Research Paper

Iranian EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Obstacles to Implementing Student-Centered Learning: A Mixed-Methods Study

Mohammad Reza Hemmati[1], Faramarz Azizmalayeri[2]*
[1]Ph.D. Candidate, English Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran
hemmatim@malayeriau.ac.ir
[2]Assistant Professor, English Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran
f_azizmalayeri@malayeriau.ac.ir

Abstract
Recent studies within the past four decades have confirmed the effectiveness of Student-Centered Learning (SCL) over Teacher-Centered Learning (TCL). Furthermore, the emergence of 21st-century learning skills and competencies necessitates education systems to change their previous practices and equip their students with these skills and competencies. However, implementing SCL has not gained considerable attention among education authorities and EFL teachers in Iranian high schools. This study aims to explore EFL teachers' understanding of SCL and their perceptions of the obstacles to implementing it in Kermanshah, Iran. To this end, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design that combined 24-item questionnaire data with 9 structured interviews using the NVIVO Software Version10. The questionnaire analysis revealed that there is a wide gap between the participants' perceptions of SCL and their practices in the classroom. Moreover, the analysis of the interviews led to extracting three main themes of institutional, teacher-student-parent, and socio-cultural obstacles that impede implementing SCL in EFL classes and indicate that TCL practices are still running. The results revealed that teachers hold general perceptions of SCL. However, due to some constraints, they adhere to the TCL.

Keywords: *Student-Centered Learning (SCL); English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers; Social Constructivism; Mixed Methods study*

موانع اجرایی رویکرد یادگیری دانش آموز محور از دیدگاه معلمان زبان انگلیسی در ایران با روش مطالعه تلفیقی
مطالعات چهار دهه ی اخیر، کارآمدی رویکرد یادگیری دانش آموزمحور(SCL) را درمقایسه با رویکرد یادگیِری معلم محور(TCL) تایید کرده است. همچنین، پیدایش مهارتهای یادگیری و شایستگی های قرن ۲۱، سیستم های آموزشی را ملزم نموده تا شیوه های آموزشی گذشته ی خود را تغییر داده و دانش‌آموزان را به این مهارت ها و شایستگی ها مجهز کنند. با این حال، اجرای رویکرد دانش آموزمحوردردبیرستان های متوسطه دوم ایران نتوانسته است به اندازه کافی توجه مسئولان آموزشی و معلمان زبان انگلیسی را به خود جلب کند. این مطالعه با هدف بررسی درک معلمان زبان انگلیسی از رویکرد یادگیری دانش آموز محور و آگاهی آن ها نسبت به موانع اجرایی آن در شهر کرمانشاه انجام شده است. برای این منظور، دراین مطالعه با استفاده از طرح روش های تلفیقی همگرا و بکارگیری نرم افزار NVivo Version 10 داده های یک پرسشنامه ۲۴ سوالی با ۹ مصاحبه ساختارمند ترکیب شد. تجزیه و تحلیل پرسشنامه ها نشان داد که بین درک شرکت‌کنندگان از رویکرد دانش آموز محور و عملکرد آنها در کلاس فاصله زیادی وجود دارد. همچنین تجزیه و تحلیل مصاحبه ها منجر به استخراج سه موضوع اصلی *سازمانی، معلم - دانش آموز- والدین و فرهنگی- اجتماعی* درممانعت از اجرای رویکرد دانش آموز محوردر کلاس‌های زبان انگلیسی شد و نشان داد که در این کلاس ها کماکان رویکرد معلم محور در حال اجراست. نتایج این مطالعه نشان داد هرچند معلمان زبان انگلیسی درک کلی از این رویکرد دارند، اما به دلیل برخی محدودیت ها هنوز به رویکرد معلم محور پایبند هستند.
واژگان کلیدی: یادگیری دانش آموز محور، معلم زبان انگلیسی، ساختارگرایی اجتماعی، مطالعه روش های تلفیقی.

Introduction

In the literature, four theories establish the foundations of the SCL approach: Dewey's Progressivism emphasizing the needs, experiences, interests, and abilities of students; Rogers' Humanism emphasizing the application of the results of his psychological research to person-centered teaching, caring about students, and genuineness on the part of the learning facilitator; Piaget's Cognitive Development accentuating the students' understanding of concepts and their ability to think and reason in the learning process, and Vygotsky's Social Development stressing the ZPD which refers to the range of abilities a person can perform with the guidance of an expert, but cannot yet perform on their own.

To achieve satisfactory communicative competence in English in globalized world, no longer the sage-on-the-stage pattern of education can ensure the best learning outcomes in EF/SL classrooms. On the other hand, the emergence of 21st-century learning skills in the English language classroom (Plucker, J., Kaufman, J., & Beghetto, R., 2016) and 21st-century competencies have pedagogy to fundamentally shift their previous practices and encourage students to follow these skills and competencies.

