From Teacher-centred to Learner-centred: Exploring the Viability of a Pedagogical Shift at a Bilingual School in Vietnam

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Abstract

This research paper explores the viability of teacher-centred and learner-centred pedagogical approaches within the context of a bilingual school in Vietnam. Through open-ended responses, nine teachers who work in the institution provide insights about their own pedagogical strategies and share their personal views on the way English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is taught in Vietnam, highlighting potential shortcomings that are linked back to the literature. The findings show that the participants do not feel constrained by the principles of distinct pedagogical methodologies. Depending on students' needs, teachers are able to assess whether a more teacher-centred or learner-centred approach proves to be more effective in different phases of their lesson. On the other hand, the analysis of cultural values shows that a strong teaching-to-the-test belief is an important factor that refrains public school instructors to adopt a more communicative, student-centred pedagogy. It is then concluded that changes in the modes of EFL assessment in Vietnam – such as a bottom-up approach over a top-down one - are needed.

Introduction

In 2016, the Vietnamese government publicly announced that the 2008-2020 National Foreign Languages Plan (NFLP) could not meet its targets within the original time frame, thus extending it for five more years, i.e. until 2025 (Ngo, 2021). The purpose of NFLP is simple: Vietnam is looking to improve the English skills of its students, that should master the language to communicate effectively with foreign speakers (Ngo, 2021). To do so, the NFLP asks local teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to radically change their traditional pedagogical approach to a new one that emphasises task-based, student-centred activities (Dao and Newton, 2021).

This research hoped to gain first-hand insights on the topic, by investigating it from a different perspective. Since the bilingual school where I teach is located in Vietnam and enrols solely Vietnamese students, the aim was to examine whether the pedagogical shift could be viable in another context, i.e. a non-public institution. Therefore, by adopting a qualitative approach to research, foreign - i.e. non-Vietnamese - EFL teachers who work at the school were asked to fill a detailed questionnaire structured in open-ended questions. As Bradburn *et al*. (2004) suggest, such type of questions is a valuable tool to delve deeply into a topic. In fact, the aim is to analyse the teachers' personal pedagogical strategies and, simultaneously, inquire about Vietnam's struggles to change the way EFL is taught in the public education system.

Nine teachers agreed to take part in the questionnaire. Their responses were analysed by organising them in themes that helped address the research question. The findings show that the participants apply both teacher-centred and student-centred approaches in different phases of the lesson. Moreover, cultural differences between the teachers' context – a private

bilingual school – and public schools have been highlighted. Such dissimilarities are specifically related to class size and the Vietnamese exam-oriented culture (Andrew, 2020; Ha *et al*., 2021).

Literature Review

When Politics Influences Pedagogy

The radical shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach to studying EFL in Vietnam is not an isolated case. Since the beginning of the 2000's, several governments of emerging Asian economies have felt the urge to modify their national EFL curriculum towards a more communicative method (Tsui, 2020).

The reason behind such change is primarily political. As Thomas M. (2015) notes, the traditional, teacher-led pedagogy was not producing graduates able to communicate proficiently in English. South-East Asian governments realised that this factor could have hindered the opportunity to both compete and collaborate in the new digital and globalised age (Thomas M., 2015). In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) recognised English to be necessary for nation-building. Boosting Vietnamese youth language skills would thus serve the cause of the country's development and modernisation (Nguyen H.T.M. and Bui, 2016; Tran and Tanemura, 2020). The evolution of EFL practices in other Asian countries has also been analysed by scholars (see Thomas M., 2015; Tsui, 2020).

To start the historic pedagogical reform, an updated English curriculum with a set of new textbooks for the public education system – Grade 1 to 12 – was institutionalised in 2006 (Nguyen B.T.T. *et al*., 2015). Shortly after, the NFLP was officially launched by MOET in 2008, with the ambitious target of enabling Vietnamese students to use English as a Second Language (L2) to communicate in real-life scenarios by the end of 2020 (Nguyen T., 2017). Specifically, university undergraduates are expected to master English at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Cao, 2018; Foley, 2021).

To improve students' English skills, MOET clearly states that 'a learner-centred, communicative task-based approach must be a priority' (Dao and Newton, 2021, p.100). The design of the newly adopted textbooks also reflects the willingness to move towards a student-focused, task-based teaching method (Duong and Nguyen H.T.T., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to analyse how this specific L2 terminology is located within the academic literature.

Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) and Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)

The vast literature that explores EFL pedagogical reforms in Vietnam and other Asian countries focuses particularly on two distinct EFL methodologies: the teacher-centred 'PPP' and the learner-centred 'TBLT' (East, 2019). In broad terms, a teacher-centred approach refers to a context where teachers are the authorities in class (Buditama, 2017). This matches with the traditional view in Vietnam where teachers provide knowledge and give instructions to students who passively participate in the lesson (Tran and Tanemura, 2020). On the contrary, in a student-centred approach pupils are actively involved in the process of learning (Can, 2014). Although different in concept and implementation, PPP and TBLT share the

centrality given to communicative tasks (Harris and Leeming, 2021), which is also at the core of NFLP (Ngo, 2021).

