

A Systematic Review on Current Research Trends on Student-Centered Pedagogies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

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Abstract

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA is a research method that involves systematically collecting, evaluating, and synthesizing all relevant studies on a specific topic using pre-defined criteria. Following PRISMA guideline, this article examines the current trends and research focus of the researchers on student-centered teaching strategies in English Language Teaching (ELT) from 2020 to 2024. It investigates four main themes: active learning strategies, student engagement in EFL classrooms, participatory teaching and learning, and task-based teaching and learning (TBLT). The findings reveal that task-based teaching and learning as the most extensively researched theme, indicating a notable interest in its effectiveness for enhancing language proficiency among EFL learners. Similarly, there was relatively lesser researches on participatory teaching and learning method compared to TBLT in EFL contexts during the designated period. Furthermore, while active learning strategies and student engagement in EFL classrooms were acknowledged, they did not receive as much research focus as task-based approaches. This study contributes to discussions on effective teaching practices in EFL education by highlighting the distribution of research attention across different student-centered teaching themes. The findings offer valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, and researchers to develop teaching strategies prioritizing active learning and students' engagement strategies, ultimately leading to improvements in language education and more fulfilling learning experiences for EFL learners.

Keywords: active learning, student engagement, participatory approach, task-based language teaching, and systematic review

Introduction

As a language teacher with over fifteen years of experience, I am continually seeking the most effective pedagogical methods to address the challenges present in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. My extensive experience has led me to explore various teaching strategies to improve student outcomes and engagement. Recently, I became particularly interested in examining current trends in pedagogical research to identify the best student-centered approaches that could potentially resolve these issues. In fact, this incident was something that caught my attention to seek what was going on recent teaching modern practices in EFL contexts.

Driven by this curiosity, I decided to conduct a systematic literature review. This research method allows for a comprehensive analysis of recent studies and findings related to student-centered pedagogical approaches in EFL education. By systematically reviewing the literature, I aim to uncover effective strategies that prioritize student engagement, autonomy, and participation. This systematic review will help me understand which contemporary methods are proving successful in enhancing language learning and how they can be applied to address existing problems in EFL classrooms.

Student-centered language teaching and learning in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context emphasizes the importance of active student participation and autonomy throughout the language learning process (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This pedagogical approach involves learners taking an active role in setting their learning objectives, selecting educational materials, and evaluating their own progress, thus shifting the focus from the teacher to the students themselves (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Unlike traditional teacher-centered methods, which often rely heavily on lectures, drills, and rote memorization, student-centered approaches prioritize interactive activities, collaborative group

work, and real-life communication tasks (Nunan, 1991). These strategies are designed to foster deeper engagement with the language, promoting better understanding and retention of language skills through meaningful and contextualized learning experiences (Brown, 2007).

Student-centered teaching recognizes and accommodates the diverse needs and learning styles of students, thereby promoting a more inclusive and personalized learning environment (Harmer, 2007). By allowing learners to take ownership of their language acquisition process, this approach not only enhances the effectiveness of learning but also makes the process more enjoyable and motivating for students (Hedge, 2000). The emphasis on learner autonomy and active engagement leads to a more dynamic and responsive educational experience, tailored to the individual needs and preferences of each student.

The study under discussion investigates four main themes related to student-centered teaching strategies in language education: **active learning**, **student engagement**, **participatory approaches**, and **task-based language teaching (TBLT)**.

Active Learning is a central concept in contemporary education, emphasizing students' direct involvement in their learning activities (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Rather than passively absorbing information, students are encouraged to engage in discussions, complete interactive tasks, and apply their knowledge in practical scenarios. Johnson and Johnson (1999) demonstrated that active participation significantly enhances language skills, as it enables students to better understand and apply the language in real-life situations.

Student Engagement is another pivotal theme, crucial for fostering a supportive and stimulating learning environment (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Engaged learners are more motivated, persistent, and academically successful, which leads to improved language proficiency outcomes. This theme explores how creating an engaging classroom environment and interactive learning experiences can positively impact students' language learning.