According to Masters (2013), students grasp almost 5-30% of the content presented in the traditional teacher-centered approach. Besides, the passive teacher-centered pedagogies that have served previous generations are no longer appropriate to satisfy students' 21st-century learning skills (Zeki & Güneyli, 2014). Along with these changes and due to the recent progress in cognitive and learning theories, there has been growing interest in determining how effectively to teach students and promote their learning (Sawyer, 2005). To this end, many educationists have tried to explore the best ways students learn, retain ideas, improve skills, and create innovative projects, to improve engagement and instruction (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Recent studies within the past four decades have confirmed the effectiveness of SCL over TCL; for instance, fostering the intellectual development of students (Burke, 1983); increasing student participation (Kelly, 1985); developing confidence in students (Dandoulakis, 1986); shifting the learning responsibility to students (Passman, 2000), motivating students, stimulating lifelong learning, and developing communication skills (Villacís & Camacho, 2017; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). Since SCL is perceived as useful in the rapidly evolving educational environment (Al-Humaidi, 2015), it has gained global attention.

Across Asia, educational policies such as Malaysia's Vision 2020 (released in 1991), Thailand's National Education Act reforms (released in 1999), and Singapore's Thinking Nation (released in 1997) support more SCL strategies rather than focus on information retention (Pham Thi Hong, 2011). Although most North American and European countries have pioneered to adopt SCL at all levels of education, a vast number of the developing countries still rely mainly on the TCL approach.

Conversely, the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Strategy 8-7, (2011, p.39) stipulates that: Placing emphasis on a teacher-oriented approach in teacher-student relationships in education and preventing progression of any theoretical or practical plans or programs that contradict with this pivotal practice. Due to the nature of the theocratic government, this strategy, instead of relying on research-based findings in education, comply with the views of high-ranking authorities who recommend paving the ground for the ideological promotion of the youth through following the philosophy of Islamic education. While the SCL paradigm well complies with the principles of a more democratic and liberal system of education.

As the term suggests "student-centered learning is a method of learning or teaching that puts the learner at the center" (Machemer & Crawford, 2007, p.9). It has originated from the conceptual framework of constructivism (Cuban, 2006), in which students learn more by interaction, doing, and experiencing rather than by observing. Educationists from Canada, the EU, and the US have spent plenty of energy and time to implement the SCL at all levels of education in the past four decades.

Despite success in implementing SCL over TCL in literature (Passman, 2000; Villacís & Camacho, 2017; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019), SCL has neither been implemented nor received due attention in Iranian EFL contexts, instead, TCL still dominates in most Iranian EFL high school classes even though it fails to meet its main objective.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore EFL teachers' perceptions of SCL and the obstacles to implementing it. Although a vast amount of research exists regarding the merits of implementing SCL in various educational settings, little research has been done on obstacles to implementing this approach in high school EFL classes. This study shows that most EFL classroom instruction follows a TCL approach.

This study is significant both theoretically and practically. From the theoretical point of view, it is the first attempting to explore SCL from the point of view of the EFL teachers. The practical significance of the findings may be helpful to EFL teachers, material developers, and designers. To obtain the necessary information and achieve the purpose of the study, this research posed the following research questions:

Research Questions

RQ1. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the SCL approach?
RQ2. What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions of the obstacles to implementing the SCL approach?

Review of Literature

Student-Centered Learning Paradigm

According to Jacobs and Renandya (2016), the initial moves in education towards SCL began with the works of scholars such as John Dewey (Progressivism), Carl Rogers (Humanism), Jean Piaget (Cognitive Development), and Lev Vygotsky (Social Development). The Dewey's (1940) philosophy in education initiated fundamental changes to teaching and learning by its emphasis on meaningful activity in learning and class participation.

The starting points of the development of SCL emanates from Progressivism, over 100 years ago. Dewey argued that in an educational environment the child should be regarded as the sun about which the other effective factors of education revolve; in other words, the child should be the center of an educational system.

Carl Roger's Humanism found much application in education and SCL. Humanistic scholars believe that both feelings and knowledge of students are beneficial to the learning process. In education, tenets of humanism accentuate the role of self-directedness, autonomy, self-evaluation, the importance of both cognitive and affective domains in learning, and the creation of a non-threatening environment in learners.

Constructivism contends that individuals construct much of what they learn and understand (Bruning et al., 2004). It highlights the interaction of persons and situations in the acquisition of skills and knowledge (Cobb & Bowers, 1999). It originates from the research of Piaget,

Vygotsky, the Gestalt psychologists, as well as the philosophy of John Dewey. Although there is no one constructivist theory of learning, most constructivists agree on these two tenets: 1) learners are active in constructing their knowledge, and 2) social interactions are important in this knowledge construction process (Bruning, Schraw, & Norby, 2011).

Based on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory cognitive development is not a direct result of activity, but it is indirect; other people must interact with the learner, use mediatory tools to facilitate the learning process, and then cognitive development may occur. According to Vygotsky (1978, p.57, as cited in Hoidn, 2016) "Every function in a child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and later on the individual level; first between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)." In other words, in children, higher-order mental processes, first are co-constructed during the interaction between the child and her parents or another person. Then these co-constructed processes are internalized by the child and become part of that child's cognitive development (Mercer, 2013). In this view, the main goal of instruction is to encourage learners to be active agents and owners of their learning.

Overall, the fundamental beliefs from these four theories collectively focused on how students actively learn and construct their learning, and finally paved the way for the emergence of SCL. As Arman (2018) believes, the cornerstone of SCL resides on the teachers' design of active and deep learning, and the students' autonomy and responsibility for learning.