The two acronyms have been at the centre of L2 academic debates for decades. PPP appeared first in the mid-70's and is linked to a method that is commonly known as 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT) (Anderson, 2017). At that time, CLT aimed to move away from the traditional grammar-oriented approach to L2 by emphasising the importance of communicative competence and language functionality (Ellis *et al*., 2019). It was a revolutionary concept that marked the discrepancy between learners' knowledge of a L2 and their ability to use it to interact with another speaker (Macaro and Masterman, 2006).

Thus, the goal of L2 communication in PPP is reached through a controlled, teacher-led lesson. Grammar and language are first explicitly explained to students *(presentation)*, who then have the opportunity to practice target forms with oral or written exercises *(practice)*. The lesson's last phase *(production)* involves producing the rules in a 'controlled' – by the teacher – activity (Le V.C. and Barnard, 2009; East, 2019; Le D.B.T and Newton, 2020).

As a later version of CLT (Duong and Nguyen H.T.T., 2021), the first TBLT curriculum was designed in the mid 80's (Lai, 2015; Ellis *et al*., 2019) and took distance from the PPP approach. TBLT supports the concept of a 'natural order' of acquisition where students do not need explicit instruction in their L2 learning process (Anderson, 2017). The approach is built upon learner-centred and experiential premises where meaningful and purposeful communicative activities – i.e. 'tasks' - are believed to promote language learning (Ellis, 2013; East, 2019; Le V.C., 2020). Therefore, by completing tasks in class, students are exposed to real-life scenarios and practice true language use (Le D.B.T and Newton, 2020). As opposed to PPP, grammatical rules or vocabulary issues are only treated when they incidentally arise during the communicative activities, which have utmost priority (Ellis, 2013; Nguyen G.V *et al*., 2015).

In TBLT, teachers step aside from being 'in control' of the class and act as both mentors and advisors (Liu *et al*., 2021). In the initial *pre-task* session of the lesson, the teacher stimulates and motivates students by introducing the topic and making students understand what to do in the next phase. During the *task*, students practice L2 while the teacher stands as an advisor who gives prompt assistance when needed. Finally, in the *post-task* phase the teacher is a reviewer who provides feedback and analyses the language items emerged in the previous phases (Le D.B.T and Newton, 2020). To describe this revisited role of instructors, Ellis (2013) aptly compares teachers to caretakers, thus stating the importance of accompanying students towards a natural L2 acquisition process.

Task-supported Language Teaching (TSLT): A Middle Way Between Teacher-centred and Student-centred Approaches?

On the one hand, advocates of TBLT have criticised PPP for being traditionally teacher-centred, providing explicit instructions and neglecting students' needs (Anderson, 2017). On the other hand, flaws in TBLT have also been identified. Firstly, TBLT theories have been deemed disconnected from the real teaching world and from classroom practitioners' experiences – what Michael Swan calls 'legislation by hypothesis' (Swan, 2005, cited in Ellis, 2013). The insufficiency of evidence that proves TBLT to be a better L2 teaching method has also been

highlighted by critiques. In fact, some studies show that PPP and TBLT are both equally effective (Toth, 2008; Harris and Leeming, 2021).

Next, by allowing students' freedom in language use and only drawing attention to language forms after the task, TBLT might not be appropriate for beginner students who lack both L2 vocabulary and grammar knowledge that allows them to complete a task (Lai, 2015; Thomas N. and Brereton, 2019; Harris and Leeming, 2021).

Finally, some scholars do not recognise TBLT as suited to non-Western cultures of learning (Walsh and Wyatt, 2014; Thomas N. and Brereton, 2019). For instance, TBLT premises conflict with the Confucian ideology that emphasises the importance of exams' results and has a deeply rooted teacher-centred tradition which focuses solely on the transmission of knowledge, leaving no space for debating, criticising, and communicating (Liu *et al.*, 2021). Since Confucian ideology encompasses several Asian countries – including Vietnam – with many EFL students (Lee, 2021), researchers have studied an approach to learning EFL that could be proved successful in this specific context. TSLT, defined as a 'weak TBLT' (Ellis, 2019), integrates features from both PPP and TBLT. Specifically, the final *production* phase involves communicative tasks to be completed after an explicit focus on language forms. By doing so, tasks are incorporated in a more traditional teacher-centred context which also gives students the opportunity to freely communicate and practice L2 (Nguyen G.V. *et al.*, 2015; Thomas N. and Brereton, 2019; Harris and Leeming, 2021; Liu et. al, 2021).

