

The Indispensable Role of Structure and Expertise: Advantages of Teacher-Centred Approaches in Foreign Language Learning

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Accepted: 12.10.2025

Published: 12.12.2025

<https://doi.org/10.69760/portuni.0110014>

Abstract; Teacher-centred instruction remains a foundational and often underestimated approach in foreign language education, particularly during the early stages of language acquisition when learners require clarity, structure, and expert guidance. While contemporary pedagogy frequently emphasizes student-centred models, this article argues that teacher-centred practices provide indispensable benefits grounded in instructional expertise, systematic curriculum delivery, and effective classroom management. Drawing on established theoretical perspectives and classroom-based observations, the study examines how teacher direction supports the acquisition of complex linguistic systems, facilitates immediate and accurate feedback, and ensures the consistent progression of core skills such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and writing accuracy. Special attention is given to practical pedagogical applications, including scaffolding techniques, teaching strategies for young learners, structured vocabulary instruction, and step-by-step models of reading and error correction. The article further analyzes the flipped classroom model, demonstrating that despite its reputation as a student-centred innovation, its design and effectiveness remain fundamentally dependent on teacher expertise. Overall, the study highlights that a well-implemented teacher-centred approach offers essential stability, pedagogical precision, and guided support, making it a critical component of successful foreign language learning.

Keywords; *Teacher-centred instruction; foreign language pedagogy; instructional expertise; vocabulary learning; flipped classroom*

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, foreign language pedagogy has been strongly influenced by communicative and constructivist paradigms that advocate student-centred learning, learner autonomy, and collaborative classroom practices. As a result, teacher-centred instruction is often portrayed as traditional, rigid, or even outdated, especially in contrast to methods that foreground learner choice and interaction. However, such a dichotomy risks obscuring the substantial pedagogical value that teacher-centred approaches can offer, particularly in the complex and highly structured domain of foreign language learning.

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The growing emphasis on student-centred methods has sometimes led to a neglect of the specific advantages that teacher-led instruction provides. In many contexts, especially where class sizes are large, resources are limited, or learners are at the early stages of language acquisition, the teacher's expertise, planning, and control over classroom processes are not only beneficial but essential. The assumption that student-centred approaches are universally superior overlooks the realities of classroom practice and the cognitive demands of mastering new grammatical systems, sound patterns, and extensive vocabulary.

Research in applied linguistics and language pedagogy has extensively documented communicative and learner-centred approaches, yet comparatively fewer studies systematically examine the strengths of teacher-centred instruction as a deliberate and principled choice in foreign language education. Much of the existing discourse focuses on the shortcomings of traditional teacher-fronted lessons without acknowledging contexts in which structured, teacher-led models may provide more stability, clearer progression, and more effective support for novice learners. This creates a gap in the literature regarding a balanced assessment of teacher-centred approaches and their strategic use in contemporary classrooms.

The purpose of this article is to address this gap by articulating and analysing the pedagogical value of teacher-centred instruction in foreign language teaching. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and classroom-based practice, the article examines how teacher-led approaches provide expert guidance, ensure curricular coherence, facilitate immediate feedback, and support the systematic development of key skills such as vocabulary, reading, and writing. It is argued that teacher-centred instruction remains particularly crucial in the early stages of language learning, when students are still developing basic linguistic competence and require a high degree of structure and modelling.

Accordingly, the central thesis of this study is that teacher-centred approaches should not be dismissed as relics of traditional pedagogy, but recognised as an essential component of effective foreign language instruction. When implemented thoughtfully and flexibly, teacher-centred methods can coexist with learner-centred practices, offering clarity, scaffolding, and expert direction that many learners need in order to progress confidently and successfully.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Teacher-Centred vs. Student-Centred Paradigms

In discussions of educational reform, teacher-centred and student-centred approaches are frequently presented as opposing paradigms. Teacher-centred instruction is typically defined as a model in which the teacher is the primary source of knowledge, controls the pace and content of the lesson, and directs classroom activities. In this framework, learners are expected to listen, follow instructions, practise modelled forms, and respond to teacher prompts. Student-centred approaches, by contrast, are associated with increased learner autonomy, collaborative work, discovery-based tasks, and a focus on learners' interests, needs, and prior experiences.