SCL is usually contrasted with the TCL, where teachers share knowledge with their students who are thought of as passive receivers of information (Kain, 2003). The direction of imparting knowledge, in fact, in TCL is unilateral, from teacher to student. Learners in this approach are so passive and are not capable of gaining the most beneficial outcomes from their learning. Nonkukhetkhong et al., (2006) believes that SCL means self and lifelong education when teachers should change their traditional roles from teller to coordinator and from material users to teaching material providers.

Although there is a large amount of theoretical literature on SCL, no unanimously agreed-on definition for SCL exists. Some theorists provide a broad definition of SCL like "students have a choice in what to study, how to study" (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005, p.3), while others provide specific principles (Weimer, 2002). Some others like Felder and Brent (1996, p.43), have defined it as "a broad teaching approach that includes substituting active learning for lectures, holding students responsible for their learning, and using self-paced and cooperative (team-based) learning." Brooks (2004) has defined SCL as an instructional practice where students are actively engaged in the learning as opposed to passively receiving information in TCL. More recently, Richards and Schmidt (2013) have defined SCL as "a belief that attention to the nature of learners should be central to all aspects of language teaching, including planning teaching, and evaluation. Learning is dependent upon nature and will of the learners" (p. 326).

Teachers' and Students' Roles

In TCL, the teacher's role is an information provider and evaluator to monitor learners to get the right answer. The teacher also asserts control over what and how students learn. While in an SCL, the role of the teacher changes to a guide. SCL-oriented teachers provide on-demand support and scaffolding to students. While the role of the teacher in SCL is the commitment to professional and personal growth and creating real-world and authentic learning experiences in SCL, this is not the case for TCL. In SCL, students function as co-designers of the curriculum and their learning environments by establishing learning goals, creating a reflective process, and taking learning outside of the classroom (Bray & McClaskey, 2015).

The Characteristics and Elements of Student-Centered Learning

According to Bransford, Vye, and Bateman (2002), one of the most prominent characteristics of SCL is that teachers particularly concentrate on what students should learn and emphasize s on the reason. In TCL classes, teachers provide multiple tasks for the students, they ask the questions and answers and render examples; while in SCL classes, students are more hard-working than their teachers. Furthermore, teachers take into account the existing knowledge of students (Protheroe, 2007), help students who have learning difficulties, and consider their background and SES. The author furthers that, teachers also pay due attention to the considerations given to individual learners' experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, capacities, and needs (Harkema and Schout, 2008). Referring to other aspects of SCL, Harden, and Laidlaw (2013) state that teachers should provide timely feedback to the students, engage them in active learning, tailor the learning to their personal needs and make the learning relevant.

In the literature, among the various elements that have been proposed as the elements of SCL in EFL classrooms, Table 1 summarizes the most significant ones.

Table 1
Ten Elements of Student-centered Learning

Elements of Student-Centered Learning	Brief explanation
Students and teachers as co-learners	Teachers do not pretend to know everything. Instead, teachers and students learn along with each other
Student–student interaction	Students believe that they can learn from peers and develop the skills needed for learning together. Indeed, learning with peers constitutes a key mode of student learning
Learner autonomy	Teachers act as guides on the side, as students learn how to become autonomous lifelong learners. Autonomous does not necessarily mean "alone." Instead, it means that students have control, and part of that control involves whether to learn alone, with peers, or with teachers and other experts
Focus on meaning	The class does not use rote learning. Instead, students fully understand what they are studying and why they are studying it
Curricular integration	Students appreciate the links between what they study one day in one class with other days in the same class and the same day in different classes. Plus, they see the links between what they learn and their lives and the lives of others beyond the classroom
Diversity	Teachers and students plan learning activities with the needs of all students in mind, and the class appreciates the benefits of learning with diverse students and teachers

Thinking skills	The class goes beyond the information given, as they elaborate on the ideas and information they encounter. Students and teachers apply, elaborate on, expand on, modify, analyze, and synthesize while learning
Alternative assessment	Assessment expands beyond multiple-choice, true–false, and short answers. Students take part in the assessment process, via self-assessment and peer assessment, as well assessment of teachers, materials, and education institutions
Learning climate	The class cooperates toward an atmosphere in which all are appreciated and supported, and, as a result, all are willing to take risks
Motivation	Rather than extrinsic motivation dominating, the class strives to promote intrinsic motivation, where everyone is a motivator of their individual self, their peers, and their teachers

Note. Adapted from *English language teaching today: Linking theory and practice* (p.14), by W. A. Renandya & H. P. Widodo, 2016, Springer. Copyright 2016 by Springer International Publishing Switzerland.

The rationale beyond SCL in the literature is twofold: first, the emphasis on how learners learn regardless of how teachers teach. The second is the type of learning that students need to prepare themselves and society for a better future, the learning of the 21st Century skills (Fadel & Trilling, 2010).

Student-Centered Learning vs. Teacher-Centered Learning

TCL, according to Mascolo (2009), refers to the communication of knowledge to students in a learning environment in which the teacher has the primary responsibility, and students are the passive characters in the learning process. The failure of TCL to provide and create an environment in the classroom to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills has led to a paradigm shift from TCL to SCL. Moreover, recent research has empirically proved that SCL can have positive ramifications on learners and learning (Stefaniak & Tracey, 2015).

