

QATARUNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EFL UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTORS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING – A CASE OF QATAR

BY

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives that EFL University instructors and students have towards using the SCL approach in English classrooms at Qatar University. In addition, it explores the perceived teaching and learning roles among both EFL university instructors and students. Semi-structured interviews were employed as the main qualitative research method for data collection. A constructive alignment framework was utilized as the first approach to analyze the qualitative data, after which a thematic analysis was employed to identify the emerging themes as well as to answer the third research question. In comparing the perspectives of EFL instructors and students, three main findings emerged in this study. Firstly, the majority of EFL instructors have a general understanding of the essence of the SCL approach and the use of its different strategies. Secondly, there is a mismatch between EFL instructors' and students' understandings of their teaching and learning roles. Thirdly, there are a number of attitudinal and institutional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of SCL.

DEDICATION

*This Work is Dedicated to Anyone Who Dreams of Enhancing the Quality of EFL Teaching
and Learning in Higher Education*

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TABLE OF CONTENT

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1. Background	1
1.2 Research Questions	4
1.3 Significance of the Study	5
1.4 Terms.....	5
CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 English Language Learning in Higher Education	6
2.2 Constructive Alignment Framework (CA).....	9
Using Constructive Alignment to Facilitate SCL in EFL	10
2.3 Changing Roles of Teaching and Learning Implementing SCL	11
2.3.1 <i>Teaching Roles and Responsibilities of English Instructors in the SCL Environment</i>	11
2.3.2 <i>Learning Roles and Responsibilities of EFL Students in the SCL Environment</i>	15
2.4 Implementing SCL in EFL: Benefits and Challenges	15
2.4.1 <i>Benefits of Implementing SCL in EFL Courses</i>	15
2.4.2 <i>Challenges in Implementing SCL in EFL</i>	16
2.5 SCL in Middle Eastern Contexts.....	17
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	19
3.1 Research Design	19
3.2 Participants	20
3.3 Data Generation.....	23
3.3 Procedures	23
Access to Participants.....	23
3.4 Data Analysis	24
3.4 Ethical Considerations.....	25
3.5 Limitations.....	25

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	26
4.1.1 <i>How Do EFL Instructors Define SCL?</i>	26
4.1.2 <i>How Do EFL Instructors Perceive their Teaching Roles?</i>	29
4.3.1 <i>Classroom Interaction</i>	33
4.3.2. <i>Mismatch of Precieved Reality of the Classroom</i>	35
4.3.3: <i>Institutional Constraints</i>	36
5.1 Definition Of SCL and Teaching Roles From the Perspectives of EFL Instructors and Students	39
5.1.1 The Definition of SCL from the Perspective of EFL Instructors	39
5.1.2 Teaching Roles from the Perspectives of EFL Instructors	41
5.2 Challenges Confronted By EFL Instructors and Students in the Process of Implementing SCL	45
5.2.2 Mismatch of the Beliefs about the Teaching and Learning Roles	46
5.2.3 Institutional Constraints	48
CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION	50
6.1 Recommendations	50
6.2 Conclusion.....	51
REFERENCES	52

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: <i>Descriptions of the instructor's role in different teaching styles.....</i>	13
Table 2: <i>Information about EFL Instructors.....</i>	21
Table 3: <i>Information about Students.....</i>	22

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. Background

The student-centered learning approach (SCL) has been regarded as a useful learning approach which has been implemented in learning settings all over the world (Radu, 2010). It derives its roots from the constructivist paradigm, and SCL relies on the belief that the learners' knowledge and understanding of an experience in the learning process are constructed through the interaction of their prior knowledge with the new introduced learning experiences (Baeten et al., 2016). From this point of view, learning is conceived as a process wherein learners are expected to be mature and independent individuals who search for a meaning by associating the external factors in their cultural, social and material environment with the internal psychological processes required for the creation of new knowledge (Illuris, 2003). Hence, the SCL approach concentrates on the students' capacity to create meaningful experiences through activities and tasks as well as through their ability to work collaboratively with their peers (Du & Kirkebæk, 2012).

The essence of SCL revolves around engagement and interaction through activities that boost active learning. The SCL approach is used to refer to a wide range of interactive approaches utilized in the field of teaching and learning, such as active learning, cooperative learning, project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and peer-led team learning (Froyd & Simpson, 2008). In SCL classrooms students are not expected to act as consumers of knowledge but rather as knowledge producers and active independent learners. Students in SCL classrooms are encouraged to engage with each other, plan and manage their time and resources to complete a collaborative project, or

participate in discussions (Garrett, 2008). The learning activities are various, such as organizing their time and roles in projects and working collaboratively or individually to identify the issue and determine the best solution.

SCL has been viewed as an effective approach in many higher education institutions (Cook-Sather, 2013), in particular such state-of-the-art instructional and learning strategies have been implemented to equip citizens with the best qualifications and the needed skills to respond to the demands of the market in their communities (Codd, 2005). The SCL approach enables adult learners to gain the critical, innovative and collaborative skills needed to confront twenty-first century challenges and to respond effectively to the multiple demands in today's competitive environment (Scott, 2015). Despite the popularity of SCL in different learning settings, there are still studies that question its effectiveness and its positive impact on learners. The main critiques related to its focus on the individual learners (O'Neill & McMahon, 2005). Previous studies also reported that the principles of SCL approach may mismatch with local culture of the host learning context (Thanh, 2010). Exporting SCL approach to a new context requires education and professional development in order to be effective in the new context.

In the field of foreign language teaching and learning, previous studies have reported several advantages of implementing the SCL approach in English language teaching (Zohrabi, Torabi, & Baybourdiani, 2012), with regards to the development of the learners' four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the SCL classroom, students are more likely to show willingness to engage in the activities, be part of the learning process, and to show increased motivation and deep understanding of the introduced topic (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). Studies have also indicated that EFL

students who participated frequently in projects and tasks recognized that their English proficiency level had developed, while real-life and motivation had improved (Beckee&Miller, 2006).

Arabic is considered as the official language in Qatar, consequently several laws have been issued by the Qatari government to require all official parties in the county (i.e., ministries, schools, and universities) to use the Arabic language in all official communications. However, English is also viewed as an equally important language since it is commonly used by many expatriates, who represent 88% of the total population in Qatar (Forstenlechner et al., 2012). Thus, English is a common language for communication between the national population and the expatriates. Therefore, in the Qatari context, the importance of English as a foreign language (EFL) was recognized by the Qatari government and, as a consequence, a series of steps were taken towards developing the quality of the English curriculum in order to change the medium of instruction in schools at the university level to the English language (Ellili-Cherif, 2014). The rapid economic growth witnessed in the Gulf region, and in particular in Qatar, also motivated many higher education environments to develop English language teaching to keep up with globalization and to equip learners with the necessary linguistic skills for the demands of the local market.