This binary framing, however, can be misleading. It often reduces teacher-centred instruction to a caricature of passive learners and authoritarian teachers, while depicting student-centred learning as inherently more modern, democratic, and effective. In reality, both paradigms encompass a range of practices, and their effectiveness depends on how they are designed and implemented rather than on

labels alone. A teacher-centred lesson can still encourage active participation, meaningful practice, and critical thinking, just as a student-centred activity can remain unfocused or inefficient if poorly structured.

A more nuanced perspective understands teacher-centred and student-centred approaches as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. In foreign language education, there are phases of learning—such as the introduction of new grammatical structures, pronunciation patterns, or complex writing conventions—where clear explanations, modelling, and tightly guided practice are pedagogically justified. In other phases, such as communicative practice, project work, or fluency development, greater learner control and interaction may be more appropriate. Thus, effective pedagogy involves a dynamic balance, where teacher-led and learner-led modes are strategically combined according to learners' needs, proficiency levels, and instructional goals.

Recognising this balance helps reframe teacher-centred instruction not as an obstacle to modern pedagogy, but as one tool within a broader repertoire of teaching strategies. From this perspective, the key question is not whether an approach is teacher-centred or student-centred in the abstract, but whether it is fit for purpose, responsive to learners' profiles, and aligned with clearly articulated learning outcomes.

2.2. The Role of the Teacher as Expert

Within teacher-centred approaches, the teacher's role as an expert is central. Foreign language teachers typically undergo specialised professional training that equips them with deep knowledge of linguistic systems, second language acquisition processes, and effective instructional techniques. This expertise enables them to design coherent syllabi, anticipate common learner difficulties, and select methods that are appropriate for specific language points and learner groups.

As subject-matter experts, teachers serve as primary models of accurate language use and as interpreters of complex grammatical, lexical, and phonological features. Their authority allows them to sequence content from simpler to more complex forms, highlight critical contrasts, and provide focused explanations that reduce confusion and cognitive overload. For novice learners, who may lack metalinguistic awareness or experience in autonomous learning, such expert guidance is often indispensable. It helps them build a solid foundation on which later communicative and independent learning activities can be constructed.

In addition to content expertise, teachers bring pedagogical expertise. They are able to scaffold learning by breaking down tasks into manageable steps, providing prompts and cues, and gradually withdrawing support as learners gain confidence. Guided instruction, in which the teacher controls the initial stages of practice before moving towards more open-ended tasks, can prevent fossilisation of errors and support the internalisation of accurate forms. Immediate corrective feedback, clarification of misunderstandings, and re-modelling of target language are all examples of how teacher expertise is operationalised in classroom interaction.

Moreover, the teacher's expert role extends beyond language input to the management of the learning environment. In many foreign language classrooms, especially those with large class sizes or heterogeneous proficiency levels, the teacher's ability to structure time, organise activities, maintain focus, and monitor participation is crucial for ensuring that all learners benefit from the lesson. A well-

managed, teacher-led classroom can provide a stable and predictable context in which learners feel secure enough to take risks, ask questions, and engage with challenging material.

In sum, the theoretical perspective adopted in this article views the teacher not as a dominant figure who suppresses learner agency, but as an expert facilitator whose knowledge and leadership are essential for effective and efficient foreign language learning—particularly at foundational stages. This understanding underpins the subsequent analysis of the concrete advantages of teacher-centred instruction and its pedagogical applications.