In most TCL classes, the major means of the teaching process is through giving lectures. In such classes, it is the teacher who plays an active role and the teaching process places the focus of instruction on the design, content, and organization of the courses from the teachers' view, not students. In contrast, SCL instruction provides a learning environment in which the students construct their skills and knowledge. In a TCL classroom, the learning process is teacher-driven and depends on teachers' mastery of the content, the way they explain it, their practice, and also the homework. Furthermore, the balance of power in TCL settings is towards the teacher, while in the SCL settings, it weighs towards the students. In TCL classrooms, the rate of passivity among students is high, in contrast, in SCL ones, students are more active. The assessment methods in TCL-led and SCL-led classrooms are another source of debate. While in the former, test-oriented assessment is on the core, in the latter, more authentic formative and summative assessments are emphasized (Klemenčič, M., 2019).

In its initial practices in the classroom, SCL aims to develop learner autonomy and independence from the teacher by making students responsible for their learning. The TCL

approach motivates students to focus on grades, while SCL promotes education as an end in itself (Wright, 2011).

While SCL encourages students to actively construct their knowledge through real-world experiences along with providing activities and assessments of the student's choosing (Freire, 2018), TCL includes the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students via notes or handouts that require memorization; lectures; and summative assessments, which evaluates students on their ability to duplicate teacher-delivered material (Vavrus et al., 2011). A recent comprehensive comparison of the two approaches is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Selected Continua of Characteristics on which to Compare Teacher Centered Learning and SCL

Teacher Centered Learning	Student Centered Learning
1. Teachers and course materials are seen as all knowing; knowledge is seen as fixed	Teachers and course materials can be wrong; teachers are co-learners along with students. People understand that knowledge is changeable and subject to debate
2. Students talk is mostly directed at teachers, i.e., teacher–student interaction. The usual pattern is (1) teacher asks a question; (2) a student answers; (3) the teacher evaluates the student's answer	Students also talk to peers, i.e., peer interaction
3. Teachers and administrators are the only ones who decide what will be studied and how it will be studied	Students also have a voice in what they study and how they will study it
4. Assessment is done only by teachers	Students also do assessment: of peers, selves, and their classes
5. Learning tasks are seen as preparation for what students will do after their education	Learning tasks can also connect to students' lives in the present
6. Extrinsic motivation is the dominant form of motivation	Teachers and students attempt to build intrinsic motivation
7. Most questions/tasks have only one correct answer; students are to repeat what they have been taught	Many questions/tasks have multiple correct answers; students are to go beyond what they have been taught and to thereby deploy and develop thinking skills
8. One way of teaching, the didactic method, predominates	Multiple ways of teaching are used
9. The focus is almost exclusively on cognitive outcomes, such as test scores	Students and teachers also value affective outcomes, such as enthusiasm for learning and empathy for others

Note. Adapted from *Student centered cooperative learning: Linking concepts in education to promote student learning* (p.5), by G. M. Jacobs & W.A. Renandya, 2019, Springer. Copyright 2016 by Springer Nature Singapore.

Contrary to TCL, in which most learning takes place within the traditional and inconvenient classrooms, the learning process, in most cases, in SCL is self-guided and self-paced.

Recent research on SCL has also confirmed the following findings such as a decrease in drop-out rates; an increase in the percentage of students accepted into college; increase in growth in mathematics; increase in growth in reading; increase in student engagement, and a decrease in student referrals (Glowa, L., & Goodell, J., 2016).

Research Findings on Implementing SCL

Although most EFL teachers are acquainted with the concept of SCL, to what extent their perception of this paradigm is in harmony with the real classroom practice is a matter of controversy. However, research findings indicate that due to lack of knowledge of SCL, teachers tend to implement it as they understood it (Prapaisit De Segovia and Hardison, 2008).

Nonkukhetkhong et al., (2006), in their research targeted to elicit the EFL teachers' perceptions of SCL, found that teaching enough content for teachers is a very central aspect in an SCL classroom. The teachers also claimed that SCL is appropriate for bright and very motivated students who are ready to take responsibility for their learning.

Yilmaz (2008) studied the teachers' perceptions of learner-centered instruction. The results revealed that a great deal of the challenges in their classes was linked to the organizational structure of their classrooms and schools, such as large class size, lack of resources, etc.

According to Weimer (2002), observing practicing teachers in the classroom showed that they continued to be lecture-focused even after attending workshops on the student-centered method. Also, Ebert-May et al. (2011) claimed that there were some circumstances in which the teachers might think that they were using SCL approach, but in fact, they were still using TCL. Furthermore, An and Reigeluth (2011) reported that due to the lack of knowledge about learner-centered instruction and other obstacles, teachers often face problems in creating a learner-centered classroom even though they have learner-centered beliefs.

Zohrabi et al. (2012) compared the learner-centered approach with the teacher-centered in teaching English grammar in the Iranian high school context. The results supported the implementation of the teacher-centered process to develop grammar knowledge of Iranian EFL learners.

To determine the teachers' attitudes towards SCL and their attempt to practice SCL in classrooms, Salleh and Yusoff (2017) found that there were positive attitudes of the EFL teachers towards SCL. In another study, Al-Humaidi (2015) found that there exist some contradictions between the EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices in implementing the SCL.

Sockman (2015) indicates that teachers may not feel contented with the new role as a facilitator in SCL, since they regard the students' independence as a threat to their identity. Kaymakamoglu (2018) showed that even though the teachers expressed constructivist or both constructivist and traditional beliefs, they mainly followed a teacher-centered approach.

