughly tuned input*

- Is more complex than learners’ current proficiency and stretches the boundaries of their current knowledge
- Focuses on authentic use of language in listening or reading passages
- Is used “as is,” with minimal alteration by the instructor or textbook author
- Is used in the activity stage of the lesson

Roughly tuned input challenges student to use listening and reading strategies to aid comprehension. When selecting authentic materials for use as roughly tuned input, look for listening and reading selections that are one level of proficiency higher than students’ current level. This will ensure that students will be challenged by the material without being overwhelmed by its difficulty.

2. **Use Language in Authentic Ways**

In order to learn a language, instead of merely learning about it, students need as much as possible to hear and read the language as native speakers use it. Instructors can make this happen in two ways.

*Teacher talk:* Always try to use the language as naturally as possible when you are talking to students. Slowing down may seem to make the message more comprehensible, but it also distorts the subtle shifts in pronunciation that occur in naturally paced speech.

- Speak at a normal rate
- Use vocabulary and sentence structures with which students are familiar
- State the same idea in different ways to aid comprehension

Materials: Give students authentic reading material from newspapers, magazines, and other print sources. To make them accessible,

- Review them carefully to ensure that the reading level is appropriate
- Introduce relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures in advance
- Provide context by describing the content and typical formats for the type of material (for example, arrival and departure times for travel schedules)

Advertisements, travel brochures, packaging, and street signs contain short statements that students at lower levels can manage. The World Wide Web is a rich resource for authentic materials. Reading authentic materials motivates students at all levels because it gives them the sense that they really are able to use the language.

3. Provide Context

Context includes knowledge of

- the topic or content
- the vocabulary and language structures in which the content is usually presented
- the social and cultural expectations associated with the content

To help students have an authentic experience of understanding and using language, prepare them by raising their awareness of the context in which it occurs.

- Ask them what they know about the topic
- Ask what they can predict from the title or heading of a reading selection or the opening line of a listening selection
- Review the vocabulary (including idiomatic expressions) and sentence structures that are usually found in that type of material
- Review relevant social and cultural expectations

4. Design Activities with a Purpose

Ordinarily, communication has a purpose: to convey information. Activities in the language classroom simulate communication outside the classroom when they are structured with such a purpose. In these classroom activities, students use the language to fill an information gap by getting answers or expanding a partial understanding. For example, students work in pairs, and each is given half of a map, grid, or list needed to complete a task. The pair then talk to each other until they both have all the information.

5. Use Task-based Activities
Fluent speakers use language to perform tasks such as solving problems, developing plans, and working together to complete projects. The use of similar task-based activities in the classroom is an excellent way to encourage students to use the language. Tasks may involve solving a word problem, creating a crossword puzzle, making a video, preparing a presentation, or drawing up a plan.

6. Encourage Collaboration

Whenever possible, ask students to work in pairs or small groups. Give students structure in the form of a defined task and outcome. This structure will allow students to collaborate as they develop a work plan, discuss the substance of the task, and report the outcome. They will thus use language in a variety of ways and learn from each other.

Effective collaborative activities have three characteristics.

- Communication gap: Each student has relevant information that the others don’t have
- Task orientation: Activity has a defined outcome, such as solving a problem or drawing a map
- Time limit: Students have a preset amount of time to complete the task

7. Use an Integrated Approach

Integration has two forms. Mode integration is the combination of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in classroom activities. By asking students to use two or more modes, instructors create activities that imitate real world language use.

Content integration is bringing content from students’ fields of study into the language curriculum. University students often find it instructive to read, discuss, and write about material whose content they already know, because their knowledge of the topic helps them understand and use the language. They are able to scaffold: to build on existing knowledge as they increase their language proficiency. For students who plan to study and/or work in a field that will require them to use the language they are learning, integration of content can be a powerful motivator.

8. Address Grammar Consciously

University students usually need and appreciate direct instruction in points of grammar that are related to classroom activities. These students often have knowledge of the rules associated with standard use of their native language (metalinguistic knowledge) and can benefit from development of similar knowledge in the target language and discussion of similarities and differences.

Discuss points of grammar in the contexts where they arise. Asking students to think through a rule in the context of an effort to express themselves clearly is a more effective way of helping them internalize the rule than teaching the rule in isolation.

Two types of grammar rules to address when using authentic materials:
- Prescriptive rules: State how the language “should” or “must” be used; define what is “correct.” These are the rules that are taught in language textbooks.
- Descriptive rules: State how the language is actually used by fluent speakers. The degree to which descriptive rules differ from prescriptive rules depends on the setting (casual/formal use of language), the topic, and the backgrounds of the speakers.

