

# Comparison Of Central Aspect of Teacher-Centered and Learner-Centered Pedagogical Models

Mahliyo Kukiboyeva

Independent Researcher, Namangan State University

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\*Correspondence: Mahliyo Kukiboyeva

Email: [mahliyo81@mail.ru](mailto:mahliyo81@mail.ru)

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**Abstract:** This article compares teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches to instruction by examining their philosophical foundations, pedagogical practices, strengths, and limitations. Teacher-centered models, grounded in behaviorist and direct instruction traditions, emphasize clarity, efficiency, and the teacher's role as transmitter of knowledge. Learner-centered approaches, rooted in constructivist, socio-cultural, and humanistic theories, prioritize student agency, inquiry, and reflective engagement. Drawing on seminal theorists such as Dewey, Vygotsky, Rogers, and Freire, as well as empirical syntheses by Rosenshine, Hattie, Black and Wiliam, and Cornelius-White, the article evaluates evidence for each approach in terms of cognitive, affective, and equity outcomes. Findings indicate that teacher-centered strategies are effective for introducing foundational knowledge, while learner-centered methods promote deeper understanding, motivation, and metacognition when adequately scaffolded.

**Keywords:** Learner-Centered Teaching, Teacher-Centered Instruction, Learner Autonomy, Constructivism, Direct Instruction, Pedagogy, Educational Philosophy, Formative Assessment, Student Engagement, Instructional Effectiveness

## Introduction

Education has long been shaped by two broad and often contrasted orientations: teacher-centered (or teacher-directed) approaches and learner-centered (student-centered) approaches. The former emphasizes structured instruction delivered by the teacher; the latter centers the learner's interests, agency, and active engagement in constructing meaning. In practice, these are not mutually exclusive categories but ends on a pedagogical continuum; yet the philosophical commitments, classroom practices, and empirical claims that accompany each orientation differ in ways that matter for curriculum design, assessment, teacher preparation, and student outcomes. This essay compares teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches by examining their theoretical roots, typical classroom practices, strengths and weaknesses, and the empirical evidence about their relative effectiveness. It concludes with a synthesis of best-practice implications and policy considerations for educators seeking to blend the best of both approaches.

## Methodology

### Theoretical roots and philosophical assumptions

Teacher-centered approaches trace their intellectual lineage to behaviorist and direct-instruction traditions. These models assume that learning consists largely of acquiring observable skills and knowledge that the teacher sequences and transmits, and that clear, explicit instruction with ample practice leads to mastery (Rosenshine, 2012). The teacher is an authority who structures content, models procedures, and monitors practice so that students internalize correct responses and build automaticity. This perspective values clarity, efficiency, and measurable gains in content mastery (Rosenshine, 2012). (American Federation of Teachers)

By contrast, learner-centered approaches draw on constructivist, humanistic, and socio-cultural theories that view learners as active meaning-makers. John Dewey argued that education is an active, experiential process — “education is not preparation for life; education is life itself” — and stressed the importance of experience, reflection, and democratic participation in learning (Dewey, 1938). Constructivist theorists such as Jean Piaget emphasized the learner’s internal cognitive construction of knowledge, while Lev Vygotsky foregrounded social interaction and scaffolding: “What a child can do in cooperation today, he can do alone tomorrow,” a concise articulation of the zone of proximal development and the social basis of higher cognitive functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Jerome Bruner argued that any subject can be taught in an intellectually honest form to learners of various ages if organized appropriately (Bruner, 1960). Humanistic educators, notably Carl Rogers, emphasized learner autonomy and the capacity to learn how to learn: “The only person who is educated is the one who has learned how to learn and change” (Rogers, 1969). These theoretical foundations point to classrooms in which learners actively inquire, reflect, and dialogue rather than passively receive (schoolofeducators.com, JSTOR, harvardpress.typepad.com, SCIRP).

Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy adds a moral and political dimension: education either reproduces social conformity or becomes “the practice of freedom,” empowering learners to analyze and transform their world (Freire, 1970). This framing situates learner-centered teaching not only as a cognitive stance but as an ethical imperative in contexts of inequality and social injustice (WiscSearch).

### Pedagogical Features: What Happens In The Classroom

In teacher-centered classrooms the lesson typically follows a predictable structure: the teacher presents clear learning objectives, demonstrates procedures or explains content, leads guided practice with feedback, and assigns independent practice or evaluation. Techniques such as explicit instruction, modeling, worked examples, frequent questioning, and systematic review are prominent. Rosenshine’s synthesis of research highlights the effectiveness of such explicit, scaffolded techniques for building foundational skills and factual knowledge (Rosenshine, 2012). Because the teacher controls pacing and sequencing, instructional time is often efficient, and classroom management is more straightforward (American Federation of Teachers).

