Promoting Active Learning in the ESL Classroom: Tertiary Level Students' Perspectives on Lecturing Approaches

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The present study explores students' experience in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Its approaches range from traditional to interactive lectures which include e-learning tools. The purpose of different lecturing approaches is to promote active learning as part of learner-centred education, among tertiary students. This exploratory study examined responses from over 70 ESL students about their preferences in the lecturing presented to them. Results indicated that the students selected the game-based online platform, "Kahoot!", as the best lecturing approach for understanding the course.

Key words: *student-centred learning, active learning, e-learning tools.*

Introduction

It is a global movement in education. The shift from the traditional, didactic role of the teacher to a more student-centric approach, is becoming increasingly prominent. It is believed that students could benefit more in their independent role as regulators of their own learning. Learner-centred education has become prominent in twenty-first century teaching and learning. In the Fourth Industrial Revolution where technology is advancing, education is impacted. Through Education 4.0, awareness of the need to revolutionise the classroom environment towards a more learner-centred approach is increasing. As Hussin (2018) purports, Education 4.0 is a response to the needs of the Fourth Industrial Revolution where humans and technology meet. From the aspect of education, providing learners with an innovative environment and resources through e-learning tools is crucial to ensure learning takes place effectively. It is a major concern for educators when students constantly struggle to pay attention and remain focused in the classroom. Not only that, this has become a major source of distraction for

learners, with the rapid growth of technology. In order to exploit technology to capture student interest, education-based e-learning tools are introduced into the classroom setting as one of various lecturing approaches. This study intends to explore the learners' preferences of approaches that they experience, particularly in acquiring language skills. These lecturing approaches range from traditional lectures, questions and answers, and blended learning, to online game-based applications. This study potentially sheds light on how to promote active learning, through several lecturing approaches for tertiary students. It hopes to encourage more student interaction, not only with their peers and learning resources, but essentially with the content of the course.

Literature Review
Teacher-Centred Learning vs Student-Centred Learning

Teacher-centred learning is described as similar to traditional classroom instruction (O'Neill and Macmahon, 2005; Elen et al., 2007). It involves the teacher having the primary role and power as the instructional agent, whilst students have limited choice in determining their learning, and this results in their becoming passive in class (O'Neill and Macmahon, 2005; Elen et al., 2007). Emaliana (2017) states that the teacher's role here is to become the major source of information, and that this method of learning poses several benefits. It is advantageous in terms of the ability to prepare learning materials and conduct learning activities within a shorter span of time. Emaliana (2017) also notes that teachers have full control of the classroom, as they have full authority to set certain criteria and rules to ensure the main purpose of transferring knowledge to learners can be achieved.

Kember (1997) describes student-centred learning as knowledge that is constructed by students, and guided by the lecturer as merely a facilitator of the construct, not as the provider of information. Lea et al. (2003) further details features of student-centred learning: i) active over passive learning; ii) deep learning and understanding; iii) students' increased responsibility and accountability; iv) learner autonomy; v) teacher-learner interdependency; vi) mutual respect between teacher and learner; and vii) reflexive approach to the teaching and learning process. Student-centred learning provides teachers with the capacity to consider learners' needs and encourage them to participate actively in the learning process by guiding, managing and directing their students' learning (Emaliana, 2017).

Besides that, O'Neill and Macmahon (2005) state that learning can be seen as a continuum of both teacher-centred and student-centred learning where it is not perceived dualistically. This continuum is illustrated below:

Figure 1. Learning Continuum (O'Neill and Macmahon, 2005)
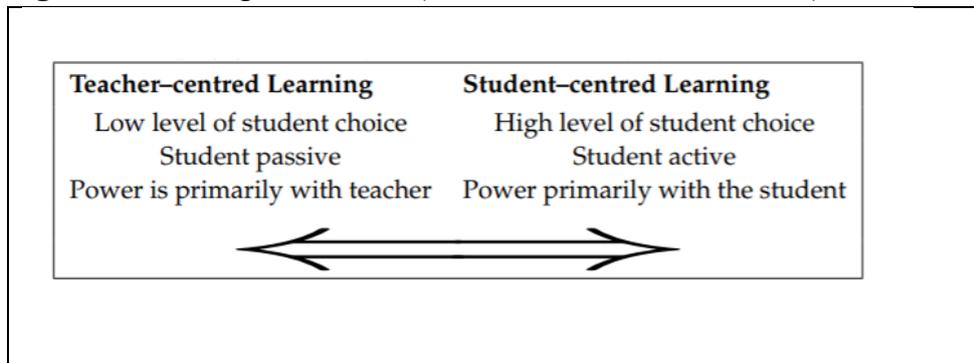
From Figure 1 above, student-centred learning involves students exercising a high level of choice and power in determining their learning experience. Additionally, an aspect of student-centred learning is the active mannerisms of individual students during the learning process. This study seeks to examine how active learning could be implemented in lecturing delivery so that students could benefit from this approach.

Active Learning

Prince (2004) notes active learning as having students conduct meaningful learning activities and consciously reflect on the practice. Active learning, as part of student-centred learning, does not merely involve physical active movement during the learning process. It also entails active enquiry by which students resort to self-directed learning, deciding which information is relevant to a specific topic and critically questioning content to make sense of new information. Biggs (1999) mentions that questioning and collaboration is crucial to developing deep learning, through the practice of relating new concepts to pre-existing knowledge. This form of active learning shifts further away from rote memorisation, which limits information retainment. This high level of involvement in the learning process is seen as beneficial for students when ascertaining whether new concepts have been effectively learnt. Prince (2004) also states that active learning has two essential elements: i) introducing student activity into the traditional lecture; ii) promoting student engagement. The present study explores these two elements through student feedback on the lecturing approaches, implemented within a specific language course.

Lecturing Approaches

Meguid and Collins (2017) stated that an outcome-focused approach towards learning is essential to student-centred learning. High-quality engagement and strong motivation among students could take effect through a creative learning environment. Meguid and Collins (2017) conducted a study on students' perception in the use of a lecturing tool, PollEverywhere Audience Response System (PollEverywhere). Results found that students respond positively

to the use of PollEverywhere for interactive lectures. They also noted that students become increasingly active and engaged with the lecture through this PollEverywhere. Aside from that, Alahmar (2018) conducted a similar study on lecturing approaches, ranging from traditional lecture to e-learning tools, among pharmacy students. Through the study, it is found that students show less preference for lectures with long text, as compared to bullet points and images. These formats, in their view, were helpful for clarifying content. Apart from that, students also show more interest in practical sessions compared to theoretical lectures as they can understand the lesson better when solving problems with their friends, instead of passively listening to lectures.

Methodology

This exploratory study attempts to examine students' perspectives on the lecturing approaches presented to them in the form of a questionnaire, with a 3-point Likert scale, ranging from Not Interesting to Most Interesting. The lecturing approaches are listed in Table 1. There were 73 tertiary level English major students in this study, undertaking a specific course; Listening and Speaking Skills. These students were actively involved with the various lecturing approaches over the course of one full semester; specifically 14 weeks.

Table 1: Summary of lecturing approaches

Approach	Details
Padlet	Online application that creates a bulletin board for displaying information
Kahoot!	Game-based online platform posing multiple-choice quizzes
Role-play	Students' imitation of a character or role different from their own
Jigsaw	Cooperative learning approach to increase student engagement
Quizizz	Multiplayer classroom review tool for collaborative learning
Flipped classroom	Blended learning that delivers instructional content outside of the classroom
Question and answer	Traditional question and answer session between lecturer and students during and after the lesson
Normal lecture	PowerPoint presentation prepared by lecturer

The various lecturing approaches were specifically planned and executed with specific criteria. The first selection criterion is eliciting active physical involvement by the students in class, such as role-play and jigsaw activity. The second criterion is to include technology in the lecture, to capture students' attention regarding the lesson. An online application such as Padlet is an example of a technology-based education platform that is applied in one lesson. The third criterion is the element of competition, to prompt students' active learning and memory through game-based assessment in the form of quizzes such as Kahoot! and Quizizz. The last criterion

for a lecturing approach is the traditional normal lecture followed by a question and answer session.