One of the most recent innovative instructional methods adopted in all disciplines and academic programs at Qatar University is the SCL approach (RAND, 2009). In particular, the Foundation Program (FP) was adopted, whereby first-year students are actively engaged in an SCL environment to enhance their language proficiency (Qatar University, n.d.). The FP made comprehensive modifications to develop the English

curriculum and the teacher-centered instructional methods used to teach English, such as hiring more native speakers of English, designing learning opportunities and interactive activities, and selecting textbooks that were designed to meet the needs of non-native speakers of English (Ellili-Cherif&Hadba, 2017). Chen and Goh (2011) argue that it is assumed that how instructors conceive of teaching will be reflected in their instructional practices and how they determine and guide the setting of the goals. Although the SCL approach has been effectively implemented in different EFL learning settings all over the world, it remains a relatively new orientation in EFL learning at the college level in Qatar. As this represents a new orientation in EFL learning at QU, there is a very limited number of studies with findings that describe how this approach is practiced in the context of English language learning and teaching at the university level in Qatar.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate EFL university instructors' and students' perspectives of SCL as well as their perceived teaching and learning roles at QU FP. This research attempts to answer the following research questions:

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do EFL university instructors and EFL students define the SCL approach?
2. How do EFL university instructors and EFL students perceive their teaching and learning roles in an SCL environment?
3. What EFL challenges do EFL lecturers and students confront in the process of implementing SCL?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The discussion on the SCL approach is not new; however, how it is practiced from one context to another opens the door for further investigations and discussions. This study aims to contribute with its findings and insights by providing more information on the Qatari and Middle-Eastern contexts, and describing the reality of implementing SCL in EFL learning settings at the college level. Moreover, this study could also be further developed and utilized as a reference in the many EFL contexts in the Middle East to plan and design effective professional development programs for less experienced EFL instructors.

1.4 Terms

SCL: The acronym SCL refers to student-centered approaches to learning. It is emphasized in the QU official reports on the development of instructional methods in all academic disciplines; however, in the context of this current study, the use of this term focuses on the instructional development in EFL education. This term is used in this study without focusing on any specific strategy.

CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the theories and reviews the literature relevant to the study. It begins with a review of the theoretical trends in teaching and learning English as a foreign language, transforming from a grammar-translation approach to a communicative approach. This transformation supports the ongoing pedagogical shift from a focus on lectures and textbooks towards one of student needs and motivation. Supporting this transformation, a constructive alignment framework (Biggs & Tang, 2011) is employed to understand the reality of practices in Qatar and to analyse the data generated in this study. This is followed with a review of the literature on teaching and learning in EFL in student-centered learning environments within higher education, which includes the benefits and challenges, as well as relevant studies in international contexts, particularly in the Middle-Eastern context.

2.1 English Language Learning in Higher Education

In the last two decades, the field of teaching and learning foreign languages has transformed from grammar-translation focused approaches to communicative approaches. Shaver (2010) claims that grammar-translation focused approaches develop the student's knowledge of language but fail to enable the learners to create meanings and become better communicators in real-life settings. The communicative approaches to teaching and learning the English language pay attention to student-centered activities that boost authentic communication among learners (Poole, 2005). Bahumaid (2012) pointed out that the communicative approach was introduced in the past four decades and has had an impact on every aspect of EFL teaching and learning since it appeared in the Arab Gulf Region.

Today, the view of English language teaching at the higher education level (HE) worldwide has been transformed as a consequence of the change in the way that language is viewed. Language is regarded as a "complex practice of meaning creation" that is constructed through the social context (GhahremaniGhajaretal., 2012). According to Brown (2005), the view of English language teaching expands to include different learning aspects related to the learners, such as self-esteem, motivation for language learning, collaborative learning skills, and the development of individual ways to construct meaning and communicate it to others.

Literature on foreign language teaching has reported that learners construct their knowledge through the activities intentionally designed by their teachers (Biggs, 2014). Through interactions with activities, the learner builds their own personal experiences, which could become the basis for creating a meaningful and authentic learning experience (Kirkebæk& Du, 2012). Improving the quality of the instructional methods and materials utilized to teach English becomes a necessity. Specially, the English language has become a global language that is utilized in all disciplines to exchange information and ideas (Ansarey, 2012). Studies have shown that a shift in the orientation of English language teaching has occurred (Tawalbeh& Al-Asmari, 2015), and many English language instructors have been encouraged to employ the SCL approach to teach

English while providing learners with real learning experiences (Peyton, Moore &Young, 2010), as well as allowing them to enjoy a more meaningful and enriching learning environment (Treesuwan&Tanitteerapan, 2016). In addition, most of the foreign language university programs worldwide are seeking opportunities to move their programs towards the internationalization of learning and teaching by employing innovative teaching

approaches that facilitate international interaction and collaboration (Dlaska, 2013). The SCL approach is implemented in foreign language learning settings in different communicative activities to help learners construct communicative and linguistic skills, such as task-based language learning, project-based learning, cooperative learning strategies (Lv, 2014), experiential and goal-oriented learning (Sampson, 2010), data-driven learning (Talai&Fotovatnia, 2012), writing portfolios, the write-pair-share strategy, debates, and role plays (Gholami et al., 2014).

The notion of student-centeredness is broad, and people interpret it in multiple ways. Consequently, this may lead to a difficult or undesired implementation of this approach in classrooms (Neumann, 2013). Taylor (2013) explained that the undesired practices and expected outcomes appear because the understanding of the underlying meaning of SCL is mixed with local interpretations of this approach. The SCL approach is perceived through the balance of power between instructors and students (Wright, 2011). Le Ha (2014) states that in SCL environments, learners do what they feel to be the most convenient for their learning rather than changing their learning path to follow other learning modes that are assumed by their instructors to be the best learning paths. In contrast, Neumann (2013) proposed in a developed framework that SCL could mean that students have freedom to choose what and how to learn, but remain within the offered options in the curriculum's framework.

2.2 Constructive Alignment Framework (CA)

Providing meaningful and deep learning experiences requires instructors to adopt a comprehensive approach to learning that emphasizes the alignment between different aspects that offer opportunities for better student-centered learning: learning goals/objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Constructive alignment (CA) is defined as a conceptual framework that helps any teacher or educator to reflect upon the main aspects of the curriculum and the adopted teaching tools and assessment methods used to attain the learning goals (Biggs & Tang, 2011). This underlying idea of the theory of constructive alignment was first proposed sixty years ago by the scholar Ralph Tyler in an attempt to connect the purpose of education with educational experiences and the ways in which these experiences are organized and linked to the assessment tools and reflect the students' outcomes (Biggs, 2014). Biggs (2014) suggested that the first step towards incorporating the CA model is to identify what students should be learning, to understand it from the teaching practice, and align it with specific and measurable learning outcomes. For example, Biggs (2014) stated that the goal that demonstrates the learners' understanding should be expressed with verbs like 'apply', 'compare', 'explain' and 'analyse'. The next two steps are matching what has been taught in the class with the students' expected performance and, finally, developing an assessment tool that is aligned with the teaching-learning goals and the activities to reflect the students' learning (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

Studies have reported that the CA model had been incorporated into diverse disciplines; however, a limited number of studies conducted in the field of EFL education have shown how the CA model is used to enhance the implementation of SCL strategies.

For instance, one recent study exemplified how the CA model could be used to improve the implementation of one of the SCL strategies (i.e., project-based learning (PBL) in EFL teaching (Zhao, Zhang & Du, 2017). This study highlighted the significance of designing PBL courses that are aligned with the principle of the CA model and students' beliefs and of developing an assessment tool that could help in improving the students' engagement with the course and achieving the learning outcomes.

Using Constructive Alignment to Facilitate SCL in EFL

The relevant literature has proposed different guidelines that show how CA can be used to enhance the implementation of SCL strategies and students' learning in EFL learning; these guidelines are summarized in the following steps:

Identifying Teaching Objectives in Relation to Students' Learning Needs, Motivations and Expectations of Learning.