Learner-centered classrooms emphasize student inquiry, choice, collaboration, and metacognition. Teachers act as facilitators or coaches who design rich tasks, pose problems, support small-group interaction, and encourage students to set goals, self-assess, and reflect. Weimer (2002) describes five major shifts in practice associated with learner-centered teaching: shifting the focus from teaching to learning; redefining the role of the teacher; placing responsibility for learning on students; balancing power and authority; and redefining the content to focus on learning processes as much as content (Weimer, 2002). In learner-centered classrooms, assessment often includes portfolios, projects, and self-assessment alongside traditional tests (SCIRP).

### **Strengths and Limitations of Teacher-Centered Approaches**

Teacher-centered instruction excels at introducing new skills and conveying compact bodies of foundational knowledge. It supports novices who require clear, stepwise guidance and reduces cognitive load by providing worked examples and focused practice. Empirical syntheses and classroom observations indicate that certain explicit instructional techniques reliably improve testable achievement in domains like decoding, basic mathematics, and the acquisition of procedural knowledge (Rosenshine, 2012; Hattie, 2009). For example, meta-analytic work synthesized by Hattie identifies many teacher-driven influences (clarity, feedback, teacher expectations) among factors with substantial effect sizes on achievement; Hattie's aggregate work suggests that what teachers do matters enormously, regardless of the pedagogical label (Hattie, 2009) (American Federation of Teachers, [inspirasifoundation.org](http://inspirasifoundation.org)).

However, teacher-centered approaches are often criticized for promoting passive learning, limiting student agency, and failing to cultivate higher-order skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and self-regulated learning. When classrooms rely excessively on transmission and rote practice, students may perform well on standardized measures yet struggle to transfer knowledge to unfamiliar contexts. Critics also note that highly teacher-directed instruction can be less motivating for students who do not see the relevance of the material to their own interests (Bruner, 1960; Dewey, 1938) ([harvardpress.typepad.com](http://harvardpress.typepad.com), [schoolofeducators.com](http://schoolofeducators.com)).

### **Strengths and limitations of learner-centered approaches**

Learner-centered pedagogy can foster deeper conceptual understanding, intrinsic motivation, metacognitive skills, and the capacity for collaborative problem-solving. Meta-analytic evidence shows positive correlations between learner-centered teacher-student relationships and affective and behavioral outcomes as well as cognitive gains: Cornelius-White's large meta-analysis (119 studies, over 355,000 students) reported meaningful average correlations, especially for affective and behavioral outcomes, indicating that learner-centered relational and instructional practices tend to support holistic learning (Cornelius-White, 2007). Moreover, formative assessment strategies — a close ally of learner-centered practice — have been linked to substantial learning gains when implemented well (Black & Wiliam, 1998). These findings underscore that centering learners

can enhance both engagement and achievement when combined with effective formative feedback. (bearworks.missouristate.edu, Evaluation and Assessment)

But learner-centered approaches also carry risks and constraints. Open inquiry without sufficient scaffolding can lead to superficial exploration, misconceptions, and inefficient use of learning time, particularly for novices lacking domain knowledge. Research comparing discovery learning with guided instruction repeatedly shows that unguided discovery often produces weaker outcomes than guided instruction, while guided constructivist practices (scaffolding, explicit modeling, feedback) yield stronger results (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006 – note: not exhaustive here). Additionally, learner-centered transformations often require more planning, lower student–teacher ratios, and professional development to implement well; such resources may be limited in many school systems. Finally, learner-centered practices can be difficult to reconcile with high-stakes standardized accountability regimes, which reward uniform content coverage and measurable test gains. (See discussion below on assessment.) (PMC, ScienceDirect)

### **Assessment, Accountability, and Alignment**

Assessment practices expose a key tension between the approaches. Standardized, summative testing regimes fit comfortably with teacher-centered models because they reward efficient coverage and measurable outcomes. Conversely, learner-centered pedagogies emphasize formative assessment, feedback, self-assessment, and portfolio work that capture growth and process as well as product. Black and Wiliam’s influential review concluded that formative assessment – giving learners frequent, diagnostic feedback and involving them in assessing their own learning – substantially improves student achievement when used systematically (Black & Wiliam, 1998). This suggests that learner-centered assessment methods, when combined with teacher clarity and effective feedback, can produce both deep learning and measurable gains (Evaluation and Assessment).