9. Adjust Feedback/Error Correction to Situation

In the parts of a lesson that focus on form, direct and immediate feedback is needed and expected. Encourage students to self-correct by waiting after they have spoken or by asking them to try again.

Feedback techniques:

- Paraphrase a student’s utterances, modeling the correct forms
- Ask students to clarify their utterances, providing paraphrases of their own

Avoid feeding students the correct forms every time. Gradually teaching them to depend less on you and more on themselves is what language teaching is all about.

In the parts of a lesson that focus on communication activities, the flow of talk should not be interrupted by the teacher’s corrections. When students address you, react to the content of their utterances, not just the form. Your response is a useful comprehension check for students, and on the affective level it shows that you are listening to what they say. Make note of recurring errors you hear so that you can address them with the whole group in the feedback session later.

10. Include Awareness of Cultural Aspects of Language Use

Languages are cognitive systems, but they also express ideas and transmit cultural values. When you are discussing language use with your students, it is important to include information on the social, cultural, and historical context that certain language forms carry for native speakers. Often these explanations include reference to what a native speaker would say, and why.

Culture is expressed and transmitted through magazines and newspapers, radio and television programs, movies, and the internet. Using media as authentic materials in the classroom can expand students’ perspectives and generate interesting discussions about the relationships between language and culture.
Models of Language Teaching and Learning

Language instructors at the university level in the United States are often in one of three situations:

- They are language instructors with experience teaching in their countries of origin, but little or no training in the teaching approaches commonly used in the United States
- They are professionals in other fields who are native speakers of the language, but are not trained as teachers
- They are graduate students who have extensive knowledge of language, literature, and culture, but are not trained as language teachers

These instructors often must begin their work in the classroom with little or no guidance to help them appreciate which methods work, how, and why. In response, they may fall back on an outdated model for understanding language teaching and language learning.

Older model: Language learning is a product of transmission. Teacher transmits knowledge. Learner is recipient.

This teacher-centered model views the teacher as active and the student as fundamentally passive. The teacher is responsible for transmitting all of the information to the students. The teacher talks; the students listen and absorb (or take a nap).

The teacher-centered model may be attractive to new language instructors for several reasons:

- It is the method by which they were taught
- It makes sense: The teacher should be the focus of the classroom, since the teacher knows the language and the students do not
- It requires relatively little preparation: All the teacher needs to do is present the material outlined in the appropriate chapter of the book
- It requires relatively little thought about student or student activities: All students listen to the same (teacher) presentation, then do related exercises

However, experienced language instructors who reflect on their teaching practice have observed that the teacher-centered model has two major drawbacks:

- It involves only a minority of students in actual language learning
- It gives students knowledge about the language, but does not necessarily enable them to use it for purposes that interest them

To overcome these drawbacks, language teaching professionals in the United States and elsewhere have adopted a different model of teaching and learning.
Newer model: Language learning is a process of discovery. Learner develops ability to use the language for specific communication purposes. Teacher models language use and facilitates students' development of language skills.

In this learner-centered model, both student and teacher are active participants who share responsibility for the student's learning. Instructor and students work together to identify how students expect to use the language. The instructor models correct and appropriate language use, and students then use the language themselves in practice activities that simulate real communication situations. The active, joint engagement of students and teacher leads to a dynamic classroom environment in which teaching and learning become rewarding and enjoyable.

Language instructors who have never experienced learner-centered instruction can find it daunting in several ways.

- It requires more preparation time: Instructors must consider students' language learning goals, identify classroom activities that will connect those with the material presented in the textbook, and find appropriate real-world materials to accompany them
- It is mysterious: It's not clear what, exactly, an instructor does to make a classroom learner centered
- It feels like it isn't going to work: When students first are invited to participate actively, they may be slow to get started as they assess the tasks and figure out classroom dynamics
- It feels chaotic: Once student start working in small groups, the classroom becomes noisy and the instructor must be comfortable with the idea that students may make mistakes that are not heard and corrected
- It sounds like a bad idea: The phrase "learner centered" makes it sound as though the instructor is not in control of the classroom

This final point is an important one. In fact, in an effective learner-centered classroom, the instructor has planned the content of all activities, has set time limits on them, and has set them in the context of instructor-modeled language use. The instructor is not always the center of attention, but is still in control of students' learning activities.