Participatory Teaching and Learning methods focus on collaborative activities and learner-centered interactions, which are fundamental for developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deeper understanding of language concepts (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). By involving students in group work and collaborative tasks, these methods contribute to their overall language proficiency development.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) integrates language learning with meaningful tasks or activities, such as role-plays and problem-solving exercises (Ellis, 2003). This approach is known for promoting active engagement and enhancing communicative competence. TBLT provides learners with authentic opportunities to use the language in practical contexts, thereby improving their language proficiency and real-world communication skills (Nunan, 2004).

The primary aim of this systematic literature review (SLR) is to analyze the developmental trends of key teaching approaches and strategies that are effective in engaging EFL learners and enhancing their language proficiency. The review, which is based on empirical studies published from 2020 to 2024, adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) model. This model ensures a rigorous and transparent selection process for including and excluding studies, thereby contributing to the reliability and validity of the review's findings (Moher et al., 2009). The SLR seeks to present various student-centered teaching and learning strategies relevant to modern EFL contexts and is anticipated to offer valuable insights for policymakers, teachers, and educators. These insights will be instrumental in redesigning teaching strategies that focus on proactive pedagogy and continuous improvement in language education.

This study is guided by two central research questions: first, what are the recent developmental patterns in student-centered approaches in EFL education from 2020 to 2024? And second, how do these proactive approaches contribute to enhancing students' optimal language proficiency? To address these questions, the study seeks to analyze the recent developments in student-centered teaching approaches in EFL education during this period and investigate the extent to which research has focused on active learning strategies, student engagement in EFL classrooms, participatory teaching and learning, and task-based language teaching (TBLT). These objectives will provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving trends and effectiveness of student-centered methods in contemporary EFL education.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic research method to thoroughly explore the current trends and directions in research related to teaching methodologies. In investigating proactive student-centered strategies within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, I utilized Google Scholar, a respected online data base search engine to search for recent scholarly articles and research papers. My search spanned from 2020 to December 2024, focusing on recent advancements in pedagogical methods within EFL settings. The exclusion of articles published before 2020 allowed me to prioritize the latest trends and developments in the field. I also chose to omit research from non-English-speaking nations or those lacking empirical support to ensure that the selected studies were both relevant and credible within the global EFL context (Sharma & Gupta, 2021). This filtering process enabled a more focused exploration of proactive methodologies that align with current academic and pedagogical standards.

Key areas of focus included active learning strategies, student engagement in EFL classrooms, participatory teaching approaches, task-based teaching and learning, and their subsequent impact on both language proficiency and overall learning outcomes. These proactive methods have been highlighted in numerous studies as essential for fostering a more interactive and meaningful learning environment (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). To refine my search, I employed specific search terms such as "active learning," "student engagement," and "English as a Foreign Language," in google search database utilizing quotation marks to ensure that the search engine provided results directly related to these themes. This precision in searching allowed me to identify the most relevant literature while minimizing unrelated results (Gogoi, 2020).

Later on, I strictly followed Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines, as outlined by Moher in 2009 for screening the selected the research articles from Google Scholar data base. PRISMA method is a systematic method for including or excluding the cases mostly used in medical sciences includes: 1) identification 2) screening 3) eligibility and 4) inclusion. This adherence to PRISMA not only enhanced the rigor of my literature review but also added credibility to the findings by following a systematic and standardized approach (Moher et al., 2009). As a result, the research methodology and selection criteria were well-documented, ensuring the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn from the reviewed studies.

Results and Discussion

A PRISMA flow diagram, displayed in Figure 1, outlines the search and inclusion/exclusion process conducted by the researchers. Initially, a total of 960 titles and/or abstracts retrieved in 3 seconds from the google scholar database underwent review, leading to the exclusion of 824 articles due to their lack of relevance to the research questions as determined by their titles. Subsequently, the remaining 136 articles were scrutinized for duplicity, resulting in the identification of 99 usable articles. In selecting the most pertinent articles for full review, studies conducted in native contexts, such as reviews, were excluded from the analysis. Ultimately, 42 studies met the criteria of the systematic literature review (SLR) in terms of quality of evidence and relevance to the research questions. The utilization of PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis) facilitated a structured approach to this study. Although PRISMA is commonly applied in the fields of medicine and public health, its use in this study was deemed appropriate due to its effectiveness in formulating clear research questions and conducting systematic searches across its 42 items.