Methodology and Methods

Epistemology and Ontology

This study attempts to gain an insight into the experience of EFL teachers who work in a bilingual school in Vietnam, along with their personal views and interpretations of EFL teaching practices. From a sociocultural perspective, it can be viewed as a localised community that shares aims and methods, the research site being the institution where they work (Makar and O'Brien, 2012). Given the ongoing national level EFL pedagogical reform in Vietnam (Ngo, 2021), the desire to get an in-depth and first-hand understanding of the subject motivated my research (Yin, 2006). Through it I have aimed to compare the data collected with the findings of relevant academic literature. The study is therefore based on an interpretivist perspective of qualitative educational research, which 'requires the researcher to adopt an exploratory orientation, and in particular, to learn to understand the distinctive perspectives of the people involved' (Hammersley, 2013, p.29).

I embraced the concept of educational research as an applied discipline which is genuinely connected to practice and attempts to improve it (Paechter, 2003). The knowledge generated will hopefully influence other colleagues' practice for the better as well, since educational research should not 'add to knowledge without carrying an explicit and direct message about what to do as a result' (Paechter, 2003, p. 106).

Research Question

The research project was approached with the intent of offering a different perspective on a topic that is still widely analysed by the academic literature. Although the Vietnamese pedagogical shift started almost 15 years ago, the NFLP was officially declared to have failed in 2016 (Nguyen T., 2017; Pham and Dinh; 2019) and it has now been postponed to 2025 (Dao and Newton, 2021). The slackening of the educational reform is an evident warning of the difficulties that the country is facing for improving the EFL communicative skills of Vietnamese students.

Since most of the literature provides case studies of Vietnamese EFL teachers working in public schools, I was interested in gaining opinions from foreign EFL teachers who work in a bilingual school located in Ho Chi Minh City. This type of private institution still adheres to the national curriculum designed by MOET (MOET, 2020), but also allocate additional EFL periods that follow an independent program. The aim of this study was thus to understand whether the shift in methodologies desired by MOET could be feasible in a different environment – i.e. in non-state, private schools. My interest can therefore be formulated with the question:

> *Is a pedagogical shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred viable at a bilingual school in Vietnam?*

During the research, one sub-question based on the literature has arisen:

> 1) What are potential obstacles to NFLP's implementation by 2025?

Methods

Being simultaneously the researcher and a practitioner at the bilingual school allowed me to carry out smoothly the questionnaire (Appendix A) directed to my colleagues (Cochran-Smith and Donnell, 2006). Out of 15 foreign EFL teachers, 7 accepted to participate in the questionnaire. Furthermore, two members of the school's Leadership Team also showed interest in taking part in it. Thus, in total, 9 responses were collected (Appendix B).

Due to Covid safety regulations (University of Sheffield, n.d.), an Internet-based questionnaire proved to be the most convenient method to carry out the research. Questions were inserted into a 'Google Forms' that could be easily and safely shared among the participants. While the response rate was satisfactory, it is important to note that online questionnaires could also carry some risks. As Kalleitner *et al.* (2020) note, the response rate in web-surveys is generally lower compared to traditional data collection methods, since a simple email invitation lacks in being an effective motivational factor.

As Dörnyei and Taguchi (2009) highlight, questionnaires are extremely useful tools that allow researchers to gather a significant amount of information efficiently and effectively. Moreover, being a study based on qualitative research, the questionnaires' aim was to collect descriptive data that would provide original insights on the subject (Mackey and Gass, 2016). This favoured the adoption of open-ended questions over close-ended ones.

Six main open-ended questions were asked (Appendix A). Three of them invited participants to reflect on their own teaching practice, and in which instances they would adopt a teacher-centred or a learner-centred approach. The other three questions asked to express their

opinion on the current EFL context in Vietnam. Open-ended questions proved to be ideal to analyse a topic in depth and allowed respondents to freely share their thoughts on the topic (Bradburn *et al.*, 2004).

Data Analysis

Google Forms is a free web-based application that enables data collection through forms, questionnaires, and surveys (Google, n.d.; Mallette and Barone, 2013). The open-ended questions were manually inserted in the software and an email with an attached link was sent to the participants.

After collecting the responses, one table (Appendix B) was created to analyse the data. To help address the research question, the answers were organised in themes that followed the questions' order. Questions 1-3 provide participants' personal information. Questions 4-6 identify their personal views on teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches. Questions 7-9 list the personal opinions on the Vietnamese EFL context.

Ethical Considerations

The study underwent the University of Sheffield's Ethics Approval Process (University of Sheffield, n.d.). Moreover, in compliance with the principles of *autonomy* and *confidentiality*, participants were aware of the research goals and freely decided to take part in the project (Carpenter, 2018).