Apart from the questionnaire, students were asked to elaborate on their experience after they had undergone the lessons, through a feedback form. Their feedback provided richer details of the lecturing approaches that they find most interesting and helpful for them to gain a deeper understanding of the course.

Results and Discussion

Votes from the survey, as presented in Figure 2, indicate that the game-based online application Kahoot! was the most interesting lecturing approach, with over 69%, followed by Role-Play, 63%, and Quizziz, 49.3%. Meanwhile, 2.7% of students find that the least interesting lecturing approach is the Question and Answer session. Figure 3 breaks down the results. The type of lecturing approach is on the horizontal axis, and the number of students who prefer that approach is on the vertical axis.

Figure 2: Lecturing approaches introduced in the course
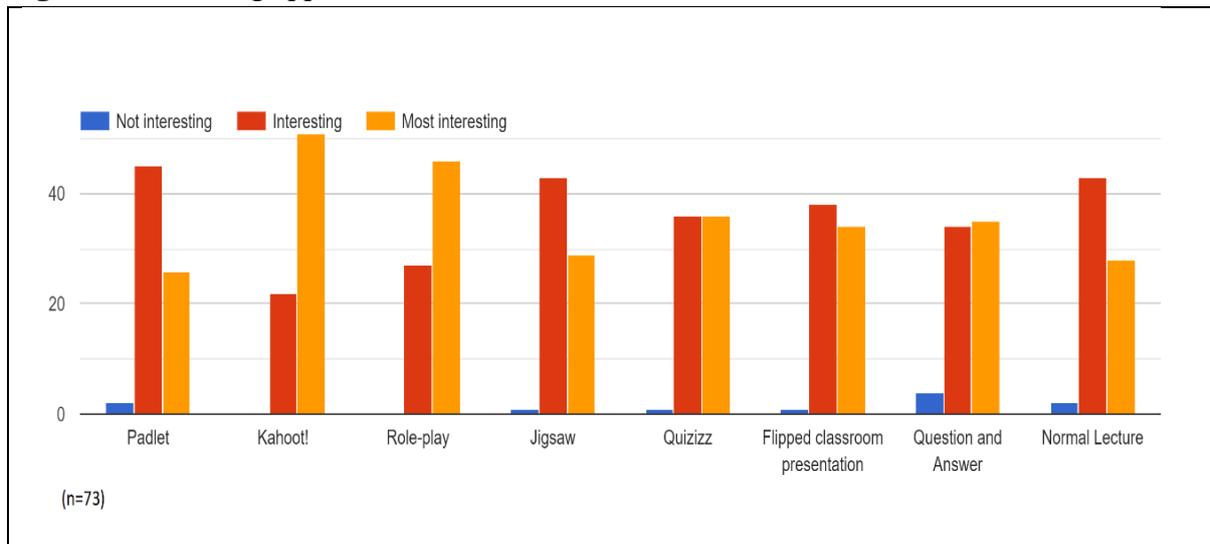
Students articulated their preferences further, in remarks given under Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Learner preference of lecturing approaches
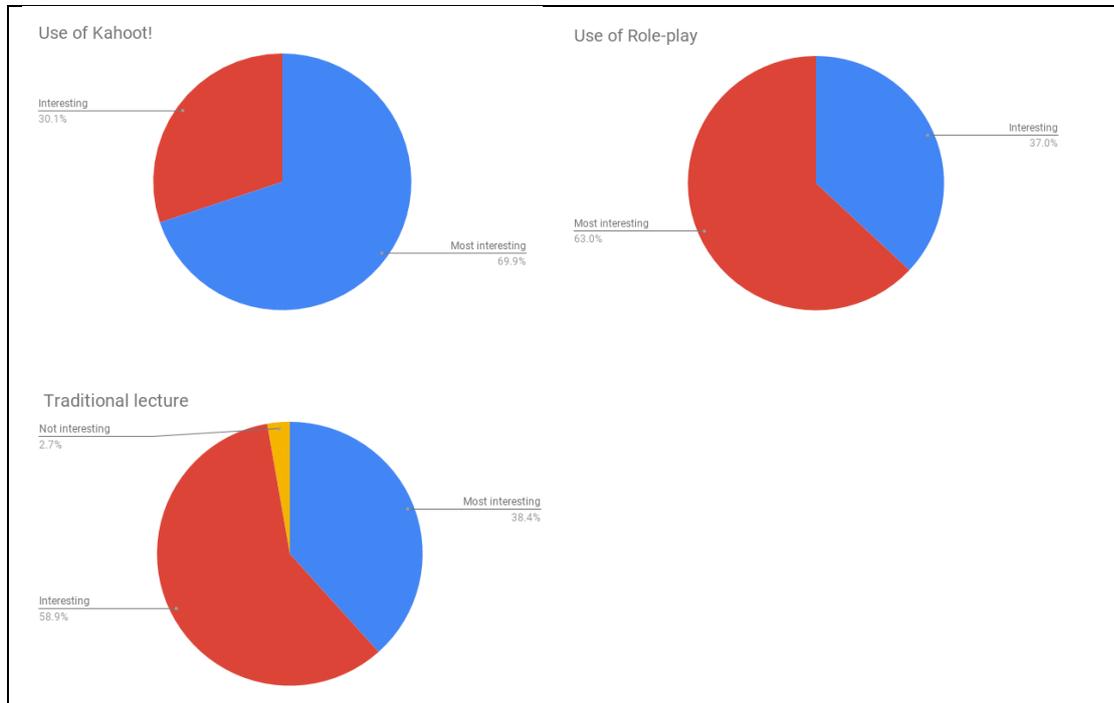
Further analysis of lecturing approaches is elicited from students' feedback. They express their learning preferences through different learning approaches presented to them:

Table 2: Feedback on Kahoot!

KAHOOT!	
Student	**Feedback**
S5	*Obviously, I love it when the lecturer made a Kahoot! game because for me, playing games are one of the best way to study.*
S32	*The Kahoot game was interesting. It tested our understanding of the class lectures and at the same time we enjoyed ourselves.*
S16	*Kahoot! The online game lets me evaluate myself on a certain topic.*
S19	*I would say Kahoot! It not only helped me recall what I learned but it kind of created a small competition among us to be the first and correct one to answer.*
S23	*In my opinion, Kahoot activity was the best. The questions were very useful for me especially for my upcoming exams. The fact that the game has first, second, and third rankings boosts my urge to try it again and again and to also strive towards a better score each and every time I play the game. I love Kahoot very much.*
S38	*In my opinion I really like competitive and yet fun situations for example when we play Kahoot or Quizizz. This is because these tools encourage MOST of the*

	students to do well in their classes and to focus more so that they will not miss out on what their classmates are learning.

Results indicate that students mostly prefer an online game-based learning platform, Kahoot!, as the best lecturing approach for this particular course. This application is indeed interesting as it promotes an active learning environment by adopting a gamification element, that is, competition (Johns, 2015). As shared by S38, playing Kahoot! allows the student to awaken their competitive side to compete with their classmates. Apart from that, the function of Kahoot! as an online assessment method is also useful for students to recall and better understand the lesson, as mentioned by S19 and S32. This provides the lecturer an initial idea of the students' level of understanding and knowledge. Meanwhile, Table 3 displays feedback on the role-play session:

Table 3: Feedback on role-play

ROLE-PLAY	
Student	**Feedback**
S22	*The role-play and normal lectures taught me how to improve my listening and speaking skills.*
S25	*The role-play really expanded my knowledge in writing scripts.*
S28	*The activity that I find the most beneficial was the role-play. This activity really engaged the students as to listening and speaking skills. We used our listening skills to gather information and speaking skills to discuss our opinion on certain topic. Overall, I believe the activity conducted in class is relevant to the course itself and will surely help me in the working world.*
S50	*Role-play, as from this activity I can try to adapt what we learn from the class, and somehow it creates understanding for me.*
S51	*Role-play. Because being able step outside my box of shyness and introvertedness, and being able to entertain the class for at least a bit was very beneficial for me.*
S62	*Role play. Because I get to show how I apply the skills taught in this course.*