John Hattie’s synthesis highlights that both teacher efficacy and feedback have large effects on student learning, implying that the binary opposition between teacher-centered and learner-centered may be overstated: what matters is the quality of instruction and feedback more than the label attached to it (Hattie, 2009). In short, assessments and accountability structures should be designed to value not only factual recall but also higher-order thinking, collaboration, and transfer – outcomes learner-centered approaches aim to cultivate. (inspirasifoundation.org)

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Empirical Comparisons and The Role Of Context**

Comparative empirical studies yield a nuanced picture: neither approach uniformly dominates the other across contexts. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews reveal that learner-centered practices often produce better affective and long-term learning outcomes, while teacher-centered methods are particularly effective for novices learning foundational facts and procedures (Cornelius-White, 2007; Rosenshine, 2012). Bremner’s 2022 systematic review and other contemporary analyses highlight that context (age, subject matter, prior

knowledge, classroom resources) moderates effects: learner-centered methods flourish with adequate scaffolding and teacher expertise; teacher-centered methods are efficient and robust in contexts demanding rapid, reliable acquisition of basic skills (Bremner, 2022; Rosenshine, 2012). Thus, the evidence favors an adaptive, evidence-informed approach rather than an ideological commitment to one model (bearworks.missouristate.edu, American Federation of Teachers, ScienceDirect).

### **Hybrid and Blended Models: Principled Synthesis**

Given the complementary strengths of both traditions, many scholars and practitioners advocate principled blends that combine explicit instruction with learner-centered tasks. Jerome Bruner's notion that curricula should be organized so that "the basic ideas of any subject can be taught effectively" (i.e., through a spiral curriculum that revisits ideas at increasing depth) is compatible with scaffolding techniques that first provide explicit models and then gradually release responsibility to learners (Bruner, 1960). Rosenshine's principles emphasize that even constructivist tasks benefit from teacher clarity, modeling, and guided practice (Rosenhine, 2012). Maryellen Weimer and others have championed shifts toward learner-centeredness that retain teacher structure where necessary: effective facilitation requires teachers who can design tasks, model thinking, and provide timely, diagnostic feedback (harvardpress.typepad.com, American Federation of Teachers, SCIRP).

Practically, a blended approach can look like this: introduce core content through brief, explicit instruction and worked examples; move to scaffolded small-group inquiry where students apply and extend concepts; use formative assessment to surface misunderstandings; then assign cumulative assessments that require transfer and reflection. This sequence capitalizes on the efficiency of teacher-direction for novices and the depth of learner-centered inquiry for consolidation and transfer. Importantly, the teacher's role shifts dynamically along the sequence — authoritative when introducing new knowledge, facilitative when students practice, and diagnostic when assessing (American Federation of Teachers, Evaluation and Assessment).

### **Teacher Preparation and Professional Development**

Transitioning toward learner-centered practices requires investment in teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning. Teachers must develop skills in designing inquiry, scaffolding complex tasks, facilitating discourse, and using formative assessment — none of which happen automatically. Weimer (2002) stresses that shifting power and responsibility to learners also requires rethinking evaluation, classroom norms, and the distribution of authority. Likewise, Rosenshine's work suggests teachers need a repertoire of clear instructional moves that can be combined with facilitation skills for maximum effect (Rosenhine, 2012). Professional development that models blended practices, uses classroom data for reflective cycles, and supports collaborative teacher learning communities fosters higher-quality implementation (SCIRP, American Federation of Teachers).

## Equity Considerations

Both approaches implicate equity in different ways. Teacher-centered instruction can help close gaps by guaranteeing exposure to core knowledge and by providing explicit practice for students who lack rich out-of-school learning contexts. However, if implemented rigidly without attention to cultural relevance and student voice, it may perpetuate disengagement among marginalized learners. Learner-centered methods promote voice, relevance, and empowerment — outcomes aligned with Freire’s vision of education as liberation — but without ample scaffolding and resources they may exacerbate disparities if advantaged students are better positioned to take charge of their learning. Thus, equity-minded educators must ensure that learner autonomy is deliberately scaffolded and that teacher clarity and support are available to all students (WiscSearch, Evaluation and Assessment).

## Conclusion

Comparing teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches reveals complementary strengths: teacher-centered methods provide clarity, structure, and efficiency for novices and for foundational learning; learner-centered approaches cultivate autonomy, motivation, and deeper transfer when supported by scaffolding and feedback. Major reviews and meta-analyses (Black & Wiliam, Cornelius-White, Hattie) suggest that neither approach guarantees success in isolation; rather, pedagogical effectiveness depends on thoughtful alignment among learning goals, instructional sequences, assessment practices, and teacher expertise. As Bruner, Dewey, Vygotsky, and Rogers remind us, the ultimate aim of education is not merely the efficient transmission of facts but the cultivation of reflective, adaptable learners capable of participating in democratic life and solving novel problems.

A practical implication for teachers and policy makers is to adopt a pragmatic pluralism: use explicit instruction to build core knowledge and procedural fluency, then purposefully release responsibility via scaffolded, learner-centered tasks that develop metacognition, collaboration, and transfer. Invest in professional development so teachers can enact both kinds of moves with fidelity, and design assessment systems that reward process as much as product. As Dewey put it, education should be life itself; but life requires both dependable tools (which teachers can supply through clear instruction) and the freedom to apply them creatively (which learner-centered pedagogy supports). (schoolofeducators.com, American Federation of Teachers)

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