

# Foundations of Person-Centered Approach and Its Applications in Education

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**Abstract:** As English has become the world's lingua franca, worldwide interest and demand for its acquisition are escalating. It is the reason why currently English learning and instructing are considered as a widespread activity among individuals. English is being trained for both academic and general purposes. However, it should not be ignored that during language mastering journey it is inevitable for learners to encounter some issues like Language interference. To cope with these difficulties, adopting contemporary educational approaches is crucial. This article aims to outline of Person-centered approach from its origin to influential training in educational settings.

**Keywords:** *Freedom, PCA, Empathic Understanding, Student-Centered Learning, Belief, Condition, Individuality.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

English is currently the most widely taught and learned language worldwide. It is a very ancient language that has undergone numerous transformations from its original form. Modern English, which emerged after the Renaissance period, was shaped under the influence of Latin and Germanic cultures. Today's English is the simplest and most adapted form of this ancient language; however, it is still considered a complex language for those learning it as a second language.

According to Pan Van (2020), English language teaching has emerged as an indispensable element in the context of rapid globalization and the growing prominence of lifelong learning as a core educational paradigm. Beyond its role in equipping individuals with linguistic competencies, it serves as a key driver for enhancing career prospects and fostering broader societal development.

Tetiana Aleksandrovyh and Mykola Malynka (2020) conceptualize pedagogical activity as a complex and multifaceted process, emphasizing that its outcomes are not immediately observable. The authors argue that the teaching profession demands not only profound knowledge across diverse disciplines but also essential human qualities such as patience, compassion, love, intellect, and wisdom. It is therefore natural to expect that educators maintain an intrinsic motivation for lifelong learning. The professional success of teachers largely depends on their selection and effective application of instructional methods, forms, and educational

technologies. Through these deliberate choices, educators facilitate the activation and deep assimilation of learners' knowledge.

PCA (Person-Centered Approach) formerly developed by American psychologist Carl Rogers in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, has significantly influenced both psychology and education. Initially designed as a therapeutic model, this approach emphasizes empathy, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard.

The central hypothesis of this approach was briefly stated by Carl Rogers as follows: "Each individual possesses vast internal resources for self-understanding, self-concept, primary relationships, and self-directed behavioral change. However, the use of these resources is only possible in a clearly defined facilitating psychological environment—that is, one characterized by genuine, supportive, and empathetic relationships" (Rogers, 1979). This hypothesis forms the main idea of the person-centered approach: a person can change and develop through their inner potential if they are in a suitable psychological environment.

As Mazaikina (2016) emphasizes in her research on the application of the person-centered approach (PCA) in higher education, 21st-century pedagogy increasingly prioritizes person-centered methods, as they enable a more holistic understanding of the student's personality. However, the implementation of PCA remains a complex task, given that the very notion of "personality" encompasses a broad

spectrum of qualities that an individual must possess to be considered a fully developed person.

The concept of person-centered approach was initially attached to several books of Carl Rogers. Richard E. Frank, in his 2014 doctoral dissertation titled *Carl Rogers, Self, Freedom, and Education*, states: "In 1969 Carl Rogers published *Freedom to Learn*, and, in a matter of weeks, the book's central theses had become the subject of rather heated educational debate. Perhaps it would be unfair to call *Freedom to Learn* a "methods book," but it is more than anything else" (Frank, 2014).

Before the publication of *Freedom to learn*, in 1967 Rogers wrote an article named *Graduate Education in Psychology: A Passionate Statement*. This article was primarily focused on the perceived inadequacy of master's programs in effectively preparing students for their future professional careers. With particular attention to the field of psychology, Rogers highlighted a number of assumptions and perspectives embedded in existing curricula that he considered static and misguided. Although the ideas and critical reflections presented in the article held significant value for the training of future psychologists, interestingly, *American Psychologist* initially rejected the manuscript for publication. In response, Rogers distributed the unpublished manuscript to interested readers, stating, and "...I have never written anything that has aroused more interest" (Rogers, 1967).

