# Student-Centred Learning And Teacher-Centred Learning: A Psychological Perspective On Teaching Approaches

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## Abstract

Teaching approaches are very important in learning experiences of students and their psychological development. This paper discusses the differences between teacher-centred learning and student-centred learning from the psychological perspective. Teacher-centred learning focuses on structured learning where the teacher is the main source of knowledge while student-centred learning focuses on active participation of learners, autonomy and collaboration. Drawing on the major psychological theories, namely, behaviourism, constructivism and humanistic learning theory, the study focuses on the influence of these approaches on students' motivation, cognitive development, critical thinking and academic performance. The analysis suggests that the teacher-centred learning offers a systematic framework of delivering the basic knowledge and maintaining the organization in the classroom, whereas the student-centred learning facilitates the intrinsic motivation and active engagement in the classroom and develops higher order thinking skills. The findings suggest that combining some aspects of both approaches can create a balanced learning environment to support effectively knowledge acquisition and students' intellectual and personal growth in today's educational environment.

**Keywords:** Educational Psychology, Student-Centred Learning, Teacher-Centred Learning, Cognitive Development, Motivation.

## 1. Introduction

The changing landscape of higher education has seen a greater need for effective teaching approaches for better student engagement, learning outcomes, and critical thinking skills. Modern universities are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to develop the analytical capabilities of learners, their creativity and problem-solving. As a result, the researchers and educators have focused on studying on varying pedagogies approaches that can facilitate quality of teaching and learning. Among the most widely discussed approaches is teacher-centred learning and student-centred learning that represent two opposite perspectives on the teaching-learning process (Smith, 2018; Jones and Brown, 2019).

Teacher-centred learning is regarded as a conventional instructional strategy where the teacher is the ultimate authority and knowledge giver in the classroom setting. Commonly, instruction is applied via lectures and structured explanations, as students listen, take notes and reproduce information in assessments. Teachers are the ones who plan the lesson, have control over what takes place in the classroom, and assess the outcome of the learning of students in this model (Hancock, Bray, & Nason, 2003; Peyton, More, & Young, 2010). In a psychological tradition, this approach is very much akin to behaviourist theory of learning which focuses on structured teaching, reinforcement, and measurable learning outcomes (Sharon, 2008; Smith, 2018).

In contrast, student-centred learning is focused on the active participation and autonomy of the learners. Students are encouraged to participate in discussion, collaboration and problem solving activities so that they can construct their own understanding of knowledge. In such environments teachers are facilitators that guide the learning experiences of the students rather than simply providing information (Mascolo, 2009; Mascolo & Fischer, 2004). This approach is highly related to the constructivist learning theory, which regards learning as an active process in which knowledge is built through interaction and experience (Jonassen, 1991; Brown & Green, 2020).

Although these two approaches are different with regard to their roles and instructional strategies, both contribute to the educational process. Teacher-centred learning offers structured knowledge delivery whereas student-centred learning encourages deeper understanding, motivation and critical thinking (Prince, 2004; Johnson et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to examine these approaches from a psychological perspective to understand the impact of various approaches to teaching on learning behaviour and academic development of students in higher education.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

### 2.1 Teacher-Centred Learning

Teacher-centred learning is one of the most traditional ways of learning in the education sector with the teacher being the central figure in the teaching-learning process. In this model, the teacher is the main authority and source of knowledge, and students receive much of their knowledge in the form of lectures, explanation, and demonstration. The instructor sets the learning goals, manages the activities in the classroom, and assesses the student's performance through tests and assignments (Hancock, Bray, & Nason, 2003; Peyton, More, & Young, 2010).

From a psychological perspective, teacher-centred learning has a lot to do with behaviourist learning theory, which focuses on structured instruction, repetition and reinforcement as major processes in learning. According to this view, learning is achieved by teachers providing their students with clear explanations, opportunities for practise, and feedback that help them to meet specific learning goals [Sharon, 2008; Smith, 2018].

This approach is frequently regarded as successful for presenting a large amount of information in a structured and organized way, especially for introducing basic concepts or teaching large groups of students (Davis, 2016). However, critics claim that teacher-centred learning can restrain active participation of students and their chances to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills as learners tend to take a passive role within the classroom space (Prince, 2004). Despite these limitations, however, teacher-centred instruction is an important component of educational practise, particularly when combined with other interactive teaching strategies.