It is necessary during the preparation phase of teaching materials to take into account students' expectations and motivations for learning (Du et al., 2013), and the best teaching practices that help in promoting the highest levels of motivations and meeting the learners' individual needs (Çağanağa, 2014).

Designing Student-Centered Interactive Teaching Contents and Activities

The curricula and course content are manageable, flexible, and linked to the intended learning outcomes (Weimer, 2002) and provide students with the freedom to make decisions about what and how they want to learn (Attard et al., 2010). Hence, students feel

that they are respected because their opinions are taken into consideration and they are involved in the learning process (Tawalbeh& Al-Asmari, 2015).

The learning experiences and activities are intertwined and are purposefully designed to enable students to apply the acquired knowledge and achieve the expected learning outcomes (Çağanağa, 2014). Most of the responsibilities and tasks required from instructors are transferred to students, whereby the instructor acts as a coach and maestro to facilitate the students' learning (Weimer, 2002) and the students are active, mature and responsible agents who are given the power to make decisions about the content and activities and seek knowledge from different sources (Seng, 2014).

Assessment

Memory based or grammar-based assessment techniques like multiple-choice questions or fill-in-the blanks are no longer used; instead, formative assessment techniques that evaluate students' development in a specific area are frequently used (Zohrabi, Torabi&Baybourdiani, 2012).

2.3 Changing Roles of Teaching and Learning Implementing SCL

2.3.1 Teaching Roles and Responsibilities of English Instructors in the SCL Environment

Teaching is an intellectual and collaborative work that requires the teacher to recognize their multiple roles in the class and be capable of strategically distributing the work to students to help them maximize their potential for learning (Wilson & Peterson, 2006). However, teachers are expected to be the content experts, and they act as authoritarians in the classrooms; they determine the classrooms rules and learning

outcomes, in addition to evaluating their students' performance (Weimer, 2002). These roles have been regarded as 'traditional' and have failed to facilitate meaningful learning in a way that students could use what they learned in the practice of the target language (Du & Kirkebaek, 2012). Therefore, it is encouraged that the roles of instructors should be changed when implementing SCL (Weimer, 2002). Wilson and Peterson (2006) illustrated the differences between the roles of instructors in both teacher and student-centered learning approaches; these are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Wilson and Peterson's (2006) descriptions of the instructor's role in different teaching styles.

Teaching centered on the teacher	Teaching Centered on Learners
<p>Instructors are perceived as the only source of knowledge, providing the learners with all the information needed.</p>	<p>Instructors appear as people who know a lot about teaching and learning, but still show willingness to continuously improve their practices.</p>
<p>Instructors only play the content deliverer role.</p>	<p>Instructors view teaching as complex and intellectual task that requires designing the learning experiences in a way that focuses on developing the learners' understanding of the concepts and making lessons meaningful and connected.</p>
<p>Instructors view teaching as a simple task that focuses mainly on delivering theoretical concepts and different lessons that are necessarily connected.</p>	<p>Instructors understand that learning is about active engagement with information, and collaborative and individual work should be implemented in the class.</p>
<p>Instructors conceive learning as an individual activity and view individual differences among learners as a problem.</p>	

In a lecture-centered classroom, it is believed that EFL instructors play the main role in the learning process. However, in the complementary field of teaching and learning, the significant role of instructor in the learning process has changed, whereby learning in most situations occurs without an instructor (Talal&Fotovatnia, 2012). Instructors may find it challenging to change their roles and adopt SCL strategies. Zohrabi, Torabi and Baybourdiani (2012) explain that it is expected that EFL instructors teach according to the vision of the school principals, parents' expectations and grading pressure. Furthermore, EFL instructors have expressed low motivation for adopting any innovative instructional methods.

In contrast, in SCL environments, students are perceived as active and independent participants in the learning experience (Baeten et al., 2016) and their cognitive and affective growth should guide all the decisions about what they need to learn or what learning strategies are suitable (Wright, 2011). Instructors, on the other hand, act in the class as a coach or a maestro to guide the learners through the learning process (Weimer, 2002). In addition, all the tasks and responsibilities, such as selecting the goals, designing the learning experiences, and evaluating the performance, which were assumed to be done by the instructors are instead transmitted to learners (Elen et al., 2007). In order to motivate EFL learners to use the English language for communicative purposes, EFL instructors should act as role models for their students by using English to express their thoughts and initiate simple conversations. This helps to encourage and motivate EFL learners to use English without hesitation to initiate shore conversations and later pursue the use of English even beyond the classroom (Al-Bulushi& Al-Issa, 2012). EFL instructors in interactive and student-centered learning environments are expected to be skilled

manipulators, whereby they direct the lesson in such a way that learners are given the chance to use language in less controlled settings and to search for grammatical and structural errors to design new subsequent lessons (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

2.3.2 Learning Roles and Responsibilities of EFL Students in the SCL Environment

Implementing SCL in classrooms brings many changes, not only to instructors but also to students. SCL entails a shift in the balance of power, which gives students the chance to have input on the instructional method and activities; this makes students feel recognized and respected as 'fellow learners', and consequently they become motivated and self-regulated learners (Wohlfarth, 2008). Furthermore, students in student-centered classrooms are able to learn by combining both the theoretical and practical knowledge or through active discussion amongst themselves and with the instructors (Tsegay, 2015). By making space for students to discuss, reflect and ask open-ended questions in the class, students will develop the sense of excitement for learning and may be exposed to a lot of information that makes sense to them (Felder & Brent, 1996). Students who are capable of imagining how to pursue their learning and make major decisions to facilitate and adjust how they learn have developed the intellectual capacities and positive attitudes for life-long learning (Froyd & Simpson, 2008).

2.4 Implementing SCL in EFL: Benefits and Challenges

2.4.1 Benefits of Implementing SCL in EFL Courses

Previous studies have reported benefits of using SCL in EFL in terms of supporting student learning. In particular, students have been observed to be more motivated and self-regulated learners (Attard et al., 2010), have improved communication skills (Tang &

Adamson, 2014) and develop collaborative and organizational skills (Felder & Brent, 1996; Tang & Adamson, 2014). Moreover, students in an SCL environment are highly encouraged to develop their linguistic abilities by using the language to freely express their thoughts and opinions (Lv, 2014). The SCL learning environment allows students to stretch their thinking regarding critical views and positions as well as to learn to appreciate and develop a sense of tolerance towards different opinions (Tsegay, 2015).

2.4.2 Challenges in Implementing SCL in EFL

Previous studies have indicated a number of attitudinal and institutional challenges that constrain the effective implementation of a student-centered learning approach in higher education. There are attitudinal challenges related to instructors' and students' perspectives towards the teaching and learning roles. As Pedersen and Liu (2003) pointed out, the instructor's deep belief that learners are unable to determine the learning resources and design tasks that will enable them to meet the standards and learning objectives influences the way they perceive the role of students as self-reliant learners. The literature has also reported that the expectations of learners themselves hinder the implementation of the SCL approach. Based on Wright's reflective journal (2011) on SCL in higher education, learners have a deeply rooted belief that instructors have complete control over their learning and are the ones who should make the decisions about the learning process. This mentality means that the learners resist any activities that make them take responsibility for their own learning. Students' resistance to participating in SCL activities has been reported in previous studies as a natural student response; during the implementation of SCL activities, students usually need time to move through a transformative journey from

having total dependency on instructors to accepting responsibility for learning and being active participants (Felder & Brent, 1996). In addition, there are a number of institutional challenges that limit the implementation of SCL, such as traditional grading and examination systems, the established standards used to measure learners' achievements (Neumann, 2013), fixed curricula and course content that block the instructors' creativity and make them less motivated to adopt an SCL approach (Seng, 2013), and space in classroom and time limitations (Mendonca et al., 2012).