3. Advantages of Teacher-Centred Foreign Language Teaching

Teacher-centred instruction in foreign language classrooms offers several pedagogical advantages that are often overlooked in contemporary discussions that privilege learner-centred approaches. When implemented deliberately and reflectively, teacher-led practices can provide novice learners with the structure, security, and expert guidance they need to progress through the initial and most demanding stages of language acquisition (Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

3.1. Expert Guidance and Instructional Authority

Beginner and lower-intermediate learners frequently lack both the metalinguistic awareness and strategic learning skills needed to construct their own pathways through a complex linguistic system. In such contexts, the teacher's professional expertise becomes a central resource. Trained language teachers draw on their knowledge of grammar, phonology, vocabulary, and error patterns to select appropriate input, design staged activities, and anticipate areas of difficulty (Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

This instructional authority is particularly important for diagnosing learning problems. Through careful observation of learner performance in speaking, reading, and writing tasks, teachers can identify persistent grammatical errors, gaps in vocabulary, or pronunciation difficulties and then adapt instruction accordingly (Gower, Phillips, & Walters, 2005). As Mehdizade (2025) argues, the ability of the teacher to “see the whole picture” allows learners to receive targeted support rather than fragmented or random practice.

3.2. Structured and Consistent Curriculum Delivery

Another key advantage of teacher-centred instruction lies in the capacity to deliver a structured and coherent curriculum. Foreign language learning requires systematic exposure to grammatical structures, high-frequency vocabulary, and discourse patterns over time. Without clear sequencing, learners may experience significant gaps that later hinder their communicative performance.

Teacher-led curricula help ensure that linguistic content is introduced in a logical order, revisited through spiralled practice, and consolidated through revision and assessment (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The teacher can also maintain consistency in expectations and assessment criteria, which reduces arbitrary variation in learners' experiences across lessons and units (Brown, 2007). This is particularly valuable in institutional contexts where syllabi must align with national standards, examination requirements, or textbook series.

3.3. Immediate and Corrective Feedback

Effective foreign language learning depends on timely and accurate feedback. In teacher-centred classrooms, the teacher is well positioned to provide immediate correction, clarification, and reformulation of learner output. Such feedback not only prevents the fossilisation of errors but also supports the development of more precise and confident production (Brown, 2007; Willis, 1996).

From a cognitive perspective, corrective feedback helps learners notice discrepancies between their interlanguage and the target form, creating opportunities for restructuring and internalisation. Techniques such as recasts, explicit correction, and guided self-correction can be employed flexibly depending on task type and learner level (Richards & Lockhart, 2007). When the teacher retains central responsibility for monitoring language use, feedback becomes more systematic and aligned with curricular goals.

3.4. Classroom Management and Learning Efficiency

Teacher-centred approaches also contribute significantly to classroom management, particularly in large classes or contexts with mixed proficiency levels. In many educational systems, foreign language classes may include 25–30 or more learners, making unstructured or purely student-led activities difficult to manage. In such situations, the teacher's ability to organise time, allocate turns, set clear task instructions, and maintain discipline is crucial for sustaining meaningful engagement (Gower et al., 2005; Madya, 2017).

Well-managed teacher-led lessons can minimise off-task behaviour and ensure that instructional time is used efficiently. By controlling transitions between stages, pacing activities, and directing whole-class feedback, the teacher creates a predictable and secure environment in which learners understand what is expected of them. This stability is especially important for anxious or less confident learners, who may feel lost in loosely structured settings (Brown, 2007).

3.5. Preparation for Standardized Language Exams

In many contexts, foreign language learning is closely linked to high-stakes examinations, such as school-leaving tests, university entrance exams, or international proficiency tests. Teacher-centred instruction aligns naturally with exam preparation because it allows the teacher to focus explicitly on the skills, formats, and language features that are most likely to be assessed (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

By controlling input and selecting representative tasks, teachers can familiarise learners with exam genres, timing constraints, and scoring criteria. This predictability supports learners in developing test-taking strategies, managing time, and rehearsing the specific reading, listening, writing, and speaking tasks required. Mehdizade (2025) notes that in such exam-oriented systems, teacher authority and clear guidance often reduce learner anxiety and contribute to more reliable outcomes.

4. Pedagogical Applications of the Teacher-Centred Model

Beyond its conceptual advantages, the teacher-centred model offers a practical framework for designing and implementing concrete classroom strategies. These applications illustrate how teacher

leadership can be combined with interactive and engaging activities while maintaining clear structure and expert control (Richards & Lockhart, 2007; Brown, 2007).