## 2.2 Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning is an approach to instruction in which the students are in the centre of the teaching-learning process. Unlike the traditional teacher-centred models, this approach focuses on active participation, autonomy and engagement of the learners in the construction of their own knowledge. In student-centred classrooms, students are encouraged to explore and then participate in discussions, collaborate with their peers, and solve problems through interactive learning activities. The role of the teacher changes from being the main source of knowledge to a facilitator or guide supporting and directing the learning experiences of the students (Mascolo, 2009; Mascolo & Fischer, 2004).

From a psychological standpoint, student-centred learning is highly related to the concept of constructivist learning theory, which states that learners construct the knowledge through experience, interaction, and reflection. According to this perspective, meaningful learning is the process in which students link new information to existing knowledge and engage in the learning process (Jonassen, 1991; Brown & Green, 2020). As a result, instructional strategies, such as collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based learning, tend to be employed in student-centred environments.

Student-centred learning has been well-known for its capacity to heighten motivation, engagement, and critical thinking skills of students. Research suggests that when students have active participation in their learning, they tend to develop greater level of understanding and greater problem-solving abilities (Johnson et al., 2017; Freeman et al., 2014). However, implementing such an approach may require increased instructional planning and good classroom management from teachers. Despite those challenges, student-centred learning is generally considered to be a vital part of education, especially in higher education where independent thinking and lifelong learning skills are highly valued.

## 3. Psychological Foundations of Teaching Approaches

## 3.1 Behaviourism and Teacher-Centred Learning

Behaviourism is a first of the oldest psychological theories affecting the traditional mode of teaching, specifically teacher-centred learning. Developed in the early part of the twentieth century by psychologists such as John B. Watson and B.F. Skinner, behaviourism focuses on observable

behaviour and observable outcomes of learning rather than on what is happening in our minds. According to this theory learning takes place because behaviour is shaped by the environmental stimuli and by the applications of rewarding or punishing the behaviour (Sharon, 2008; Smith, 2018).

In educational settings, behaviourism supports a teacher centred approach, whereby the teacher is in control of the learning environment and directs the instructional process. Teachers impart knowledge in lectures, demonstrations, and organized lessons and students are expected to listen, practice, and respond to directions. Reinforcement techniques such as praise, rewards, and corrective feedback are employed in order to encourage appropriate behaviour and enhance academic performance (Hancock, Bray, & Nason, 2003).

One key concept of behaviourism is Operant conditioning which suggests that behaviours which are followed by positive consequences are more likely to be repeated. In the classrooms the classroom crisis or this principle is implemented using strategies such as positive reinforcement, feedback and classroom discipline to guide the students toward desired learning outcomes (Sharon, 2008). While there is a need for teacher centred instruction in order to provide structure and efficient delivery of knowledge, there is a criticism that excessive reliance on the behaviourist methods will limit the opportunities for critical thinking and independent learning for students (Prince, 2004).

## 3.2 Constructivism and Student-Centred Learning

Constructivism is a significant theory in psychology which has a strong impact on student centred learning. The theory was developed to a great extent on the work of Jean Piaget, who studied how children think and learn. Piaget claimed that children are active learners and do not passively receive information but construct what they learn through interaction with the environment. According to Piaget, cognitive development takes place when children organise and reorganise their mental structure through experience and biological maturation (Piaget, 1936).

Central to constructivist theory is the concept that learners construct their understanding from schemas that are mental structures that assist individuals in organising knowledge. When learners are presented with new information, they make sense of that information using what they already know. Piaget described two important processes of learning - assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of integrating new information into existing knowledge structures while accommodation refers to the process by which existing schemas are altered to accommodate new experiences. These processes help learners to attain equilibrium, a state of cognitive balance which promotes intellectual development.

Constructivist theory endorses a student-centred approach to teaching and learning because it focuses on active involvement, exploration and discovery. In this model, the students are encouraged to participate in problem-solving activities, collaborative discussions, and inquiry-based learning instead of just memorizing information delivered by the teacher. Teachers have the role of facilitator who guides learning, creates meaningful learning environments and support students as they construct their own understanding of concepts.