Ghaicha and Mezouari (2018) studied Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions of SCL. They found that teachers hold the right perceptions and a good understanding of SCL. Yet, due to constraints such as the standardized curriculum and examination, lack of materials, and large class size, teachers find themselves obliged to keep different traditional practices.

Lak, M., Soleimani, H., & Parvaneh, F. (2017) studied the effects of teacher-centered method versus learner-centered method on reading comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. The

findings of this study revealed that learner-centered instruction was more effective than teacher-centered instruction in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

Memari Hanjani and Li (2017) investigated the role of cooperative learning pedagogy in two EFL reading comprehension classes in a medium-size university in Iran and sought learners' behaviors and reflections toward SCL activities they engaged in during an academic semester. The results showed that the learners expressed favorable attitudes toward the new approach they were involved in, even though some issues were raised by the interviewees.

Moradi, and Alavinia (2020) studied the implementation, restrictions, and challenges of learner-centered education (LCE) in Iranian language schools. The findings reported three categories of teacher-induced, learner-induced, and context-relevant factors are responsible for limiting LCE implementation.

On the whole, the review of literature on main obstacles to implementing SCL in EFL classes indicates such barriers as large class size leading to inappropriate seating arrangements of students; time constraints leading to lack of the coverage of the whole content; and inadequacy of technological resources.

Method

Research Design

This study has employed a convergent mixed methods design. t is a single-phase approach in which the researchers first gather both quantitative and qualitative data, then analyzes them one by one, and at the end, compares the results to discern whether the findings confirm or disconfirm each other as shown in Figure 1 (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 348).

Figure 1
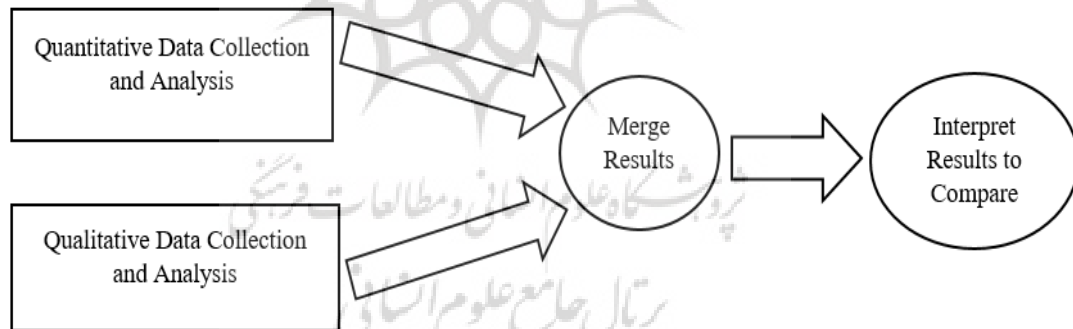
Participants

The participants in this study were nine EFL teachers chosen from four types of high schools in Kermanshah, Iran. The researchers employed a purposive sampling method to ensure that high school teachers for the present study reflect diversity in terms of geography, Three of the participants were teaching in Gifted School[1], three in Nemune Dolati[2], two in Shahed[3], and

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[1] . Iranian unisex high schools that are dedicated to gifted students.
[2]. These high schools are controlled by the government and have no fees
[3] . Shahed High Schools are public schools that are dedicated to martyrs' and veterans' children.

one in Hey'at Omanaei [4], and all were teaching tenth graders in the current academic year. The demographic characteristics of the participants of the study are shown in Table 3.

Instruments

To obtain the purpose of the study, two instruments, a questionnaire and a structured interview were employed. The questionnaire was developed by the EDC (Education Development Center) evaluation team in consultation with NMEF (Nellie Mae Education Foundation) research and program staff. The original questionnaire was administered in 23 schools in 11 public school districts in the New England region with over 2000 respondents.

Procedure
Data Collection

Due to the adopted mixed methods research design, the quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire and qualitative data through nine structured interviews. To localize the questionnaire some parts of it were revised after consulting with the advisor. After revision, the final version consisted of 24 items in two sections.

The qualitative data were analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software; QSR International Pty Ltd. (2014) NVivo (Version 10) (released in 2014), https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home. During the interviews, eight questions were asked to investigate participants' perceptions of SCL in EFL classes and the obstacles facing them to implement it.

Data Analysis

To identify the participant's perceptions of SCL, the questionnaire was administered to the participants and the results were descriptively analyzed. Then, the collected data were tabulated for ease of interpretation.

Also, to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions of the obstacles to implementing SCL, a structured interview was employed with each participant. Each 45 to 70 - minutes length interview was recorded in audio format, and subsequently, the data were transcribed in Word documents. Afterward, NVivo 10 was used for content analysis. For validity and reliability purposes, back translation was used as a technique. The structured interviews were carried out in Persian to overcome the language barriers and then translated back into English.

Results

In this study, to answer the research questions, a questionnaire and structured interview were used. The qualitative and quantitative data are presented in tables 3, 4, and figure 2, respectively.

Analysis of the Questionnaire

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[4] . In these schools, one group, as the board of trustees, is responsible for the management of the school.