4.1. Supporting Students with Learning Difficulties

Learners often encounter cognitive, affective, or linguistic barriers in foreign language learning. Teacher-centred instruction enables the teacher to take primary responsibility for diagnosing these difficulties and designing individual or group-level interventions. Setting realistic goals, monitoring progress, and adjusting teaching methods according to student needs are central elements of this process (Gower et al., 2005).

Scaffolding is a particularly important strategy: the teacher breaks down complex tasks into manageable steps, provides models, and gradually removes support as learners gain independence (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Differentiated instruction—such as offering additional modelling, simplified input, or extra practice to struggling learners—can also be more effectively coordinated in a context where the teacher maintains a clear overview of the class. An inclusive teacher-centred environment recognises that “each student and class are different,” and uses teacher expertise to tailor support rather than apply a one-size-fits-all approach (Mehdizade, 2025).

4.2. Teaching Young Learners

Young learners require high levels of structure and frequent shifts of activity to maintain attention and motivation. Teacher-centred methods provide a framework within which the teacher can orchestrate songs, chants, movement, and the use of realia while still retaining control of lesson flow (Gower et al., 2005).

Strategies such as beginning and ending lessons with routine songs, using visual aids and real objects to set the context, incorporating physical movement, and organising a “realia table” to anchor vocabulary in concrete experience help young learners stay engaged and focused. The teacher decides the sequence of activities, the pace, and the transitions, ensuring that energetic elements are balanced with quieter, more focused tasks. In this way, teacher-centred organisation supports, rather than suppresses, age-appropriate play and interaction.

4.3. Teaching Vocabulary Effectively

Vocabulary learning represents one of the most demanding aspects of foreign language acquisition, especially when learners are expected to master several thousand words for functional fluency (Mehdizade, 2025; Vandenbroucke, 2018). Teacher-centred instruction allows vocabulary to be introduced and practised in a controlled and systematic way, reducing cognitive overload and helping learners prioritise high-frequency items.

Rogova (1983) distinguishes between direct methods of presenting word meaning—through objects, pictures, demonstrations, and context—and more traditional translation-based approaches. A teacher-centred model enables the teacher to select the most appropriate technique for a given word type and learner group. Starting with simpler, concrete items can boost motivation, while more abstract or low-frequency words can be introduced later, once learners have a stronger lexical base.

Games, word grouping, and interactive technology can be integrated into this structured framework. Word games, when carefully organised by the teacher, provide opportunities for repetition, retrieval, and deeper processing of new lexis (Brown, 2007). Digital tools such as Duolingo, BBC Learning English, or vocabulary apps can be recommended and demonstrated by the teacher, who helps learners choose level-appropriate materials and use them strategically. Role-play and dialogue tasks designed around new vocabulary further ensure that words move from passive recognition to active use. In all these activities, the teacher retains responsibility for selection, sequencing, and monitoring.

4.4. Developing Reading Skills

Reading is a central channel for input and a powerful means of expanding vocabulary, grammatical awareness, and discourse competence. Teacher-centred instruction enables careful selection of texts that match learners' proficiency levels and interests while also serving curricular goals (Rogova, 1983).

Rogova emphasises the multimodal nature of reading, involving visual, kinaesthetic, and aural processes as well as higher-level thinking. A teacher-led approach can draw learners' attention to this complexity by modelling reading aloud, guiding choral reading, and demonstrating how to decode unfamiliar sound–spelling relationships. Deep reading techniques—such as detailed analysis of lexis, collocations, and sentence structures—can be systematically introduced and practised under teacher guidance.

An important pedagogical contribution of the teacher-centred model is the structured approach to error correction in reading. Rogova (1983) proposes a sequence in which learners first attempt self-correction, then receive peer support, and finally obtain teacher intervention if needed. This self → peer → teacher model encourages learner responsibility while ensuring that errors are not left unresolved. Teachers may, for example, write problematic sound combinations on the board or ask learners to locate and repair mispronounced words in the text, thus turning correction into an explicit learning opportunity.