Educational applications of constructivism emphasize the importance of discovery learning, being collaborative, and reflective. Students are known to learn most effectively when they are actively engaged with the learning materials, discussing ideas with their peers and making connexions between old knowledge and new knowledge. This approach fosters a deeper understanding, critical

thinking, and independent learning. As a result, constructivism has become an underlying theory for modern education that is student-centred and based on the idea that meaningful learning is when the learner is actively constructing knowledge instead of passively receiving it.

### 3.3 Humanistic Theory and Student-Centred Learning

Humanistic learning theory is one of the significant learning theories in psychology with the focus on how to develop the whole person and puts the learner at the heart of the learning process. The theory has been developed by psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Arthur Combs, who believed in the primary objective of education, is to help learners to achieve personal growth, self-awareness, and self-actualization (Rogers, 1951; Combs, 1982; Gould, 2012). Unlike the traditional approach to teaching which focuses primarily on the transmission of knowledge, humanistic theory emphasises the role of the emotional needs of students, their motivation and personal experiences in the learning process.

According to humanistic theorists, learning is not restricted to growth of how the brain works, but whether it involves emotional and social growth. Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that learners need to feel safe, respected, and supported in order to reach the higher ends of learning and personal development. When students feel a sense of positive and supportive learning environment, they will be more motivated to take an active role in their education. Humanistic learning theory also encourages self-directed learning, in which students are responsible for their own learning while teachers serve as facilitators instead of authorities. Carl Rogers highlighted that proper learning environments demand empathy, trust and respect between teachers and their students. These conditions promote open communication, collaboration and personal reflection, which contribute to enhanced academic and personal development.

Overall, humanistic learning theory is in favour of student-centred education in that it promotes autonomy, intrinsic motivation, and holistic development. By creating supportive and respectful learning environments, educators can help learners to develop confidence, independence, and a deeper engagement in the learning process.

**Table:1 Psychological Foundations of Teaching Approaches**

| Learning Theory | Key Psychologists | Core Idea | Teaching Approach | Role of Teacher |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Behaviourism | Watson, Skinner, Pavlov, Thorndike | Learning occurs through stimulus and reinforcement | Teacher-centred | Instructor controls learning and reinforces behaviour |
| Constructivism | Piaget, Vygotsky | Knowledge is constructed through experience and interaction | Student-centred | Teacher acts as facilitator |
| Humanism | Maslow, Rogers | Learning focuses on personal growth and self-actualization | Student-centred | Teacher supports emotional and personal development |

**Table:2 Comparison of Teaching Approaches**

| Aspect | Teacher-Centred Learning | Student-Centred Learning |
|---|---|---|
| Role of Teacher | Main authority and knowledge source | Facilitator and guide |
| Role of Student | Passive receiver | Active participant |
| Learning Method | Lecture-based instruction | Discussion, collaboration, problem-solving |
| Psychological Basis | Behaviourism | Constructivism & Humanism |
| Learning Outcome | Knowledge acquisition | Critical thinking and autonomy |

## 4. Psychological Impact on Students

### 4.1 Motivation

Motivation is a high psychological factor that affects the student's engagement, persistence as well as the overall academic performance. In educational psychology, motivation is defined as forces that can be both internal and external, and which encourage students to engage in learning activities and make efforts to accomplish their academic goals. The teaching approach utilised within the classroom plays an important role in shaping the student's motivation because different approaches to instruction have an influence on the ways students perceive learning and their level of interest in subject matter concerned.

In teacher-centred learning environments motivation tends to be external; through grades, rewards, praise or disciplinary measures. Teachers usually decide the learning process by lecturing knowledge and evaluate students by means of tests and assignments. These external incentives can be used to motivate students to perform tasks and behave in class. However, such an approach may be somewhat limiting in the sense of deeper involvement in learning as learners may be mainly interested in obtaining good grades rather than developing an interest in understanding what they are learning.

In contrast, student-centred learning environments are likely to foster intrinsic motivation, which is from students' curiosity, personal interests and desire for self-improvement. In such settings, students are encouraged to take active roles in discussions, collaborative learning activities and problem solving tasks. This active involvement is one way to help students to develop a sense of autonomy and responsibility for their own learning. As a result, student-centred approaches result in increased levels of motivation, engagement in learning activities, and academic performance.