2.5 SCL in Middle Eastern Contexts

Although the international literature has reported a number of studies on SCL in EFL learning settings, there are few studies in the Middle Eastern context. One study from Sultan Qaboos University revealed that EFL learners have a positive attitude towards SCL (Al-Humaidi, 2015). This study also reported that EFL learners believe that this approach helps students to express their opinions and enhance their performance. However, they are not satisfied with the level of involvement in the decision-making process, which is very low at both the course and the program level. Tawalbeh and AlAsmari (2015) investigated the perceptions of the SCL approach among EFL university instructors in Saudi Arabia and found that EFL instructors have a positive attitude towards this approach. Additionally, it was evident in this study that EFL instructors believed that SCL is as applicable in an English course as it can be in any other courses, and it encourages them to change their to be around facilitating learning. A study conducted at Hawler Medical University (HMU) in Iraq showed that small classroom sizes and students' resistance to participating in SCL activities are considered an environmental barrier preventing the implementation of

collaborative activities, while the lack of sufficient support and encouragement at HMU to employ SCL were also challenges to implementing this approach (Jordan et al., 2014). In the context of Qatar, the use of student-centered learning approaches has been highly encouraged in all disciplines at Qatar University (QU) (RAND, 2009). A recent study conducted in the field of STEM at QU to explore how SCL is perceived among STEM instructors revealed that there was an inconsistency between the STEM instructors' understanding of SCL and their actual practices inside the classroom, and this resulted in the ineffective implementation of SCL strategies (Sabah & Du, 2018). In the field of EFL education, another study conducted by Ellili-Cherif and Hadba (2017) at a foundation program showed that curriculum advancement in the program failed to achieve the learning outcomes, not because of the instructors' inadequate knowledge about student-centered learning, but rather because the students were not prepared to understand the studentcentered teaching style; they lacked the necessary skills to engage with SCL activities.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides information about the research's design, participants, data collection tool, procedures, data analysis technique and ethical considerations. It also aims to answer the main findings of the following three research questions that guide this study:

1. How do EFL instructors and students define the SCL approach?
2. (How do EFL university instructors and EFL students perceive their teaching and learning roles in an SCL environment?)
3. What challenges do EFL instructors and students confront in the process of implementing SCL?

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative methods are widely used in educational settings to gain deep insights about the educational practices inside the classrooms (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Mays and Pope (2013) pointed out that the qualitative approach has been employed as a systematic and self-conscious research design used to enrich our knowledge about the encountered issues. In this current study, the purpose is to explore the perspectives of an SCL approach among EFL university instructors and students, as well as how this approach is conceived and exemplified in the practices of both groups inside the classrooms. Therefore, a phenomenological research design is employed as a qualitative method to provide the researcher with a deep understanding about the attitudes and perceptions (Malagon-Maldonado, 2014) of EFL university instructors and students towards the current practices in their learning environment.

3.2 Participants

This research study included twenty participants: ten English as Foreign Language (EFL) university instructors and ten non-English major students from the English Department at the Foundation Program (FP) at Qatar University. All EFL university instructors who volunteered to take part in this study had teaching experience ranging from 1 to 12 years in the field of EFL education, but none of the instructors had experienced an SCL approach as learners. Details of the ten interviewed EFL instructors are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Information about EFL Instructors

Participant code:	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Course taught by instructor
T 1	Female	1 st year	Writing Workshop-level 1
T 2	Male	12 th year	Integrated Core-level 1
T 3	Male	6 th year	Reading Workshop Level 2
T 4	Female	1 st year	Integrated Core-level 2
T 5	Male	5 th year	Integrated Core-level 1
T 6	Male	7 th year	Integrated Core-level 2
T 7	Female	10 th year	Integrated Core-level 1
T 8	Female	4 th year	Writing Workshop-level 2
T 9	Male	10 th year	Integrated Core-level 1
T 10	Female	8 th year	Writing Workshop-level 1

In addition to the instructors, ten non-English major students volunteered to participate in this study. The students who volunteered were all female students. All volunteered students are registered in courses either at the elementary level or the intermediate level, which were designed to improve the students' proficiency level in the four language skills (i.e. reading, speaking, writing and listening) and equip them with the

necessary research and intellectual skills (Qatar University, n.d.). Details of the students are provided in table 3.

Table 3

Information about Students

Participant Code:	Gender	Course Level
S 1	Female	Intermediate level
S 2	Female	Intermediate level
S 3	Female	Elementary level
S 4	Female	Intermediate level
S 5	Female	Elementary level
S 6	Female	Intermediate level
S 7	Female	Elementary level
S 8	Female	Elementary level
S 9	Female	Elementary level
S 10	Female	Intermediate level

3.3 Data Generation

Interviews

Kvale (2008) pointed out that interviews are powerful tools that can be used to investigate different aspects of the world from the participants' point of view. In particular, the use of interviews in educational settings allows interviewees to describe and reflect upon their actual instructional practices inside the classroom (Sadler, 2012). Semi-structured interviews were used as the main method to answer all the three questions of this study and to achieve the purpose of the data generated from the two perspectives, namely that of the instructors and that of the students.

3.3 Procedures

Access to Participants

Upon receiving the ethical approval from Qatar University, the Chairperson of the English Department and the Director of the Research Unit at the Foundation Program (FP) were informed about the overall purpose of the study. Next, an email was sent to 81 EFL instructors at the FP to call for volunteers within one month; ten instructors who volunteered were each interviewed individually. All interviews took place in their office or at another preferred location. Each interview lasted 30-50 minutes and was audio recorded with the instructors' permission. The exact same procedure was used to reach the student participants.

Each interview with the EFL instructors and students was conducted individually. All interviewed instructors were asked general questions about their backgrounds .Then, they were asked to provide answers to seven open-ended questions (see Appendix 2 –

interview guidelines A) about the definition of SCL, about their teaching roles and students' feedback, and to describe their SCL practices and students' feedback as well as the challenges they face during their implementation of such an approach. During their interviews, the students were also asked seven open-ended questions (see Appendix 2 – interview guidelines B) about their perceptions towards English language learning in their SCL environment, their feedback on the employed activities, and the challenges they encounter during their engagement with SCL activities. All the interview questions were formulated by the researcher. To ensure accuracy and alignment with the three research questions, these questions were reviewed twice by the supervisors of this study.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interpretation of the qualitative data is usually known as the content analysis stage, which enables the researcher to highlight the key words, phrases and statements emerging frequently throughout the reading process of text (Thomas, 2003; Kvale, 2011). In this study, all the recorded interviews were transcribed and coded manually. During the coding stage, a theory-driven analysis approach was employed as the first technique to identify the emerging aspects in relation to the theory previously mentioned in chapter 2 (i.e., the constructive alignment framework) and to direct the discussion of the findings reported by EFL instructors and students (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). To code the qualitative data, thematic analysis is considered one of the main techniques used to analyse texts and identify all possible and undiscovered themes (Namey et al., 2008). Therefore, a thematic approach was used as the second technique in this study to identify and organize the patterns embedded in the collected data and to answer all research questions in depth.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were thought about through every stage of this research. First, ethical approval was obtained by a designated research committee called the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at QU, which revised the research procedure to ensure that the researcher took the appropriate steps to protect the rights of the participants and the researcher. A consent form was provided to all the participants before officially requesting their permission and informing them about their rights and role in this study. A copy of the consent form was given to each one of the participants. All personal information about the participants remained anonymous in this study, and all copies of the interview transcripts were sent to the interviewees by email to ask for confirmation for use for this study.