The first part of the questionnaire, as shown in Table 3, deals with the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Question	Concepts	Answers
1	Gender	Female (%44)
		Male (%56)
2	Age	Mean Age: 42.56
3	School Type	Gifted High School (%34)
		Nemune Dolati (%33)
		Shahed High School (%22)
		Hey'at Omanaei High School (%11)
4	Teaching Experience	>20 years (%67)
		11-20 years (%22)
		6-10 years (%11)
5	Academic Qualification	MA (%63)
		Ph.D. (%22)
		BA (%22)
6	Level Taught	Tenth Graders (%100)

The second part of the questionnaire (questions 7 to 24) is divided into three sections. Section 1 (questions 7 and 8) deals with the extent to which the participants have involvement in initiatives of the three Districts of Education Department in Kermanshah to enhance SCL and the extent to which these initiatives have had an impact on the enhancement of SCL. Descriptive analysis of section 1 revealed that since none of the three Districts of Education Department in Kermanshah has launched any in-service training courses or workshops on SCL, therefore, the participants announced no impact of such initiatives (see Table 4).

Section 2 (questions 9 to 13) deals with the extent to which the participants have used SCL-related skills such as collaboration, personalization, critical thinking or problem solving, student self-regulation, and academic tenacity in their classrooms, and anywhere/anytime learning. The analysis of this section confirms the researchers' initial hypothesis that there is a great gap between the participants' perceptions of SCL and their practices in the classroom (see Table 4).

Section 3 (questions 14 to 24) deals with the most important assessment methods adopted by respondents.

Based on the descriptive analysis of section 3, the three that are the most important for assessing student proficiency in their classrooms were respectively as follows:

1. Participants provide the four assessment methods of "Daily homework and daily check-ins; End-of-course or end-of-term exams; Student presentation to the class; and Traditional quizzes or tests", with a mean of (78%), as the first rank in their classroom.

2. They give the four assessment methods of "Portfolio submissions and accompanying rationale; Extended (more than a week long) individual projects; Journals, Lab books or

Notebooks; Student presentation at a public event …", with a mean of (75.25%), as the second rank in their classroom.

3. And as the third rank, they utilize these assessment methods "Classroom participation; End-of-course or end-of-term exams; and Student writing (essay, reports, etc.)", with a mean of (70.66%).

Thus, the participants, despite their beliefs, have the most emphasis on TCL-based assessments (see Table 4)

Table 4

Questionnaire analysis

Question	Section	Concepts	Answers
7	1	Involvement in District Initiatives	No Involvement (%100)
8		District Initiatives Impact	No Involvement (%100)
9		Collaboration Skill Instruction	Occasionally (%78) Often (%22)
10		Personalization Instruction	Never (%67) Occasionally (%33)
11	2	Critical Thinking or Problem-Solving Instruction	Occasionally (%56) Never (%33) Often (%11)
12		Self-regulation and Academic Tenacity Instruction	Never (%67) Occasionally (%33)
13		Anywhere/Anytime Learning	Never (%67) Often (%33)
14		Traditional Tests	1st Most Important (%78) 2nd Most Important (%22)
15		Portfolio Submissions	3rd Most Important (%78) 2nd Most Important (%22)
16	3	Classroom Participation	2nd Most Important (%67) 1st Most Important (%33)

17	End-of-Term Exams	1st Most Important (%67)
		2nd Most Important (%22)
		3rd Most Important (%11)
18	Extended Individual Projects	3rd Most Important (%67)
		2nd Most Important (%33)
19	Extended Collaborative Projects	3rd Most Important (%56)
		2nd Most Important (%33)
		1st Most Important (%11)
20	Daily Homework	1st Most Important (%78)
		2nd Most Important (%22)
21	Student Writing	2nd Most Important (%78)
		3rd Most Important (%22)
22	Journals, Lab Books or Notebooks	3rd Most Important (%78)
		2nd Most Important (%22)
23	Student Presentation to Class	1st Most Important (%78)
		2nd Most Important (%22)
24	Student Presentation at a Public Event	3rd Most Important (%78)
		2nd Most Important (%22)

Among the many themes derived from the interpreted data tabulated and parsed in the Nvivo 10, the following are notable: First, the participants already had adequate knowledge of SCL and its tenets. However, they did not implement SCL in the classroom since no initiatives had been launched by the Education Department in Kermanshah in this regard. Therefore, the participants, just based on their knowledge, attempted to implement some principles of the SCL approach, and rarely include SCL-related instruction in their classes. Second, it was revealed that although the participants were to some extent aware of the principles of the SCL approach, yet

most of their emphasis laid on the assessments that have a teacher-centered orientation in practice.

Analysis of the Interviews Using NVivo 10

The researchers analyzed the qualitative data using the NVivo. During each interview, the researcher asked eight questions to explore participants' perceptions of SCL and the obstacles facing it. Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding procedures were applied to categorize the data. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and each interview was analyzed immediately.

To answer the second research question, an in-depth analysis of the structured interviews was applied using NVivo. Out of 253 open codes obtained from the interviews' analysis and conducting axial and selective coding procedures, the following results were gleaned:

Teachers' perceptions of SCL

The following results about the teachers' perceptions of SCL were concluded:

- Almost all the participants were acquainted with this approach through personal studies, not by in-service training courses or workshops.

- They unanimously considered SCL as necessary to developing high-quality instruction, and more or less they were familiar with the ten principles of the SCL.

- On the whole, regarding the condition of school and classroom facilities, the participants had no optimistic perspective about the place and future of implementing SCL in Iranian English language teaching.