Feedback from Table 3 suggests that students also find role-play an interesting lecturing approach, that helps them better understand the course. Given that the course is specifically focused on listening and speaking ability, to engage students with active listening and speaking during the role-play session is believed to be suitable for them to adapt theory into practice. For example, when given the role of a bossy manager, the student will apply the correct and incorrect techniques on communicating in the workplace. The feedback given by S28 supports the view that, by providing an avenue for students to simulate the ideal working environment, they are able to apply communicative strategies and, ultimately, improve their overall speaking ability. Apart from that, students benefit from this role-play session as it promotes active

physical learning. They move about and perform roles in front of others with minimal intervention from the lecturer. This offers them an opportunity to boost their self-confidence and overcome fear or shyness, as experienced by S51.

When discussing the importance of physical movement to active learning, it must be noted that conducting the Jigsaw lecturing approach has helped students understand the course better. This is stated by S30: "This may not apply to everyone but I think that I learn better while I'm moving or thinking creatively, so by doing the Jigsaw activity it required us to move around and explaining to each other different things and then at the end of the class, everyone was included and questioned so it was very fair and beneficial for me." From this feedback, the Jigsaw technique as a cooperative learning approach allows each student in a group to search for relevant information regarding a bigger topic. After information gathering, they are then required to share the information with the rest of their group. Collaborative learning comes into play when each group member ensures their group understands the topic in its entirety. This technique is not only encourages active learning, but also avoids free-riding in group projects and discussions (Dingel et al., 2013).

Table 4: Traditional lecturing approaches

QUESTION AND ANSWER AND NORMAL LECTURE	
Student	**Feedback**
S4	*Question and answer. Because I can exchange my opinions with the lecturer and others.*
S12	*Question and answer. Because we can ask some questions and know new answers from different students as well as the lecturer herself.*
S14	*It was the normal lectures because I managed to learn how to improve my listening and speaking skills.*
S35	*Normal lecture because the lecturer's explanation is very detailed therefore it gives me a better and clearer understanding of the subject.*
S55	*Question and answer because I get to ask questions if I don't understand something.*

Results from feedback on the traditional lecturing approach, as displayed in Table 4, brings forth interesting points of discussion. Despite obtaining the highest number of students not interested with this approach in the survey, several students still prefer the approach of traditional classroom lecture, and question and answer sessions with the lecturer. These approaches, although not primarily promoting active learning, appear to become effective for delivering lectures and ensuring students are able to better understand topics. Active learning suggests the central role of students as taking charge of their own learning process, whereas lecturers are merely facilitators to their students. In the traditional lecturing approach, the role of imparting knowledge is heavily teacher-centred, where teachers focus primarily on content

dissemination, and they are the main source of information (Smit et al., 2014). In this context, several students still prefer the teacher-centred approach of delivering knowledge, as mentioned by S35. This is notable in comments that the lecturer provided detailed explanation, resulting in clearer understanding. This teacher-centred learning preference over learner-centred learning may be a result of designing activities which must be properly planned and executed, to promote meaningful engagement for students. As Felder & Brent (1996) argue, student-centred learning takes a considerable amount of time and effort on the teacher's part to design innovative teaching methods for the benefit of students. If the activities are not meaningful or not properly guided towards the new concepts, students would prefer the traditional method of learning; through the lecturer as the primary instructional agent.

Conclusion

Overall, one can concur that language learners respond positively to lecturing approaches that encourage active engagement. This exploratory study reveals that students particularly enjoyed lessons that both require them to compete with fellow peers, and pose a challenge for them to search for new information, such as game-based online application, Kahoot! and Quizziz. However, it is worth noting that some students also prefer normal lectures over less traditional teaching approaches as they find the depth of knowledge, new concepts and information can be acquired more effectively through a traditional lecture. It is therefore observed that the role of the teacher as the main instructional agent is still relevant in the context of teaching and learning language skills. Shifting towards self-directed learning, where the teacher is merely the facilitator, may be the direction to take towards pedagogical reform in this twenty-first century. However, it is still a work in progress for lecturers as well as students to fully equip themselves with the right design, planning, and resources to cater for a more engaging learning environment.

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