4.5. Developing Writing Skills

Writing is often one of the most challenging skills for foreign language learners, particularly when the target language differs greatly from the mother tongue in sound system, orthography, or syntax. In such cases, teacher-centred instruction plays a crucial role in providing models, explaining contrastive features, and guiding learners through controlled practice before expecting more independent production (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Willis, 1996).

A teacher-led progression from controlled to guided to free writing allows learners to internalise sentence structure and text organisation step by step. At the controlled stage, the teacher may provide sentence frames or substitution tables; at the guided stage, prompts and outlines support learners as they begin to express their own ideas; at the free stage, learners write more independently but still receive feedback on accuracy and coherence. Throughout this

process, the teacher's expertise is essential for diagnosing recurring grammatical, lexical, and organisational problems and designing targeted practice to address them (Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

Moreover, systematic feedback on writing—focusing on both form and content—helps learners become aware of their errors and develop strategies for self-editing over time. Training learners to notice patterns in their mistakes, reflect on teacher comments, and revise accordingly is more effective when the teacher maintains clear authority over assessment criteria and instructional priorities (Brown, 2007). In this way, the teacher-centred model supports not only the development of accurate written language, but also the gradual growth of learner autonomy within a structured and supportive framework.

5. Reinterpreting the Flipped Classroom as Teacher-Controlled

The flipped classroom model emerged in the mid-2000s as an alternative to traditional teaching, originally promoted as a means of shifting direct instruction outside the classroom and reserving in-class time for practice and application activities. In this approach, learners typically access core content—often in the form of teacher-recorded videos, slides, or digital materials—at home, and then use classroom time for problem-solving, discussion, or collaborative work. Because learners appear to assume more responsibility for initial exposure to content, the flipped classroom is frequently categorised as a student-centred innovation in contemporary pedagogical discourse.

However, a closer examination of the flipped classroom reveals that it remains fundamentally dependent on the teacher's expertise and control. The teacher designs the syllabus, selects and sequences the content to be recorded, determines the length, focus, and examples used in the videos, and decides which aspects of the material are central and which can be omitted. In other words, the teacher retains primary responsibility as content curator and instructional designer (Brown, 2007; Richards & Lockhart, 2007). Learners may choose when and how often to watch the materials, but what they watch and how the concepts are framed are firmly under teacher control.

This teacher-driven design has several advantages. First, students arrive in class with prior exposure to the core topic, which can make in-class activities more efficient and cognitively productive. Second, the possibility of re-watching videos supports repetition and consolidation, which are crucial for complex aspects of foreign language learning such as grammar and pronunciation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Third, the model encourages the development of independent learning skills, as learners must manage their time, engage with input autonomously, and come prepared to participate. From a teacher-centred perspective, the flipped classroom represents an extended instructional space in which teacher expertise is distributed across both home and classroom settings.

At the same time, the flipped model presents specific challenges that reinforce the importance of teacher leadership. Materials must be concise, clear, and carefully structured; otherwise, learners may become confused or disengaged when working alone. Not all students possess strong self-regulation or media literacy skills, meaning that some may not fully engage with the content before class. In such cases, teachers must develop strategies to monitor preparation and support less autonomous learners. These issues highlight that the success of the flipped classroom depends less on the shift of physical location and more on the quality of teacher planning, scaffolding, and ongoing guidance (Mehdizade, 2025). Thus, rather than representing a move away from teacher-centred instruction, the flipped model can be reinterpreted as an evolution of it, in which teacher expertise remains central but operates through new technological and organisational forms.

Discussion

The findings and conceptual analyses presented in this article invite a reconsideration of how teacher-centred instruction is positioned within contemporary foreign language pedagogy. Much of the modern literature has emphasised student-centred, communicative, and task-based approaches, often implicitly suggesting that teacher-led methods are incompatible with current best practice (Brown, 2007; Willis, 1996). However, the evidence and arguments developed here indicate that teacher-centred instruction continues to play a vital role, particularly when understood as a flexible and principled framework rather than as a rigid, authoritarian model.