All the respondents were personally known to me, being colleagues who teach EFL across all grades of the K-12 bilingual school. This inevitably raised ethical concerns. As opposed to objective, positivist research methods, the researcher of a qualitative study needs to accept a certain degree of bias due to the social interaction that is required to produce data – what de Laine (2000) defines as the 'closeness-distance dilemma' between researcher and participants. I thus opted to use of an open-ended questionnaire instead of interviews for two reasons. First, the observance of Covid safety regulations, of paramount priority in current times, called for avoiding non-essential face-to-face meetings during my data collection period. Second, an online questionnaire reduced distance and interaction between my colleagues and me. This had the beneficial effect of enabling participants to 'take more time, thought, patience, and concentration to answer' (Bradburn *et al.*, 2004, p. 154) the questions in the most objective, non-biased way.

Analysis and Discussion

The findings are presented following the order of the questionnaire. They are analysed and discussed according to the research question and the literature topics.

Adopting Teacher-centred Strategies

The vast majority of the respondents considered important for their practice both instances where a teacher-centred or a learner-centred approach were adopted.

Participants A, B, C, H found particularly useful 'leading' the class in the *presentation* phase of the lesson - the first phase of the PPP method - where a new topic and the related vocabulary are introduced. Participants D and I also pointed out the importance for students to follow teacher's directions to practice and improve their pronunciation skills.

It is argued that the adoption of a more traditional L2 teaching approach – especially at the beginning of the lesson – could be a consequence of the teachers' professional background. In fact, Anderson (2017) states that PPP is still the principal model used in EFL teaching qualification courses such as Cambridge CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL.

Duong and Nguyen H.T.T. (2021) highlight another element that leads EFL Vietnamese teachers to prefer PPP over TBLT, i.e. planning time. Participant B reflects the same concern. Despite overall preferring the use of TBLT, the constant use of this method would be detrimental because of the amount of time required to plan a learner-centred task:

> *I like to think that overall my approach leans towards being student-centred. I often use task-based teaching. (B)*

> *Some stages of some lesson types tend to be more teacher-centred, such as when presenting vocabulary. There certainly are more student-centred ways to achieve this (such as guided discovery) although they tend to be more time consuming so I use them less. (B)*

Adopting Learner-centred Strategies

While considering the effectiveness of a teacher-centred approach, participants also widely agreed on the importance of using a more student-centred method in other phases of their EFL lesson.

> *Yes, during the production phase. Kids are usually seated at their desk and can collaborate together finding the answer or asking for help to friends and the teacher when more support is needed. (A – Early years)*

> *Yes, we regularly have activities where the student is able to be creative and choose the content of their output, particularly in small activity-based tasks. For example, students often make posters or presentations where they can choose the content and then present to the class when finished. (D – Grade 5)*

> *Collaboration projects, dialogic exploration of topics, frequent cooperative/peer learning, debates, consistent brainstorming, peer feedback and student content creation. (H – Grade 10 and 11)*

> *Yes, during group projects (PBL), reading, writing, speaking games. (I - Grade 6)*

From their responses, it clearly emerges the value of giving learners freedom in a later stage of the class – which matches with the *production* phase of PPP. The rationale behind this choice is to let pupils express creativity and freely practice the language forms they studied. It is quite interesting to notice that emphasis on learners' group work and collaboration – key

elements of a student-centred approach – is given by teachers working with different age groups.

A Pedagogical 'Combination' Rather Than a 'Shift'

Participants did not express a distinct preference about the most effective EFL teaching approach. On the contrary, they choose the right moment to adopt a certain method instead of another: there are phases where students need more support and benefit from being 'guided' by the teacher – e.g. when new concepts are introduced (Nguyen G.V. *et al*., 2015; Liu et. al, 2021) – and other stages where free language expression is encouraged (East, 2019).

Therefore, two primary factors transpire from the responses. First, both teaching approaches are perceived to be viable and applicable within the same class in different stages of the lesson. Second, the participants use of strategies taken from both PPP and TBLT seems to recall the concept of TSLT developed by educational research (Ellis, 2019). N. Thomas and Brereton (2019) describe TSLT as 'combining a scaffolded approach to learning the necessary structures with the extended opportunity to develop their communication skills that tasks often afford' (p. 277), a definition that matches with the respondents' personal approach to EFL pedagogy that emerged from their answers.

Moreover, teachers' ability to adapt their methods depending on the situation highlights another key issue that occurs in the literature. Recent studies have shown that 'variation' is one of the key elements that can make teaching effective (East, 2019; Harris and Leeming, 2021). No matter what, every student will grow tired of learning in the same way whether is 'doing worksheets all the time…using the iPad…doing TBLT all the time' (East, 2019, p. 111). Thus, it is suggested that teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches could be considered complementary rather than divergent.