## 4.2 Cognitive Development

Cognitive development is the growth of intellectual capabilities of students such as thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, and understanding of complex concepts. In educational psychology, cognitive development plays an important part in determining how students process information, apply knowledge, and develop higher order thinking skills. Different teaching approaches, such as teacher-centred learning and student-centred learning, have different impacts on the development of these cognitive abilities.

Learning environments that are teacher centred often place cognitive development on the acquisition of basic knowledge and memorization of information. In this approach, teachers usually deliver structured content in the form of lectures and explanations and students are expected to absorb and reproduce the information during the assessment. This method can be effective in helping students to understand basic concepts and build essential academic knowledge. However, because the student often serves as a passive receptor of data, there may be a lack of opportunity with depth of cognitive involvement, critical thinking and independent exploration.

In contrast, student-centred learning environments tend to promote higher levels of cognitive development, through the promotion of active participation, inquiry and problem-solving. Students are engaging in discussions, working collaboratively and solving real-world problems that require the student to analyze information, evaluate ideas and construct his or her own understanding of concepts. Such learning experiences result in the development of critical thinking, creativity and analytical skills. As such, student centred approaches have been frequently seen as better in developing competencies and skills in higher cognitive level and in preparing students for complex learning challenges.

## 4.3 Critical Thinking and Creativity

Critical thinking and creativity are necessary cognitive skills that enable the students to analyse information, evaluate ideas, and come up with innovative solutions to problems. In the modern education these skills are believed to be basic in the development of the independent learners and in preparing the students for the complex challenges in the real world. Educational psychology puts forward the idea that critical thinking and creativity development are highly linked with teaching methods and learning environments in a classroom.

In learning environments that are centred on teachers, instructional practises are often based on the transmission of knowledge: through lectures, structured explanations and teacher led activities. Although this approach can be effective in providing basic knowledge and keeping the classroom well organised, it may also create limitations to providing opportunities for students to actively engage in inquiry and independent thinking (Prince, 2004). In such environments, students may become passive consumers of information rather than active participants in the learning process, which may be a limitation to the development of creativity and analytical reasoning.

In contrast, student-centred approaches to learning promote the development of critical thinking and creativity by encouraging students to engage in active discussions and collaborative learning and problem-solving activities. Constructivist views are centred around how the knowledge is constructed by the learner through interacting, exploring and reflecting to form a deeper understanding and innovative ideas (Piaget). Similarly, in humanistic approaches, the live concepts of autonomy, open communication and supportive learning environments are stressed in promoting creativity and intellectual growth (Rogers, 1951). Research has also shown that student-centred education can result in higher levels of participation, motivation and engagement which can contribute to the development of critical thinking and creative problem solving skills (Cornelius-White, 2007).

## 5. Advantages and Limitations

### 5.1 Advantages of Teacher-Centred Learning

Teacher-centred learning was utilised a great deal in educational systems for many years due to the structured and organised learning process. In this type of model, the teacher is the centre of the knowledge and learning, leading the learning process through lectures, demonstrations and well-understood explanations. One of the major advantages of teacher-centred learning is that it allows instructors an opportunity to convey a lot of information in a short period of time. This method would be of particular use in higher education or large classrooms where it may be difficult to manage discussions and interactive activities (Davis, 2016).

Another important advantage of teacher centred learning is the level of structure and control that teacher centred learning provides in the classroom. Teachers can build lesson plans and have control over the pace of instruction and they can make sure the required curriculum content is covered in a systematic way. This is a structured environment and helps students to understand fundamental

concepts clearly, and provides a stable environment for learning. Additionally, the teacher's knowledge and advice can help students avoid confusion when it comes to learning complex or technical subjects (Hancock, Bray, & Nason, 2003).

Teacher centred learning is also useful for successful classroom management and discipline. Since the teacher is the one who is direct the learning activities, then the students are given their expectation and instructions clearly. This approach can be particularly useful for beginners or students that require significant guidance and learning structures. Furthermore, teacher-centred instruction makes it easier to evaluate student performance using standardised assessments, such as tests and assignments, in order for educators to monitor student learning progress and ensure that academic standards are being met.

## 5.2 Advantages of Student-Centred Learning

Student-centred learning has few advantages that result in more effective and meaningful education experiences. One of the most important advantages of this approach is that it encourages active participation in the learning process. In student-centered classrooms, learners are actively engaged in discussions, collaborative activities and problem-solving tasks, which helps them to develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This active engagement results in curiosity and responsibility for their own learning (Prince, 2004).