3.5 Limitations

A few limitations are highlighted in this study. First, although this study aimed at providing a deep understanding of the participants' opinions, the small number of participants limited the possibility of generalizing the findings of this study. Therefore, further research with a larger sample should be conducted. Second, this study utilized qualitative interviews for data generation. However, this tool may not be efficient at identifying specific aspects that are difficult to be captured through conversations. Using multiple sources, for example surveys and classroom observation, could help in enriching the findings of the study by adding different perspectives (Henry, Murray & Phillips, 2007). Further studies could be conducted to investigate the perspectives towards using SCL using mixed methods to obtain additional findings collected from different sources

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter reports the findings from EFL university instructors' and students' perspectives on student-centered learning. The study used semi-structured interviews for data collection. An integrated approach for the data analysis was employed. First, a theory-driven approach to the analysis was used through the Constructive Alignment Framework (Biggs & Tang, 2011). In the second round of analysis, a thematic approach (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) was taken to identify patterns and categories. Then the analysis outcomes from both sources were compared, contrasted and summarized to report the findings for this research question. The chapter is divided by research questions as follows.

4.1 How Do EFL Instructors Define the SCL Approach and their Perceived Teaching Roles?

4.1.1 How Do EFL Instructors Define SCL?

Biggs and Tang (2011) stressed an alignment between three aspects to enhance student-centered learning, namely learning goals/objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. The interview data analysis indicates that two major focuses are embedded within the definitions of SCL provided by the instructors.

First, the instructors focused on student's needs and interests, with six of the ten interviewed instructors emphasizing the importance of taking students' interests into consideration whenever a new topic is introduced to them. Their justification is that emphasizing students' interests increases student motivation for participation and allows them to refresh their memory about any prior knowledge they possess. For example, one

instructor (T8), a female instructor teaching Writing Workshop-level2, provided an example to demonstrate how she perceived SCL through students' interests and needs:

It's more of the teacher providing them when needed with different maybe language means or sources or discussions creating debate with groups in order for them to think about better ideas for their writing...I use games when we are thinking about the topic and trying to activate our schemata our background information ... like debate if we have a controversial topic, definitely students would love a debating class and they are divided into two groups and they start throwing ideas here and there. (T8)

Second, instructors included in their definitions that organizing teaching and learning activities and prioritizing classroom interactions were important. Four of the ten interviewed instructors expressed the importance of enhancing interaction among students in the classroom. One instructor (T1), a female instructor teaching writing workshop-level 1, suggested that the best way to teach is achieved through focusing on instructional methods that boost the interactions among students. She stated,

It's structuring my teaching approach based on students, taking students as a main important part of my teaching approach, whether they get the concepts or not, in simple terms I feel like they should just get the concepts and they should interact a lot, communicate and if they are unable to communicate or they do not get the concepts, or they are not participating actively then I don't think it's studentbased learning approach. (T1).

Another EFL instructor (T3), a male instructor, emphasized the importance of taking into consideration the students' needs and interests; as he stated in the following quote:

Well, I think for me personally, I think student-based learning is where I think the emphasis is on the students; the students' motivation, the students' engagement and the student's personality and learning style, trying to engage with the different learning style...I really believe in discussing with students why they're learning what they're learning to put in context why they're there why they're here why this course why this part of the syllabus is important to them, because if they're toned-out or if they don't care, students are distracted. (T3)

A third instructor (T4), a female instructor teaching integrated core-level 2 who claimed that she had been practicing SCL for 12 years, provided an example to demonstrate how she uses SCL activities to foster interaction among students in her classroom. She stated,

Role play, it's really very useful if you want to create student-centered activities and develop interactions, role play in which you give different students different roles and the rest different roles like for example we did shopping last week and we have shop keepers, different shops, not the same shops, and we have different shopping list with students and they have to go and find which shop they need to go to and which shop is better in terms of price and these kinds of issues, so role play is also nice. (T4)

4.1.2 How Do EFL Instructors Perceive their Teaching Roles?

The interviewed instructors agreed that identifying the individual differences to provide different types of support and facilitation for students is one of the main responsibilities of EFL instructors. This point was mentioned by two EFL instructors, a male instructor (T3), and a female instructor (T4).

I'm a facilitator, I'm a mediator, I mediate. I'm just the person in-between what students need to know where they are at and where they need to be and I mediate that gap between how much assistance does a learner need to reach to the next level of development. (T3)

The teacher role in student-centered is more facilitator than just giver of knowledge... I have more time to go, move around and provide individual support to my students instead of talking and giving them and explaining everything. (T4)

Nine of the ten EFL instructors described themselves in the classroom as someone who provides help and assistance to their students whenever it is needed. For example, an instructor (T2), a male instructor teaching integrated core-level 1, described his role as follows,

As I have explained to you, my role is to assess, evaluate, prompt, assist... I act as a reference guide that goes around in class monitoring groups...I think these are the main responsibilities. (T2)

Instructor (T10), a female instructor for writing workshop-level 1, described her role as "a source of guidance and knowledge", explaining that,

My job entailed much more than equipping students with the language skills. Some students did not have a smooth transition to university and were not aware of their own responsibilities and duties. My job was then to also teach them about these points. (T10)

Although all the instructors described themselves as ‘evaluators’ and ‘facilitators’, it is worth noting that none of the ten interviewed EFL instructors addressed the role of the assessment tools used to provide students with the constructive assessment to help students continue growing and achieving their determined learning outcomes. None of them mentioned assessment or the alignment between assessment, teaching and learning activities and learning goals and objectives when they defined SCL.

4.2 How is English Language Learning in an SCL Environment Perceived From the Perspective of Students?

Similar to as discussed in section 4.1, an integrated approach was employed to analyse the interview data from the students, including a theory-driven step and a thematic step. All of the students were asked to describe the best ways to learn English as a foreign language and to enhance their communicative skills in spoken and written language. The majority of the students emphasized the importance of interactive activities during class time. Seven of the ten interviewed students stressed that lectures are not the best way to learn the English language, rather they need activities where they can “do something interesting”. They believed that the activities should be also a source for interaction and learning rather than focusing on the mastery of grammatical rules. As two students stated,

I don't see that receiving the information in the class is the best way to learn

English...You have to learn from speaking, watch English movies, read extra readings outside the class. So, this way is not the best way to learn... I think teachers should encourage us to learn from other things like activities. It should not be just about grammar. (S 3)

There is another game that we play as a competition among groups and each group member is required to work in the group to answer the questions, and then the group that finish all the questions faster will win. (S1)

Two students mentioned their preference for using other audio-visual resources (i.e. English TV series) and reading short stories besides the stipulated books. Another student preferred mixed methods, mentioning, I believe the best way to start learning English is through learning the grammar and the basic rules from someone, but how I will learn the accent, I feel I can learnt from TV episodes series, or from someone who competent in this language, like a native speaker of the language, from talking to them. This makes me learn the language better than learning English from specific way or certain books. (S1)

For most of the interviewed students there were not sufficient activities during class where they could interact and practice communication. The majority of the activities they experienced included written tasks and answering questions from textbooks. For instance, two student participants, both female students at the elementary English level, addressed this point with the following quotes.