Obstacles to NFLP's Implementation

It has been noted how foreign EFL teachers in this study are able to switch between a teacher-centred (PPP) approach to a learner-centred (TBLT) one, which results in a combination of methods (TSLT). Several studies demonstrate that Vietnamese EFL instructors also show enthusiasm towards modern EFL methodologies and recognise their benefits in improving students' communicative skills (Ha *et al*., 2021; Le, V.C., 2020; Thao and Mai, 2020). Furthermore, an astonishing 85% of the NFLP budget is dedicated to EFL teachers' training and professional development (Ngo, 2021; Vu and Ha, 2020). If so, it seems difficult to believe that NFLP has so far failed to achieve its targets. However, by analysing the participants' opinions on the Vietnamese context, it emerges that class size and traditional cultural values (Duong and Nguyen H.T.T., 2021) could be some of the obstacles to the successful implementation of NFLP.

Class Size

Among the factors that influence the type of teaching approach adopted, class size was the most prominent one. Smaller classes seem to ease and encourage a learner-centred approach (participants C, D, F, H). In support of these opinions, the literature does account big class

sizes to be a major cause that hinders the NFLP transition towards a communicative, student-focuses pedagogy (Dao and Newton, 2021; Ha *et al*., 2021).

However, some of questionnaire responses challenge the pessimist view that emerges from the literature. In fact, participants B, F, H suggest that the class size issue could be overcome by promoting group work where students support and learn from each other.

> *Absolutely. I would say class size doesn't have a huge influence on my approach, but it has an influence on the time I have to spend on each activity (B)*

> *Of these factors, class size would be most influential on the chosen teaching approach…Whereas in bigger classes, I do far more group work and provide opportunities for advanced students to lead, teach and guide others. (F)*

> *Smaller class sizes enable a greater focus on students allowing increased student focus - though this can be overcome by using 'work groups'. (H)*

Cultural Values

While a solution to the issue of class size has been proposed, the participants are concerned over strong cultural values that are embedded in the Vietnamese pedagogy. This is the main element that divides all foreign EFL teachers who participated in this study from the Vietnamese EFL instructors that work in state schools.

Participants A, B, D, F, H point out that teachers in Vietnam are traditionally seen as an authority, whose role is to pass knowledge to young pupils that are passive receivers of information.

> *The Vietnamese Pedagogical mindset is not yet open into trusting the kids full capabilities. (A)*

> *Probably the cultural perception of the teacher as an authority figure rather than a guide for the students. (B)*

> *One key factor I see in my teaching is a lack of confidence and ability in students to be inventive and creative on their own. There seems to be a usual mode of education encouraging rote knowledge and repeating direction or completing set tasks. (D)*

> *I think old-style teacher-centred approaches to learning have been engrained into the education system for a long time, not just for teachers but students too. (F)*

> *Culturally, teaching can often be seen as the passing of knowledge in Vietnam. (H)*

Such concerns are confirmed by several studies that analyse Vietnam and other Asian countries influenced by the traditional teacher-led Confucian ideology (Lai, 2015; Le V.C., 2015; Tsui, 2020; Liu *et al*., 2021).

In addition to that, participants C and F highlight a practical issue that is tied to the abovementioned cultural values, i.e. test performance.

> *The pressures already placed on pupils academic performance in tests. I feel this feeds into parents being focused on learning and in-turn teaching to the test. (C)*

> *Expectations from parents also pose a problem, as they have been accustomed to the rigorous bookwork, test, exam processes that usually come along with a teacher-centred approached. (F)*

The heavy exam-oriented culture, with a strong focus on content, severely hinders a shift towards a learner-centred pedagogy in Vietnam (Ha *et al*., 2021; Vu and Ha, 2020). To corroborate this statement, Lai (2015) and Le D.B.T and Newton (2020) point out that when teachers work in a non-state school with less exam pressure, they are more willing to develop learners' communicative skills by adopting modern methodologies – such as TBLT or TSLT. Likewise, the foreign EFL teachers of this study work in a bilingual school that follows an independent EFL curriculum and they are free to choose the teaching strategies that work best for their students.

Inconsistency Between Policy and Practice

EFL exams in the Vietnamese national curriculum are structured in multiple-choice questions with a strong focus on grammar and vocabulary, while listening and speaking sections are not part of the test (Cao, 2018; Vu and Ha, 2020). Given the significant pressure from public schools and parents to make sure that students score well at exams, it comes as no surprise that EFL communicative approaches are put aside over a teaching-to-the-test necessity (Ha et el., 2021).

It is ironic to note that while MOET is trying to implement a new learner-centred pedagogical culture, it is also the authority that oversees every educational aspect in Vietnam, including official assessments (Andrew, 2020). Therefore, if the government desires a modern, innovative, and creative EFL workforce, a reform 'from conventional quantitative testing to holistic, qualitative real-world modes of assessment' (Andrew, 2020, p.4) is needed.

If the government top-down approach has failed (Liu *et al*., 2021; Ngo, 2021), participant B suggests the idea of:

> *A bottom-up push towards what works best in the classroom. More teachers speaking up about what they find* and *sharing that knowledge with other teachers* and *administrators.*

Positive outcomes of this approach in other Asian contexts (Tsui, 2020) prove that involving Vietnamese teachers in the pedagogical reform process could be a step in the right direction for a real change in the Vietnamese EFL environment.