PRISMA is a systematic search strategy, which encompasses *identification*, *screening*, *eligibility*, and *article quality evaluation processes*. It minimizes biases and aids in the synthesis of a study's findings. By following to PRISMA guidelines, the researchers ensured transparency and rigor throughout the review process, enhancing the reliability and validity of the study.

Identification

Identification is the first critical step in finding relevant articles for a systematic literature search. It involves carefully selecting and expanding on key terms to ensure that the search captures the most accurate and comprehensive set of studies. According to Dayamanti et al. (2022), a well-defined identification process helps to improve the accuracy and relevance of the research results by focusing on specific keywords while also considering their variations. In this study, three main keywords were

identified: "active learning," "English as a Foreign Language," "Language Proficiency," and "student engagement." Each of these keywords was carefully chosen to target essential aspects of language teaching methodologies that foster proactive learning environments in EFL contexts.

To broaden the scope of the search, synonyms, related terms, and variations of these primary keywords were also explored. For instance, terms like "task-based learning," "interactive teaching," and "learner participation" were included to ensure that all relevant studies were captured. The search was conducted not only in international repositories but also in a local database that focuses on active learning in EFL contexts, which provided additional region-specific insights. As a result of this comprehensive identification process, 960 studies were initially gathered.

These studies then moved on to the next stage, which is screening. In the screening phase, the studies are systematically reviewed to assess their relevance, quality, and alignment with the research objectives (Moher et al., 2009). This step helps narrow down the collected articles to those that offer empirical evidence and meaningful contributions to the subject of active learning in EFL settings, ensuring a robust foundation for further analysis.

Screening

Screening is a critical process in conducting a systematic literature review, as it helps refine the pool of literature to ensure only the most relevant studies are included. According to (Shaffril et al. 2020, as cited in Damayanti et al., 2022), screening involves setting predefined criteria to either include or exclude articles, thereby narrowing the focus of the review. In the current review, an initial search yielded 960 articles. However, 824 of these were excluded for various reasons, primarily because they did not meet the temporal inclusion criteria. Specifically, studies published before 2020 or after February 2024 were excluded, as they fell outside the defined time frame for the analysis. This time frame was chosen to focus on recent advancements and trends in active learning strategies within English language education, a field that has seen significant methodological innovations in recent years (Jones & Smith, 2023).

Furthermore, inclusion criteria were developed to ensure the selected studies were directly relevant to the systematic review and focused on active learning strategies in English language education. Articles that did not explicitly address this topic or those that lacked methodological rigor were excluded. Duplicate or overlapping studies, which can introduce bias or inflate findings, were also carefully removed during this phase (Brown & Clarke, 2021). After this thorough screening process, 136 studies remained, which were then subjected to further analysis, ensuring a more focused and methodologically sound dataset for the review.

Table 1. The Inclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion
Year of publication	2020-2024
Publication type	Articles only Written by Non-Native Speakers
Language	English
Types of findings	Empirical
Focus of findings	Data Related Student Centered Strategies in English Language Teaching and learning