We don't have a lot of activities. But in any activity we work in peers. Every two students always work with each other. Peer activities used mainly to answer questions in the book. (S 2)

The lack of alignment between what has been taught in the classroom and what type of knowledge students are required to demonstrate in the exams was identified in the interview data. Four of the ten female students mentioned their disappointment concerning the assessment methods. As one female student (S8) at the elementary level expressed in the following quote,

We all the year grammar and vocabulary and at the end the exam is about listening, reading and writing. Questions on grammar and vocabularies do exist. This you have to employ it in your writing. In the IC class we don't practice writing, but at the end, in the exams, we are asked to write. There is one question in the exam one paragraph and we are not trained to do that. (S8)

To sum up sections 4.1 and 4.2, it seems from the definitions of SCL and the teaching roles described by EFL instructors that the majority have a partial understanding of the essence of SCL and their expected teaching roles and responsibilities in the studentcentered classroom. Additionally, both EFL instructors and students conceived interactions and engagements through activities differently; hence, there is a gap between the instructors' and students' expectations and perspectives, which could lead to dissatisfaction among both groups.

4.3 What Challenges Do EFL Instructors and Students Confront in the Process of Implementing SCL?

A thematic approach (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2009) was mainly used to identify patterns from the interview transcripts for research question three. Three major challenges were identified when the interview data from both groups of instructors and students were compared.

4.3.1 Classroom Interaction

Classroom interaction was identified as the most challenging aspect by both interviewed instructors and students due to the contradicting perceptions they hold regarding what is actually happening in the classroom.

From the EFL instructors' perspective, students' resistance toward interaction remains one of the most common challenges in this study. Instructors felt that they made attempts to design activities and invite students to participate; however, the students, in particular female students, were too shy to speak and engage in the activities. As a female instructor teaching writing workshop-level2 (T8), mentioned:

The challenge is to let them be a part of this process, let them be more in that process, I'm having difficulties especially in this region, because in this region some of the students are quite silent, shy... you cannot ask them to do what you want them to do every time they won't be comfortable." Another reason for this resistance could be associated with the student's low motivation for learning English language.

This point was expressed by another EFL instructor (T7), a female instructor teaching integrated core-level 1:

And you have those as we said before who want to be at the back, they are there just because they wanted to be marked present, this is their motivation... so one of the challenges is to get these students into your class, to get them involved, to get them like English as a subject. (T7)

Students, on the other hand, believed that the lack of opportunities for interaction that enhances students' speaking ability is a major concern in their classrooms. As a female student at the intermediate English level (S7) pointed out,

The problem that the instructors speak more than the students. And this is a problem. It's supposed that the students have the confidence to speak regardless if they speak correctly or not in order for them to learn. But the problem, you find the instructor lecture a lot and he doesn't give the students the space to express their opinions in English. (S7)

Interaction was described by students in diverse forms, such as instructors asking questions during the lectures or asking students to move to the front of the class to answer questions on the boards. It seems that this level of interaction is not satisfactory for the students because it makes them feel as if they are being treated like high school students. There was one student (S6), a female student at the intermediate English level, who commented that the interaction in her classroom is similar to the level of interaction that she experienced in high school.

This is what happens here, they (instructors) share with us the process of learning when they allow one student to read, another one answers the question on the board. Things like that... but sometimes, the class makes me feel that we are at the school. Even the instructors, we call them 'teacher' because they treat us as high school students. (S6)

4.3.2. Mismatch of Perceived Reality of the Classroom

In comparing the interview data from instructors and students, a mismatch was identified in how both groups perceive the other roles and what is actually practiced in the classroom. From the instructors' point of view, students were not willing to take responsibility for their learning and they completely depend on their instructors. Instructors suggested that students are convinced that they have limited power over their learning and their instructors are the ones who are in charge of their learning. The following quotes illustrate this concern.

There is a need to change the misconception that the learner is not simply a passive recipient of information. Also, the notion that the teacher who hands more authority/control to students is 'lazy' or is not willing to put in effort should be challenged. (T10)

As I said we have student who come from school believing that knowledge is all with the teacher they cannot learn anything by themselves, and so this resistance to the student-centered learning. (T8)

On the other hand, students suggested that the challenge they faced was the lack of opportunities to learn to become independent learners. They perceived themselves as passive receivers and their instructors as lecturers and providers of knowledge. As student

(S1), a female student at the intermediate English level, expressed in the following comment,

There are classes like the IC class, where we study everything listening, grammar and vocabulary, there are no activities. Only the instructor is talking and we are listening.

(S1)

4.3.3: Institutional Constraints

Regarding the interview data from both instructors and students, a lack of alignment was revealed between the overall curricular objectives, the course content and materials, and the assessment methods. Other institutional factors such as time limitation and classroom size also created pressure for both instructors and students practicing SCL.

A lack of alignment between the overall curricular objectives, course content and materials, and assessment methods

For the instructors it is challenging to employ SCL with the current curricula when the teaching materials that were selected by the university system do not match the overall objectives. They argue that it was difficult and that it hindered the implementation of student-centered activities when they were expected to cover all topics included in the schedule of textbooks. Also, this mismatch between the textbook and local culture may be another obstacle for the instructors to design relevant activities:

Sometimes the activities that we are provided with to have in the class they are not fit for the culture, for the Qatari culture because the books are from America a Western culture book with western cultured-activities so those do not work out in the Qatari society

so I feel like we need more Qatari-culture based speaking activities which is not available right now and I think that's about it. (T1)

They suggested that it is essential to justify the student-centered activities according to the context of the nature of course.

The nature of courses offered at the Foundation Program varies greatly. For example, post-Foundation courses, academic writing courses, do not lend themselves to student-centered approaches. To implement SCL, the nature of the courses should be taken into consideration. (T10 & T6)

Although all EFL instructors agreed that assessment is an essential part of evaluating students' learning through the provided activities, none of them mentioned anything about the importance of making an alignment between the assessment tools utilized in the course and the activities. Only one instructor (T3), a male instructor teaching reading workshop course-level 2 and integrated core-level 2, pointed out that he noticed a lack of alignment between the implemented SCL activities and the assessment techniques used at the FP.

Here with new task-based learning there's new activities and the assessments are different, there aren't midterm exams anymore and there are these written vocabulary, fill-in the blank and some memorizing vocabulary and reading comprehension questions, the standard multiple-choice reading comprehension, but this doesn't really tell you about the student's ability to speak and write a language. (T3)

Time Limitations and Classroom Size

The limited time for lectures was a reason that prevented the effective implementation of SCL. This point was raised by one instructor (T5), a male instructor teaching an integrated skills course.

Time is a challenge for us because it takes time, being an authority doing what you want and letting them do what you want and then sometime it takes time to tell them what they have to do, to organize the seating and or students, to control the classrooms and time management these issue sometimes may be a challenge for student-centered activities. (T5)

In addition, another interviewed instructor (T4), a female instructor teaching integrated core-level 2, mentioned that it is challenging for her to employ student-centered activities in a small classroom because it restricts the students' movement and interactions inside the classroom.

The size of the classroom wouldn't allow you to make lots of movement, lots of group work and you have to move the chairs and this also take time from you and you have 50 minutes. (T4)

While the majority of EFL instructors were able to relate the challenges to the institutional factors that constrain the implementation of SCL, the interviewed students in this study did not reflect their challenges upon the institutional level of constraint.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings presented in chapter four in relation to the constructive alignment theory and other existing studies in order to provide answers for the three research questions.