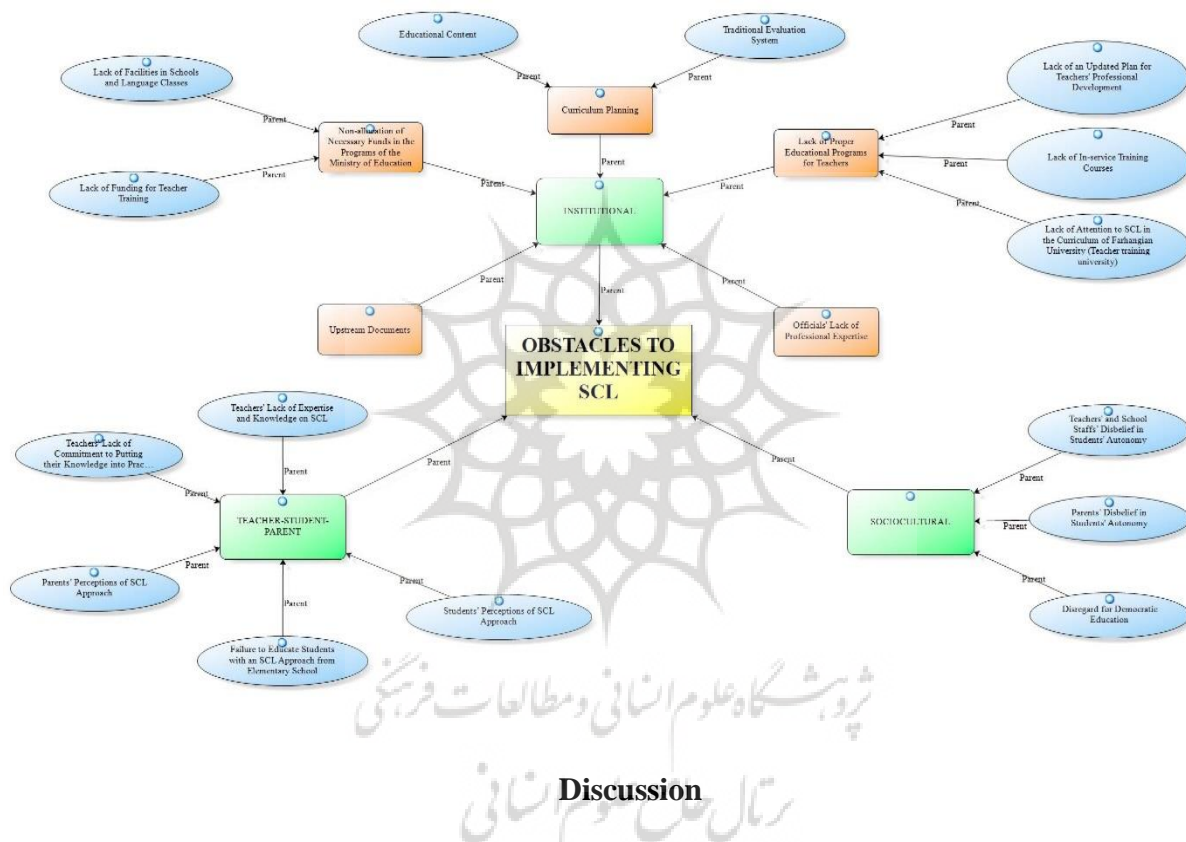## The main obstacles to implementing SCL

The main obstacles to implementing the SCL approach in EFL classrooms were as follows:

- The unawareness of school staffs, teachers, students;

- Lack of compliance with standards appropriate to the student-centered learning approach (such as class size, school and classroom equipment, and the allotted time);

- Inappropriate instructional content;

- Lack of necessary expertise among the teachers and lack of holding in-service training courses;

- Lack of attention to planning appropriate curriculum and material development from the part of authorities;

- Funding problems;

- Predominance of TCL viewpoints among the Ministry of Education's upstream documents, middle, and lower-level authorities;

- Socio-cultural problems;

- Existence of a big gap between the teachers' perceptions of SCL and their practices;

- Believing that SCL is better implemented in private schools;

- Disregarding students' autonomy from the part of parents and educators;

- Believing that the implementation of this approach is related to the type of schools and students;

- The predominance of traditional assessment systems in schools;

- Lack of due attention to the tenets of democratic education.

The above obstacles were categorized under the three main themes of institutional, teacher-student-parent, and socio-cultural obstacles.

Finally, to visually explore, present, and summarize the obstacles to implementing SCL in EFL classrooms, the following model was developed using NVivo 10 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Obstacles to Implementing SCL Model in Iranian EFL Classrooms

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of participants about SCL and the obstacles to implementing it in EFL classrooms. To answer the first research question, the researchers administered a questionnaire and analyzed the results descriptively. Descriptive analysis of the questionnaire (see Table 4) shows that though EFL teachers are aware of the principles of the SCL approach, their class practices, and their assessment methods, they do not follow SCL principles. This analysis led to these findings: First, although the participants had considerable knowledge of what SCL is, they did not apply it in the classroom since no initiatives had been launched by the Education Department to enhance the implementation of the SCL. Therefore, the participants, just based on their knowledge, attempted to implement some principles of the SCL and they rarely include SCL-related instruction in their classes. Second, it was revealed that the assessments that they carried out were more teacher-centered oriented in practice.