Conclusion

The study's aim was to evaluate whether a pedagogical shift could be viable within the context of a bilingual school in Vietnam. From the analysis of the open-ended questions, it emerges that the participants – i.e. foreign EFL teachers – do not feel constrained by the tenets of a particular teaching approach. Depending on students' needs, teachers are able to assess when a more teacher-centred or learner-centred approach works better in different phases of their lesson. These responses seem to match with what the L2 research defines as TSLT, a teaching methodology that combines elements of both PPP (teacher-led) and TBLT (learner-centred) approaches (Thomas M., 2015; Anderson, 2017; Ellis *et al*., 2019; Harris and Leeming, 2021).

The research question was asked to understand why the Vietnamese pedagogical reform of the NFLP is struggling to succeed (Ngo, 2021). Therefore, respondents were asked to share their opinions on the matter. In the second part of the analysis, cultural values that hinder the implementation are highlighted. The heavy exam-oriented culture that characterises Vietnam is a key element that marks the difference between EFL teachers at the bilingual school, object of the study, and Vietnamese EFL teachers working in public school. While the respondents can be eclectic in their EFL teaching strategies, a strong teaching-to-the-test belief refrain public school instructors to adopt a communicative, student-centred pedagogy. To change this, it is concluded that policy needs to coincide with practice, and changes in the modes of EFL assessment are urgently needed. Ideally, a bottom-up approach that involves classroom teachers in the decision-making process towards curricula and exams could prove effective and successful (Ngo, 2021; Tsui, 2020).

The study involves a small group of teachers working in the same bilingual school. While this is a significant scale limitation, the study still contributes to the literature as there are not sufficient studies exploring the EFL teaching methodologies of private schools in Vietnam. Further research on the difference between public and non-public schools – particularly related to curriculum and modes of assessment – could pave the way to a better understanding of a major pertaining to the NFLP implementation, whose new deadline is set for 2025.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Section 1: Personal Information

1) What is your nationality?

2) What grade(s) are you currently teaching? (if you have a non-teaching role please write N/A)

3) What subject(s) do you teach? (if you have a non-teaching role please write N/A)

Section 2: Personal opinions on two pedagogical approaches: teacher-centred and learner-centred

4) Are there any instances where you adopt a teacher-centred approach with your students? If yes, could you provide an example?

5) Are there any instances where you adopt a learner-centred approach with your students? If yes, could you provide an example?

6) Do you think factors such as class size, curriculum, teaching materials and technology equipment influence the teaching approach you adopt with your students?

Section 3: Personal opinions on Vietnamese EFL context

7) What do you think about Vietnam's aim of shifting towards a more communicative approach to teaching foreign languages (as planned in the MOET's "National Foreign Language Project 2020")?

8) What factors do you think might hinder a pedagogical shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach in the Vietnamese EFL context?

9) What factors do you think might facilitate a pedagogical shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach in the Vietnamese EFL context?

Appendix B

Questionnaire Responses Matrix

	Q. 1	Q. 2	Q. 3	Q. 4	Q. 5	Q. 6	Q. 7	Q. 8	Q. 9
A	Italian	Early Years	Math, Literacy, Understanding of the world	Yes, it usually happens when I introduce a new topic. I'd explain the subject standing if pertains academics or sitting around in circle when discussing good practices. When possible I will use and introduce real life examples with the aim to have them focused and with a curious mindset at the same time.	Yes, during the production phase. Kids are usually seated at their desk and can collaborate together finding the answer or asking for help to friends and the teacher when more support is needed. Kids will seat nicely at the table making sure they have all the resources needed to start the activity. Then, they will copy from the board and also practice writing on a line in lower case letters.	Yes, in same cases although I'm working for not to be to influenced by all that is mentioned above instead to keep presenting to and sharing with my students the good practices and expertise I have learnt in my years of study and apprenticeship.	That matches my goal as well. Especially for Vietnamese learners a more communicative approach could be beneficial helping them to express themselves more clearly and with a clean pronunciation.	The fear to lose control of the classroom with a new approach is something the homeroom teachers need to work on giving the kids the right to express themselves and to share new ideas. The Vietnamese Pedagogical mindset is not yet open into trusting the kids full capabilities. A more specific training is required to make the homeroom teachers aware of all the opportunities that a learner-centered approach can provide. Another disadvantage with this method is that the teacher needs to observe and supervise the kids all the time to ensure they are receiving the right information	In my view, a pedagogical permanent training is required to help them understand the perks of this method. I will suggest for Vietnamese teachers to be exposed to plenty of practical examples during the training with an insight on methodologies that can better affect a child intellectual and emotional development.