Another key benefit of student-centred learning is that it can be used to increase intrinsic motivation and autonomy. When students are given the opportunity to explore ideas, ask questions and make connexions between what they are learning and their own experiences, they will become more motivated to learn. Humanistic learning theorists like Rogers have focused on emphasis on supportive learning environments that respect the needs and perspectives of students can have an important impact on boosting the confidence, self-esteem, and engagement of learners (Rogers, 1951). As a result, students tend to have a positive attitude towards learning and continue their learning outside of the classroom.

Student-centred learning also helps in building critical thinking, creativity and problem solving skills. Through activities, such as group discussions, project-based learning and inquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to analyse information, consider different perspectives and come up with innovative ideas. Research shows learner-centred approaches can result in higher student participation, satisfaction, achievement as well as developing social and communication skills (Cornelius-White, 2007). Therefore, student-centred learning is often considered as an effective technique in teaching the students to deal with complex academic and real-world challenges.

## 6. Comparative Analysis

The following table provides a comparative overview of the teacher centred learning and student centred learning based on certain key educational aspects This comparison shows the fundamental differences in the instructional roles, the learning processes and the educational outcomes.

| Aspect | Teacher-Centred Learning | Student-Centred Learning |
|---|---|---|
| **Role of Teacher** | The teacher acts as the main authority and primary source of knowledge, directing the learning process. | The teacher acts as a facilitator or guide who supports students in constructing their own knowledge. |
| **Role of Students** | Students are generally passive recipients of information and follow the teacher's instructions. | Students are active participants who engage in discussions, collaboration, and problem-solving. |
| **Learning Approach** | Focuses on lectures, direct instruction, and memorization of content. | Emphasizes inquiry-based learning, exploration, and active engagement. |
| **Motivation** | Often relies on extrinsic motivation such as grades, rewards, or discipline. | Encourages intrinsic motivation through autonomy, curiosity, and personal interest. |
| **Interaction** | Limited interaction among students; communication mainly flows from teacher to students. | High level of interaction among students and between students and the teacher. |
| **Development of Skills** | Focuses primarily on knowledge acquisition and foundational understanding. | Promotes critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. |
| **Assessment Methods** | Uses standardized tests, exams, and teacher-led evaluations. | Includes diverse assessment methods such as projects, peer evaluation, and self-assessment. |
| **Learning Environment** | Structured and controlled classroom environment. | Flexible and interactive learning environment that adapts to students' needs. |

## 7. Implications for Modern Education

The comparison of the two types of learning approaches, teacher-centred and student-centred, have important implications in modern education. In the modern educational context, the educational purpose is not only about passing on knowledge but about developing critical thinking skills, creativity and problem-solving skills in students. For the delivery of foundational knowledge and continued structured classroom management, teacher-centred learning is still valuable. However, using this traditional approach alone may result in limited active engagement among the students and their capacity to apply knowledge in real-world situations.

Therefore, modern education increasingly emphasizes on the integration of student-centred teaching strategies through which participation, collaboration and independent learning are encouraged. At the same time, many educators suggest a balanced approach where the strengths of both models are utilised. In teacher-centred teaching, teachers explain the concepts clearly and provide students background understanding. While student-centred approaches can foster deeper learning, motivation, and skill development. By integrating both methods, educational institutions create more effective learning environments that diverse student needs and prepare learners for lifelong learning.

## 8. Conclusion

The present study has analysed the differences of the teacher-centred learning and student-centred learning from a psychological point of view. It also focuses on theoretical foundations and their influence on students' motivation, cognitive development and critical thinking skills. In teacher-centred learning, transmission of knowledge from teacher to student that emphasizes structured instruction. This method can be effective for delivering foundational content and maintaining classroom organization. However, this strategy may reduce students' active participation and the scope to develop higher-order thinking skills.

On the other hand, student-centred learning promotes active participation, cooperative learning and independent inquiry which make the student more responsible for their learning. This strategy is closely associated with psychological theory such as constructivism and humanistic learning which focus on autonomy, significant experiences and personal development. Therefore the combination of both approaches may provide a balanced instructional framework.

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