To gain participants' perceptions of the obstacles to implementing SCL and answer the second research question, the researchers employed a structured interview. Furthermore, in line with the interview results, the obstacles to implementing SCL were categorized under the three main themes of institutional (non-allocation of necessary funds in the programs of the Ministry of Education, curriculum planning, lack of proper in-service training courses for teachers, officials' lack of professional expertise, and upstream documents), teacher-student-parent (failure to educate the students with an SCL approach from elementary school, teachers' lack of expertise and knowledge, teachers' lack of commitment to putting their knowledge on SCL into practice, students' perceptions of SCL, and parents' perceptions of SCL), and socio-cultural obstacles (teachers' and school staffs' disbelief in students' autonomy, parents' disbelief in students' autonomy, and disregard for democratic education).

The analysis of both questionnaires and interviews revealed that EFL teachers perceive using SCL in classes as necessary. The findings of this study are consistent with research in similar contexts which has revealed that SCL was more effective than TCL in improving Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension performance (Lak, M., Soleimani, H., & Parvaneh, F., 2017). The findings also confirm the study by Prapaisit De Segovia and Hardison (2008) who found that due to lack of knowledge of SCL, teachers tend to implement it as they understood it. Also, to determine the teachers' attitudes towards SCL and to measure the extent teachers practice it, the findings of a study by Salleh and Yusoff (2017) demonstrated that there were positive attitudes of the EFL teachers towards SCL. In line with the results of this study, An and Reigeluth (2011) reported that due to the lack of knowledge about learner-centered instruction and other obstacles, teachers often face problems in creating a learner-centered classroom even though they have learner-centered beliefs. In another study, contrasting TCL and SCL, Kaymakamoglu (2018) studied the EFL teachers' beliefs, and actual classroom practice in Turkey. The findings showed that even though the teachers expressed constructivist or both constructivist and traditional beliefs, they mainly followed a teacher-centered approach. The results of a study by Ghaicha and Mezouari (2018) indicated that teachers hold the right perceptions of SCL. Yet, due to constraints such as the standardized curriculum and examination, lack of materials, and large class size, teachers find themselves obliged to keep different traditional practices. Also, in line with the results of this study, Moradi and Alavinia (2020) studied the implementation, restrictions, and challenges of learner-centered education (LCE) in Iranian language schools. They reported three categories of teacher-induced, learner-induced, and context-relevant factors are responsible for limiting LCE implementation.

The findings of this study are in contrast with that of Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006). They claimed that SCL is appropriate for bright and very motivated students who are ready to take responsibility for their learning. Also, the findings contradict Zohrabi et al. (2012), which supported the implementation of the teacher-centered process to develop grammar knowledge of Iranian EFL learners. In another study, Al-Humaidi (2015) found some contradictions between the EFL teachers' perceptions and their practices in implementing the SCL.

Overall, the results of the questionnaire and the interview questions were consistent. Although, there were slight differences between the results of interviews and the questionnaire. Also, some aspects of the participants' background like age, gender, and experience of teaching were taken into account. Moreover, the qualitative coding procedures for interviews led to an NVivo model representing the existing obstacles to implementing the principles of SCL in Iranian EFL classes. By and large, the researchers hope that this research has added to the current knowledge in the area of English language teaching and learning.

The findings of this research may offer some pedagogical implications for instructors, material developers and syllabus designers, and the education system.

Further research in the future needs to be done to examine whether the situation is the same or not in tertiary levels on obstacles to implementing the SCL approach.

Conclusion

This study offers research on the interaction between theory and practice for an effective educational change, especially in EFL classes. There are some limitations and delimitations to the qualitative section of this study such as generating context-dependent knowledge, that is to say, findings are not assumed to be widely generalizable since part of the study was qualitative and focused on the experience of a small number of participants. Therefore, like the bulk of qualitative research finding in the related area and beyond, the results shall suffer any extension dimension from the sample to the population without technical notifications in advance. Rather, the insights offered by the participants of the study reflect specific conditions relative to the province, city, school type, population, or other factors.

Attention to context has to be paid if the study's findings are to be regarded for more widespread contexts. Moreover, SCL is not practiced in high schools that much. However, based on the finding of this study EFL teachers need to take necessary steps to pave the way to surmount the obstacles to implementing this approach. The findings, in the qualitative section of this study, may be subject to other interpretations than that of the researcher, as well.

One of the considerable implications for instructors is that due to living in an era of information explosion, increasing communication, and globalization, no longer the previous pedagogical approaches can satisfy the ever-changing needs of 21st-century EFL learners. This necessitates EFL instructors to keep abreast of the latest changes in the paradigm shift from TCL to SCL.

EFL material developers and syllabus designers, in their part, need to comply more with the universal principles of education and shun too much adherence to ideological tenets that isolate the education system. They also need to include the basic concepts of democratic education in their provided materials. Moreover, they need to develop the materials to permit the EFL teachers to overcome such classroom challenges as covering course content, ensuring skills acquisition, and assessing students' work.

In addition, the findings provide evidence that the education system needs to adopt fundamental reforms to expedite this paradigm shift through paying much attention to EFL teachers' professional development programs, modifying the assessment systems in high schools, giving schools more autonomy, and enhance more accountability from the part of EFL teachers and school staffs. It needs to find solutions to limited resources and large classes which impede implementing SCL in EFL classes and also compensate for the shortage of staff trained in SCL in schools.

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