A. Tonini

								and are also able to practice independently.	
B	Italian	Grade 3 and 4	EFL	Some stages of some lesson types tend to be more teacher-centred, such as when presenting vocabulary. There certainly are more student-centred ways to achieve this (such as guided discovery) although they tend to be more time consuming so I use them less	I like to think that overall my approach leans towards being student-centred. I often use task-based teaching and I lean into emerging vocabulary generated by the students in some cases	Absolutely. I would say class size doesn't have a huge influence on my approach but it has an influence on the time I have to spend on each activity (more students usually equals to a bigger need for differentiation, which in turn equals more planning)	Compared to the old-fashioned way in which English is taught in Vietnamese public schools, the communicative approach is definitely a step in the right direction, although I believe that Vietnam's biggest issue is the way English proficiency is assessed in the school system (see the English section of the Vietnamese National Exam for secondary schools)	Probably the cultural perception of the teacher as an authority figure rather than a guide for the students. Things are definitely changing and they are moving in the right direction, although there's still a long way to go	A bottom-up push towards what works best in the classroom. More teachers speaking up about what they find and sharing that knowledge with other teachers and administrators.
C	Irish	4 and 7	English, Maths and Science	Yes from time to time. Sometimes when explaining new vocabulary to younger children. When presenting abstract scientific concepts using PowerPoint.	Yes. Research project work. Introducing new concepts in group discussions. KWL group discussions.	Yes. I think when these factors are more favourable, such as smaller classes, a curriculum that promotes student autonomy, a good availability of necessary teaching materials and the necessary	it's is a positive step in the right direction and will be interesting to see how it's implemented.	The pressures already placed on pupils academic performance in tests. I feel this feeds into parents being focused on learning and in-turn teaching to the test.	Less of a focus on summative assessment. More of a focus on students individual development.

						technology tools it would give me as a teacher more confidence in adopting a learner-centred approach.		
D	Australian	Grade 5	English	Yes, often in class I model the language for students to replicate, in particular for pronunciation and intonation. This is often be as simple as helping students improve by asking them to listen and repeat key words. As we have been teaching online the teacher-centred approach has been more prevalent as it is more difficult to complete student-centred activities than in class.	Yes, we regularly have activities where the student is able to be creative and choose the content of their output, particularly in small activity based tasks. For example students often make posters or presentations where they can choose the content and then present to the class when finished.	Yes definitely, our classes are above 20 students so we often need to use teacher-centred methods to be able to get through the content effectively.	I don't know too much about it yet but based on the idea of a more communicative approach it could be great for language acquisition. From what I know of the current teaching of English, there is a high focus on grammar but the linkage to its use in speaking seems somewhat weak. The is often a lack of confidence in actually communicating, even though they may know more of the technical grammar than many native English speakers.	One key factor I see in my teaching is a lack of confidence and ability in students to be inventive and creative on their own. There seems to be a usual mode of education encouraging rote knowledge and repeating direction or completing set tasks. When given more options to choose their own ideas or come up with their own content this seems more difficult that I have seen in Australia and other western contexts. The influence of the stronger collectivism in Vietnam compared to	In Vietnamese culture for a new direction to work it needs support of key people in power within the system, if that happens from above in setting the goals a first step is in place. On a lower level if such teaching methods are popularized and normalized somehow, possibly through target advertising or a PR campaign in schools that could also help. The collective mentality means that once and idea gains momentum as being right in peoples minds it spreads quickly. If the benefits of the shift are explained in

									individualism in western culture would also be a factor in this issue. People in Vietnam are concerned by being collectively judged and children seem to feel this in an educational context. The other factor that comes to mind is explaining the idea of 'no one right answer' as students often struggle with the idea that many answers can be valid.	a clear and understandable way, with links to national pride, then Vietnamese will be likely to take it on wholeheartedly.
E	Vietnamese Australian *	Grade 11, 12	Mathematics	I introduce the concept, vocabulary and formula to the students. Then I will need to solve a question as an example using the information I delivered. The students will have to observe carefully and I guide them through the solution step by step.	Solving a math problem in class. I will ask general questions to find out if students understand and know how to approach a math problem. Then I will pick the students who seems to have lack of understanding. I will guide them through the solution step by	Definitely.		I totally agree. In my personal experience, communication is the key to successfully learn a foreign language.	Limited classroom equipments and resources. Students are lack of self learning/study skills. Teachers professional development and training are not accessible in some areas/institutions.	Classrooms need to be set up to cater for learner-centred approach. Quality teacher training and development are necessary and should be available and accessible. Curriculum and teaching learning resources should be adjusted/modified to suit.