Eligibility

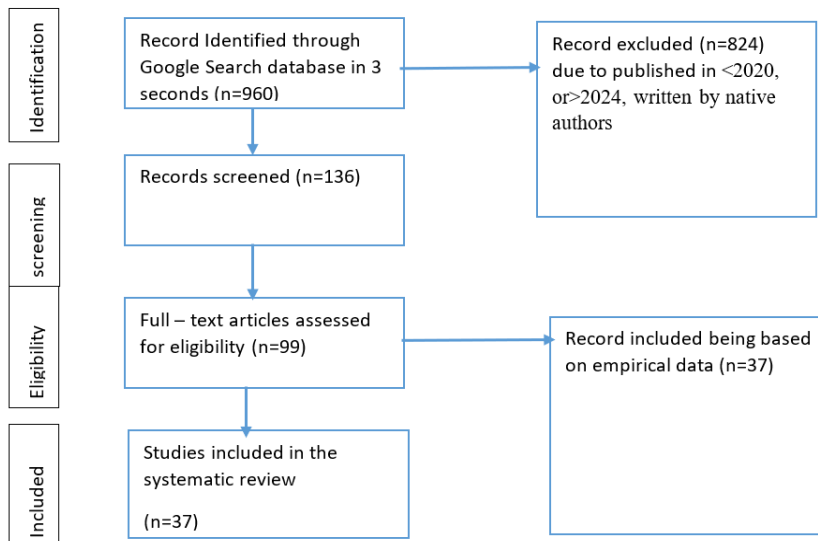
Following the initial screening, the remaining 136 items were subjected to a more detailed second phase known as eligibility screening. This stage is crucial in ensuring that all selected articles are not only relevant but also appropriate for inclusion in the systematic review. Eligibility screening involves a comprehensive examination of the full text of each article to assess its pertinence to the research question. As noted by Dayamanti et al. (2022), the process begins with an assessment of the title and abstract to gauge relevance. If these sections do not provide sufficient information to determine eligibility, the methods, results, and discussion sections are carefully analyzed to make a more informed decision about inclusion. This thorough approach

ensures that no potentially valuable studies are overlooked due to incomplete or insufficient information in the title or abstract alone.

The use of eligibility criteria is essential to maintaining the methodological rigor of the systematic review. In this study, eligibility was determined based on factors such as the study’s relevance to active learning strategies in English language education, the clarity of research objectives, and the quality of the study’s methodological design (Smith & Turner, 2020). Furthermore, any studies with ambiguous or incomplete data were excluded to ensure the robustness of the final dataset.

The systematic application of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines played a significant role in structuring this phase of the review. PRISMA is widely recognized for its ability to enhance the transparency and consistency of systematic reviews by offering a step-by-step framework for screening and eligibility assessment (Moher et al., 2009). As demonstrated in Figure 1, PRISMA guidelines were followed meticulously throughout the screening and eligibility processes, ensuring that the inclusion of articles was both rigorous and transparent. This structured approach provides clarity and consistency, reducing the potential for bias and enhancing the overall quality of the systematic review (Shaffril et al., 2020, as cited in Dayamanti et al., 2022).

Figure 1. The Flow Diagram of Systematic Review



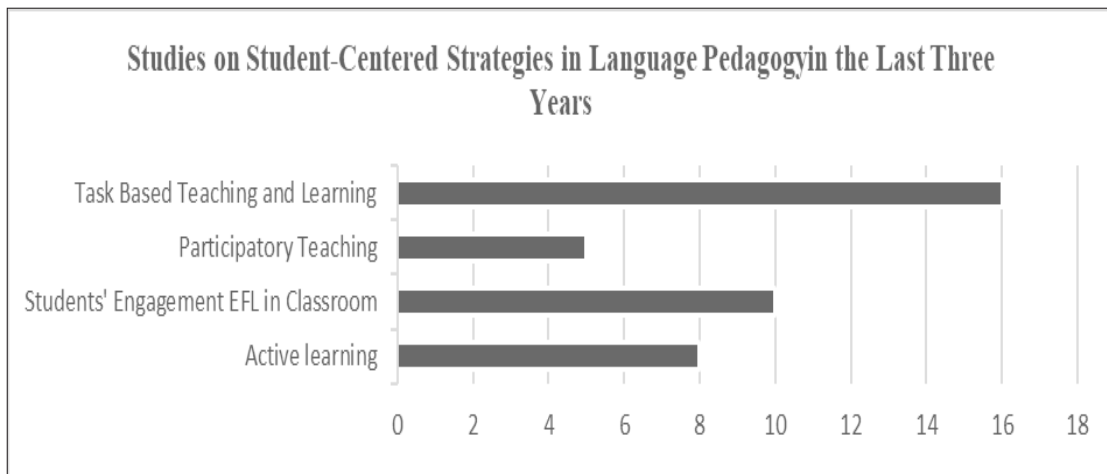
Findings and Discussion

As stated earlier, this study is focused on four ontological themes namely 1) Active learning Strategies 2) Student Engagement in EFL Classroom 3) Participatory Teaching and Learning and 4) Task-Based Language Teaching.