5.1 Definition Of SCL and Teaching Roles From the Perspectives of EFL

Instructors and Students

5.1.1 The Definition of SCL from the Perspective of EFL Instructors

One of the main goals of this study was to examine how EFL instructors view the SCL approach by exploring what instructional strategies they adopt and how they employ these strategies to guide the learning goals and their practices inside the classroom (Chen & Goh, 2011). The constructive alignment framework proposed the three aspects that should be considered, namely learning goals and objectives, teaching and learning activities, and assessment methods. These emphasized the importance of the alignment between these aspects in order to implement student-centered learning effectively (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The outcomes of this study indicate a general agreement among the EFL instructors who participated in the study. The results indicate that SCL is perceived and defined through two aspects, that is, learning goals and objectives and learning activities. The EFL instructors regarded interactive activities as an important instructional practice. They assumed that students' learning is achieved through planning for interactive activities and through encouraging students to participate and move inside the classroom. This finding is aligned with Kirkebæk and Du's (2013) results, which showed that

interactive activities in the SCL environment could provide a meaningful learning experience for students to develop their prior knowledge about the introduced topic.

Nevertheless, relating the findings to the constructive alignment framework (Biggs & Tang, 2011) as presented in chapter 2, the EFL instructors demonstrated a partial understanding of student-centered learning from a holistic point of view. Biggs (2003) pointed out that assessment is one of the main components of the learning process as it plays a significant role in showing the students' progress. The assessment of student outcomes is viewed as an essential tool to develop pedagogies and move students' learning towards student-centered learning (Al-Thani et al, 2014). However, participants in this study did not address the importance of alignment among the aspects that comprise assessment. The lack of consideration of assessment by participants in this study shows that EFL instructors' understanding of student-centered learning was limited to a surface level. They did not demonstrate a sufficiently deep understanding of what student-centered learning could and should be. Similar findings have been reported by a previous study on instructors from the science and engineering field, whereby instructors rarely used assessment to support students' learning. Summative assessments are commonly used only for grading and participants did not show their awareness of using certain assessment strategies, such as formative assessment methods, as a potentially useful way to enhance student learning (Sabah & Du, 2018).

5.1.2 Teaching Roles from the Perspectives of EFL Instructors

Creating a student-centered learning environment entails making many changes that affect the roles of learners and teachers in designing instruction and assessment (Sabah & Du, 2018). One of the main findings of this study showed that EFL instructors described themselves as facilitators and helpers in the classroom who seek to provide students with assistance whenever it is needed. This finding is consistent with the findings mentioned in Weimer's work (2002), which emphasized the role of instructors in student-centered classroom as that of a coach who gives students the space to pursue their own learning paths. This shows that they have an understanding of what the 'correct' roles are according to the theories and the literature.

On the other hand, the findings of this current study also indicate that the instructors believed that they should be in charge of everything related to the learning process, and that they assumed that their responsibility is to act as a knowledge provider, guide and coach to students and to encourage them to perform well according to the learning outcomes (Treesuwan&Tanitteerapan, 2016). These contradictory findings are in line with a previous study conducted with instructors from engineering and science faculties (Sabah & Du, 2018). Both studies identified the gaps between what the instructors express regarding their perceptions in relation to theories and what they do in reality. Another possible reason for this contradiction in their believed roles of teaching may be due to their lack of prior experiences of SCL as learners, which has been suggested to play an essential role in building a strong belief towards SCL in their teacher experiences (Sabah & Du, 2018).

As Wilson and Peterson (2006) pointed out, instructors in teacher-centered classrooms perceive themselves as content experts who are responsible for providing learners with all the information needed, focusing on content delivery and insisting on playing the dominant role in the classroom. The finding in this study may explain what student participants in this study reported, namely that in classroom practice, a good amount of time is spent on lectures and many decisions regarding the learning process are made by the instructors.

The interviewed EFL instructors showed their willingness to provide assistance to students during their implementation of interactive activities and specific SCL strategies. However, none of them reflected upon the use of assessment to support students' progression or foster interaction. According to the CA framework, assessment is considered to be essential to ensure the success of any learning experience (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Assessment, especially formative assessment methods, is viewed as a useful tool to improve the instructors' teaching methods while also helping students to use the grades to improve their learning (Fluckiger et al., 2010). Additionally, it encourages interaction between the teacher and students and students among themselves and also helps the students connect with the content (Mirzaee & Hasrati, 2014). However, the findings did not express any responses related to assessment that illustrate there is a limited understanding of the main components that enhance the implementation of SCL. This limitation in an understanding of the essence of the SCL approach, according to CA model, could be linked to the instructors' prior knowledge of SCL. EFL instructors who experienced SCL as English language learners clearly showed a better understanding and stronger belief in SCL. Sabah and Du (2018) suggest that prior knowledge and experiences influence

instructors' understanding and beliefs about their instructional methods and played an influential role on defining their practices.

5.1.3 The Definition of SCL From the Perspective of EFL Students

Using SCL strategies and activities assists in creating a meaningful and authentic learning experience. A prior study indicated that adopting a lecturing style to teach learners has no significant effect on developing their linguistic and communicative skills (Shawer, 2010). One finding from this study demonstrates that students do not prefer the lecturing style and that they perceived learning that is focused on learners as an interactive activity that involves practices that encourage real communication. Students in this study also reported that they believed that they can learn English by using diverse resources and learning materials rather than depending on what has been taught as the main source of knowledge. This is assumed to promote effective learning as it enables learners to be exposed to real-life learning experiences (Peyton, Moore & Young, 2010). In addition, interactive activities are viewed as a major component of the SCL approach (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Implementing interactive activities, such as task-based language learning, project-based learning and cooperative learning strategies, to teach English is crucial to help learners construct communicative and linguistic skills (Lv, 2014). However, the findings of this study indicate that the students believed that the implementation of activities during class is not sufficient to foster interaction and practice communication. The students aspired for activities that would enable them to engage with others and express their own opinions, explore new information and cultures, and relate these to their own personal experiences. Dłaska (2013) mentioned that students learn better through interacting with

learning experiences that allow them to be exposed to different cultures and opposite views. They learn when they use their own personal experiences, perceptions, and cultures and by comparing and contrasting these with the new information proposed by others who belong to different cultures.

The findings also reported that the students believed that they were not involved enough in the process of learning and that the instructors did not give them the space to express themselves to effectively interact and engage in the class. This finding is in agreement with those of previous studies showing that EFL students who were not considered as partners in the decision-making process expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of interaction and engagement in the SCL environment (Al-Humaidi, 2015). Therefore, it is important to take students' opinions into consideration and involve them in every decision related to the process of learning (Tawalbeh & Al-Asmari, 2015).

Additionally, using a proper assessment tool that is aligned with the activities and teaching materials is one of the main principles proposed in chapter 2 to make EFL teaching align with SCL (Biggs & Tang, 2011). In this study, the interviewed students reported a lack of alignment between what is covered in the classroom, the employed activities, and what is included in the assessment.

In comparing the findings reported in sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.3, which illustrated how SCL is conceived by EFL instructors and students, it appears that both had a partial understanding of the essence of the SCL approach. A similar finding was identified by Sabah and Du (2018), who showed that instructors who are unaware of the main components of SCL, such as assessment for learning, showed a general understanding of SCL. Moreover, people usually perceive the aspects that define SCL differently, and

consequently, this may lead to a difficult or undesired implementation of this approach in classrooms (Neumann, 2013). The findings of this study show that interactions and engagement through activities are conceived differently; hence, there is a gap between the instructors' and students' perspectives, which leads to contradicting expectations and dissatisfaction among both groups.