					step. But I will need to give them appropriate hint and reminder in terms of background knowledge so they remember and use it to solve the math problem.				
F	Australian	11 and 12	English and Maths		Yes, in Maths the lesson will always begin with an explanation from the teacher about the new exercise and skills that we are learning that day. I then follow the I do, we do, you do process using question examples.	Of these factors, class size would be most influential on the chosen teaching approach. For smaller classes, more 1 on 1 or 1 on 2 time is available. Whereas in bigger classes, I do far more group work and provide opportunities for advanced students to lead, teach and guide others.	I feel this is a great way to teach English in a way that will be more useful in real life. Whilst some industries require perfect grammar, really learning a language is all about being able to communicate effectively with people. In a world where people are constantly looking for faster ways to get messages across, this change from the MOET is step in the right direction to making better English communicators.	I think old-style teacher-centred approaches to learning have been engrained into the education system for a long time, not just for teachers but students too. Thus, it may be difficult to drive independent learning and leadership in the classroom. Expectations from parents also pose a problem, as they have been accustomed to the rigorous bookwork, test, exam processes that usually come along with a teacher-centred approached - rather	I believe the biggest facilitator will be the students who become passionate about this shift and the independent and creative opportunities they are given. After being stuck in what can be quite a draining learning environment, I believe this would be a very welcomed change.

							than more collaborative student-led tasks.	
G	Australian *	N/A	N/A	Online teaching for a whole class, School Assemblies run by Leadership Team	ELL Teaching and Learning, modified teaching and assessment to allow for differentiation of learners eg, low level learners, special needs support, inclusive education	Most definitely	It's a pedagogical shift. More teacher training and/or professional development required to support this shift/change for current teachers who teach National Foreign Language.	Large Class sizes, curriculum, lack of teaching materials and resources, and lack of technology equipment influence the teaching approach you adopt with your students. The level of teacher training and/or professional development of teachers in teaching and learning pedagogy, teaching and assessment not modified to allow for differentiation in learning, lack of teacher support and/or training to teach from a Learner-centred approach	Classes sizes keep smaller, curriculum, textbook choices, teaching materials and resources, technology equipment and more teacher training on how you make better use of the technology or teaching website or applications with influence the teaching approach you adopt with your students, teacher training and/or professional development of teachers in teaching and learning pedagogy, teaching and assessment modified to allow for differentiation in learning, teacher support and/or training to teach how to adapt a Learner-centred approach

H	British	G10 and 11	ESL/IELTS prep	When explaining IELTs strategies/test taking skills. Introducing new linguistic topics that have no local equivalent.	Collaboration projects, dialogic exploration of topics, frequent cooperative/peer learning, debates, consistent brainstorming, peer feedback and student content creation (review quiz creation).	Smaller class sizes enable a greater focus on students allowing increased student focus - though this can be overcome by using 'work groups'. Teaching material availability has a minimal impact as fewer resources would often just require extra prep on the teachers part. Tech is a big factor, particularly with online learning and can certainly weight the approach towards teacher centred. Curriculum can sometimes sway the direction of student/teacher focus. But the level of teacher creativity, effort and permission to personalise content allow the teacher potential freedom to	Not particularly aware of it. However, I expect it is adopted to overcome the recent national decline in English proficiency. My initial thoughts are positive as the level of speaking skills (pronunciation, fluency etc.) sometimes sometimes appear low when compared to comprehension and this could remedy it. Also, after years of sustained investment in learning English, Vietnam has a fundamental new generation of very high level, internationally capable and homegrown teachers who should be able to adapt such an approach easily.	Culturally, teaching can often be seen as the passing of knowledge in Vietnam. A move towards student focus could be seen as a decline in teaching itself by caregivers, institutions and even, initially, students. Student centred approach grading is often much less standardised which could also hinder support from caregivers who value standard grades.	If an increase in English communication skills and confidence in speaking are noted by caregivers then initial opposition to such shift could turn into support. This is something I've experienced personally - particularly at junior and primary levels in Vietnam. Vietnam's international ambition might also facilitate such a shift if communication value is emphasized.

A.   Tonini

						choose a suitable approach.			
I	Ukrainian	6	English (EFL), Science and Math	Teaching new vocabulary, particularly pronunciation	Yes, during group projects (PBL), reading, writing, speaking games	Yes. That said if I'm motivated enough I'm happy and willing to do the extra work and used methods I otherwise wouldn't.	I think that's a good move. Traditionally in Vietnam focus was placed on grammar and reading and speaking (pronunciation especially) and comprehension took the back seat, to the point that many A students in higher grades would be able to write and read but couldn't manage a simple conversation with a native speaker.	The teachers' old habits. Most people are comfortable doing what they did before and few would willingly want to go outside of their comfort zone.	Teacher training. I think if trainings would be marketed as 'cool' and 'hip' things to do and would be financially encouraged (e.g. giving teachers bonuses for completing trainings) many teachers would actually use new things they learned in their classrooms. It goes without saying that the trainings would have to be interesting and learner-centered (not mandatory long knowledge dump sessions where teachers only take notes) so teachers would experience them and would likelier use them with their students.

* E and G: members of the school's Leadership Team