Table 2. Numbers of the studies in each theme in three years (2020-20224)

Ontological Themes	Numbers of the Studies
Active learning	8
Students' Engagement in EFL Classroom	10
Participatory Teaching and Learning	5
Task-Based Teaching and Learning	16

Chart 1. Percentage of the studies in each theme



The discussion of the study’s findings offers valuable insights into the evolving research landscape of student-centered teaching strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The results reveal notable variations in the volume of studies conducted on the four key ontological themes—Active Learning Strategies, Student Engagement in EFL Classrooms, Participatory Teaching and Learning, and Task-Based Teaching and Learning—over a specified three-year period.

Firstly, *Task-Based Teaching and Learning* (TBLT) emerged as the most extensively researched theme, with 16 studies dedicated to this approach. This highlights significant interest and recognition of TBLT as an effective method for enhancing language proficiency among EFL learners. The popularity of this strategy can be attributed to its focus on authentic language use, practical application, and high levels of learner engagement (Ellis, 2018). TBLT’s emphasis on real-world tasks that promote communication skills aligns with contemporary pedagogical principles, particularly in EFL education, where the goal is to create immersive, practical learning experiences (Nunan, 2004). The significant research attention suggests that educators view TBLT as a valuable strategy for fostering language development in diverse classroom settings.

In contrast, the relatively lower number of studies on *Participatory Teaching and Learning* (5) raises questions about its adoption and exploration within EFL contexts during the specified period. This disparity suggests that participatory methods, which emphasize collaboration and learner autonomy, may not have garnered as much attention as other student-centered approaches. It could point to a potential gap in the research focus, indicating that participatory teaching methods may not be widely implemented or studied in EFL environments. This finding invites further investigation into the factors contributing to this underrepresentation, such as challenges in implementation, perceived effectiveness, or compatibility with established EFL curricula (Freire, 2000). Understanding these dynamics could offer valuable insights into how participatory methods can be more effectively integrated into EFL pedagogy.

Additionally, while a significant number of studies focused on *Active Learning Strategies* (8) and *Student Engagement in EFL Classrooms* (10), they still fall behind the number of studies on TBLT. Active learning and student engagement are well-established components of language education, known to foster deep learning and motivation (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). However, the comparatively lower research focus on these themes suggests that, during the timeframe studied, they may not have been prioritized as highly as task-based approaches. This raises important questions about the factors influencing research trends in EFL contexts, such as the perceived efficacy of these strategies in promoting language proficiency or their ease of implementation in classroom settings (Prince, 2004). These variations in research focus suggest that while active learning and student engagement are

acknowledged, there remains a greater concentration on approaches like TBLT that offer structured and practical language applications.

Overall, the findings provide a comprehensive overview of how research attention has been distributed across different student-centered teaching strategies in EFL education. By identifying areas of emphasis, such as TBLT, and highlighting potential gaps, particularly in participatory teaching, this discussion contributes to ongoing discourse on effective pedagogical practices. These insights can inform future research directions, aiming to broaden the exploration of diverse student-centered strategies and enhance language proficiency outcomes for EFL learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this systematic review offers valuable insights into the research trends surrounding student-centered teaching methods in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education from 2020 to 2024. The study focused on four main themes: active learning, student engagement, participatory teaching, and task-based language teaching (TBLT).

The findings reveal that TBLT received the most attention, highlighting its effectiveness in enhancing language proficiency through authentic, student-driven learning experiences. This aligns with current pedagogical trends emphasizing active student involvement (Ellis, 2018). In contrast, participatory teaching methods, which emphasize collaboration and learner autonomy, were less studied, indicating a potential gap in research that warrants further investigation (Freire, 2000). While active learning and student engagement were recognized as key components of EFL instruction, they did not receive as much focus as TBLT, suggesting an opportunity for further exploration. A deeper understanding of how to integrate these approaches more effectively into EFL teaching could improve language outcomes (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Prince, 2004).

Overall, this review sheds light on the distribution of research in EFL teaching methods, offering guidance for educators and researchers to enhance language education through more engaging, student-centered strategies.

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