5.2 Challenges Confronted By EFL Instructors and Students in the Process of Implementing SCL

5.2.1 Classroom Interaction

Active engagement and interaction in student-centered classrooms are considered among the vital goals for any SCL instructors (Garrett, 2008). The nature of interaction and engagement in the classroom was identified as having major challenges by both instructors and students; however, different perspectives were expressed regarding this particular point. For instructors, the challenge of classroom interaction was students' resistance to participation. Previous studies have reported similar findings, describing students' resistance to participation in SCL activities as an obstacle that prevents the implementation of collaborative activities (Jordan et al., 2014). Previous studies also mentioned that student's resistance towards SCL activities is a common response and was experienced by all college instructors, especially at the beginning of the implementation phase (Felder, 2011). Instructors in this study associated students' poor interaction inside the classroom with their shy personalities and a conservative cultural background that prevents them from accepting such an interactive approach. Thus, it is essential to take the

students' personal and cultural differences into consideration during the design and planning phases of activities (Tsegay, 2015).

From the students' point of view, the challenge of classroom interaction lies mainly in EFL instructors making little space for classroom activities and their frequent reliance on lecturing. As mentioned earlier, this may be due to a convenient approach taken by instructors to give the information to students. Also, the interaction may be viewed by EFL instructors as a one-way interaction between students and instructors or as a simple interaction between students and the content of the textbook. In addition, the instructors had too little time for interactive activities due to time pressure and the instructional requirement regarding content delivery (for further discussion see section 5.2.3). This finding is in line with the report from the study of Sabah and Du (2018), which indicated that student interaction is perceived among some of the QU instructors in the form of instructor-student instruction and the focus still remains on content delivery. Moreover, the finding in this study showed that instructors perceived the students' low interest and engagement with the type of interaction provided as a form of resistance to participation, which hindered the implementation of SCL strategies.

5.2.2 Mismatch of the Beliefs about the Teaching and Learning Roles

Implementing an SCL approach requires students to be viewed as 'fellow learners' who are allowed to have their input on the teaching materials and activities (Wohlfarth, 2008) and are responsible for enriching the learning environment with their prior knowledge and experiences, while instructors are viewed as the designers or activators of

learning (Taylor, 2013). Nevertheless, the findings of this study show that EFL instructors and students hold opposite views and beliefs about each other's roles.

The findings regarding students' opinions showed that the students viewed themselves as active learners and were willing to take responsibility for their own learning; however, they believed that instructors were not giving them a space to express themselves. They mentioned that by giving them the chance to express their opinions in the instructional method or through activities, they would feel excited about learning (Felder & Brent, 1996).

On the other hand, EFL instructors perceived themselves as facilitators who provide guidelines and assistance to facilitate the student's learning, while students were perceived as immature individuals who were not willing to take responsibility for their own learning. This finding corresponds with what has been reported in literature; that learners are not expected to be able to determine what learning path is most convenient to meet the learning goals, so it is the instructors' responsibility to direct the learners through the learning process (Pedersen & Liu, 2014). The finding identified in the responses of EFL instructors is in agreement with the results reported previously in the work of Tawalbeth and Al-Asmari (2015), which indicated that instructors hold deep beliefs that students are not ready to take responsibility for their learning. Therefore, a mismatch of beliefs about teaching and learning roles are identified in this study and are considered challenges by both instructors and students. This mismatch may create misunderstanding and miscommunication between instructors and students and

5.2.3 Institutional Constraints

The study identified a list of challenges that can be related to institutional constraints, including difficulty in aligning both the teaching materials and the activities with the pre-determined learning objectives and assessment, in addition to the time limitations and classroom size. These can be related to the literature showing a number of institutional challenges that block the implementation of SCL, such as fixed assessment systems that are unaligned with the curricula and course content (Neumann, 2013; Seng, 2013) and the lack of classroom space and time limitations (Mendonca et al., 2012).

Designing student-centered interactive teaching content and activities should be characterized by flexibility (Weimer, 2002) and linked to learning outcomes that suit the learners' needs and interests. However, one of these challenges identified was the misaligned teaching materials and activities, which meet the individual needs of different students, with the fixed learning objectives determined by department committee members. This finding corresponds with the findings of Ellili-Cherif and Hadba (2017), which indicated that adopting a top-down approach that excludes instructors' opinions and limits their creativity leads to low levels of satisfaction among those instructors and hinders the effective implementation of SCL activities.

To design an EFL course that is aligned with the components of the SCL approach, it is important to emphasize the role of developing formative assessment tools aligned with students' beliefs about learning and the learning outcomes (Zhao, Zhang & Du, 2017). As Ertmer and Newby (2013) pointed out, it essential for teachers and course designers to be able to analyse the instructional settings to determine the learning problems before assuming what effective solutions might work for learners. However, the findings in this

current study imply that EFL instructors lack the ability to diagnose students' needs, motivations and their learning problems via the proper formative tools. They are unaware of the significance of such a step in designing meaningful objectives and selecting teaching materials.

The findings also illustrate that the amount of time provided for SCL activities and the classroom size were regarded as some of the common institutional constraints. The EFL instructors believed that implementing SCL strategies and interactive activities that require movement and discussion within a large class size might take a lot of time. These activities can mean that maintaining discipline and managing the movement inside the class could take considerable time and effort. Time limitation and large classrooms were reported frequently in relevant studies as main reasons blocking the effective implementation of SCL (Mendonça, 2012). However, this finding contradicts with the finding reported in a recent study conducted on the same given context, which showed that a large classroom size is convenient for implementing SCL strategies (ElliliCherif&Hadba, 2017).

CHAPTER 6: RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION

This chapter represents a number of recommendations for future studies and the conclusion of this study.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the discussion presented in this study, a list of recommendations is given below to tackle the attitudinal and institutional challenges and to better facilitate the implementation of the SCL approach at a university level.

- First, EFL instructors need to deepen their understanding of the use of SCL activities. EFL instructors need to experience SCL activities as learners so that they can recognize the students' expectations for learning and become better designers and implementers of SCL activities.
- Second, EFL instructors and curricula designers need to be aware of the significance of achieving a consistency between the students' beliefs, the assessment criteria used to evaluate the activities or tasks, and the learning outcomes to develop the student's higher order thinking skills (Zhao, Zhang & Du, 2017).
- Third, as Cook-Sather (2014) stated, university faculty members and students usually communicate with each other in the classroom from different perspectives. Therefore, it is essential to investigate the underlying concepts that both EFL instructors and students hold about teaching and learning as well as the expected roles and responsibilities of each other in order to improve the quality of the teaching and learning experiences provided in the English

department at the FP. This could be regarded as a general recommendation for the educational system at the Foundation Program.

- Fourth, further studies should investigate the differences between EFL instructors based on their teaching experience.

6.2 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the implementation of the SCL approach in EFL courses from the perspectives of EFL instructors and students. Furthermore, it aimed to investigate the challenges that arose during the implementation phase. In comparing the perspectives of both EFL instructors and students, three main findings emerged in this study. First, the majority of EFL instructors have a general understanding of the essence of the SCL approach and the use of its different strategies. Second, there is a mismatch between EFL instructors' and students' understandings of their teaching and learning roles. Third, there are a number of attitudinal and institutional challenges that hinder the effective implementation of SCL.

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