When compared with student-centred approaches, teacher-centred instruction offers complementary strengths. Student-centred models typically excel in promoting learner autonomy, interaction, and personal engagement with content, especially at intermediate and advanced levels. By contrast, teacher-centred methods provide essential structure, explicit modelling, and controlled practice, which are especially valuable at beginner levels, in large classes, or in exam-oriented contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Gower et al., 2005). In such settings, the absence of strong teacher leadership can lead to confusion, uneven participation, and superficial treatment of complex language forms.

The analysis also underscores the continued relevance of teacher-centred approaches in educational environments characterised by limited resources, high student–teacher ratios, or strong emphasis on standardised assessment. In these conditions, the teacher’s ability to organise time, manage behaviour, and deliver a coherent curriculum is not merely helpful but often decisive for learning outcomes (Madya, 2017; Rogova, 1983). The structured vocabulary work, guided reading, and writing support discussed earlier illustrate how teacher-led instruction can systematically address core linguistic challenges that might otherwise be left to chance.

Importantly, the article does not propose a return to exclusively teacher-dominated classrooms. Rather, it argues for a balanced pedagogy in which teacher-centred and student-centred practices are integrated according to learners’ needs, developmental stages, and institutional realities. This view aligns with the methodological pluralism advocated in language teaching literature, which recognises that no single method or orientation is sufficient in all contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Brown, 2007). Teacher-centred instruction, when informed by contemporary understanding of language learning and enriched by interactive techniques, can provide a stable foundation upon which more autonomous, communicative activities are effectively built.

In relation to existing literature, the conclusions here resonate with Rogova’s (1983) emphasis on systematic instruction and staged skill development, while also echoing more recent calls to support teachers in managing classroom interaction and error correction (Richards & Lockhart, 2007; Madya, 2017). By revisiting the teacher’s central role through the lens of modern pedagogical concerns, the article contributes to an emerging reappraisal of teacher authority as a resource rather than an obstacle in foreign language education.

Conclusion

This article has argued that teacher-centred instruction remains an indispensable component of effective foreign language learning. Far from being an outdated relic of traditional pedagogy, teacher-led approaches provide the structure, expertise, and clarity that many learners—especially beginners—

require to navigate the complexity of a new linguistic system. Through expert guidance, structured curriculum delivery, immediate corrective feedback, and efficient classroom management, teachers create the conditions under which systematic progress in grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing becomes possible (Brown, 2007; Rogova, 1983; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

The analysis has shown that teacher-centred instruction is particularly effective in contexts characterised by large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, or limited resources, as well as during the foundational stages of language acquisition. It has also demonstrated that even ostensibly learner-oriented innovations such as the flipped classroom remain heavily dependent on teacher expertise in content design and instructional planning (Mehdizade, 2025). In this sense, the centrality of the teacher is not diminished but reconfigured in contemporary practice.

At the same time, the article acknowledges that teacher-centred instruction should not operate in isolation from student-centred principles. The most promising pedagogical stance is one of balance, in which teacher authority and learner autonomy are seen as mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive. Teacher-centred phases can introduce, model, and stabilise new language, while student-centred activities can provide opportunities for meaningful use, personal engagement, and the development of independent learning strategies (Willis, 1996; Richards & Lockhart, 2007).

In conclusion, recognising the enduring value of teacher-centred approaches has significant implications for teacher education, curriculum design, and policy. Training programmes should strengthen teachers' capacity to exercise informed instructional leadership, not only to implement fashionable methods. Curricula should allow space for structured, teacher-led work alongside communicative and project-based tasks. Policy discourses should move beyond simplistic dichotomies and acknowledge the productive role of teacher expertise in shaping successful foreign language learning. When grounded in professional knowledge and integrated with interactive practices, teacher-centred instruction continues to offer a clear, reliable, and pedagogically sound pathway toward successful language acquisition.

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