Another work that built upon Rogers's didactic ideas about person-centered approach is "Toward a Science of the Person". In this paper, he discusses three distinct ways of knowing: objective, subjective and interpersonal.

One of the fundamental book for the foundation of PCA is "On becoming a person" which comprised client-centered propositions. Subsequently, person-centered approach was arisen from this notion.

Many researchers explain the person-centered approach as one that focuses not on illness, but on health; not on teaching, but on learning; not on problems, but on solutions. This approach does not try to "fix" a person, but rather helps them grow and develop their potential — as individuals, in groups, and within organizations. It is based on human relationships that include trust, support for growth, respect, empathy, and honesty. The person-centered approach supports people's creativity and resilience, encourages them to take responsibility for their actions, and promotes independence rather than dependence (Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Zucconi, 2011; Rogers, Lyon, & Tausch, 2014).

In his 1979 book *The Foundations of the Person-Centered Approach*, Carl Rogers states that when a supportive psychological environment is created, clear changes in personality and behavior can occur. Research supporting this idea has been ongoing from 1949 to the present. Between 1972 and 1976, Aspy, Roebuck, and others conducted research in the field of education, while in 1978, Tausch and his colleagues in Germany carried out studies

across various fields. Although these studies did not gain widespread recognition, they hold a significant place in the academic community.

## II. METHODS

This article is based on a literature review aimed at exploring the theoretical foundations, historical development, and integration of the person-centered approach into the field of education. A total of 20 scholarly sources were selected for analysis, including peer-reviewed journal articles, monographs, dissertations, and conference proceeding. The following criteria were applied in selecting the sources:

- Direct relevance to the concept of person-centered approach;
- Coverage of psychological, pedagogical, and educational perspectives;
- Published between 2000 and 2025 (with the exception of classical theoretical works)
- Availability in reputable academic journals of scholarly publications.

The literature was retrieved from academic databases such as Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, Scopus and Eric. The analysis employed a thematic approach. Initially, the philosophical and psychological roots of the PCA were identified. Secondly, it was followed by an exploration of how the concept has been incorporated in educational practice, including its methodology and distinctive characteristics.

## III. RESULTS

Smith (2004) describes Carl Rogers as a psychologist in both the clinical and educational fields, as Rogers became well known for his person-centered approach in education and his non-directive therapy in clinical practice. This connection is further supported by Rogers's own belief, formed in the 1960s, that the relationship between a teacher and a student is similar to that between a therapist and a client (Rogers, 1969).

Carl Rogers explains that the person-centered approach represents the main idea that shaped his entire professional life. Based on his experiences, interactions with others, and research, this approach has taken different names over time, such as nondirective counseling, client-centered therapy, student-centered teaching, and group-centered leadership. As the approach began to be used in more areas, Rogers believed that the term *person-centered approach* best described his overall philosophy (Rogers, 1979).

Carl Rogers theorized the three conditions promote the development of the person in both therapeutic conversations and educational interactions. These conditions — unconditional positive regard, empathic understanding, and congruence — are considered essential for creating a safe and growth-oriented environment. When these conditions are present, individuals are more likely to explore their thoughts and feelings openly, leading to deeper self-awareness and personal change.

➤ *Genuineness, Realness, or Congruence*

The essence of this condition is the teacher's transparency toward the student. The teacher communicates openly and honestly with the student, without hiding anything, and the student perceives genuineness and sincerity in the teacher's attitude. When the teacher expresses themselves genuinely rather than superficially, the student is more likely to experience meaningful growth and development.

➤ *Unconditional Positive Regard*

This condition refers to a nonjudgmental, accepting, and trusting attitude, coupled with deep respect for the learner, which is essential for effective facilitators of learning. It embodies a genuine interest in and appreciation for the learner's perspectives and emotions, alongside a caring that is non-possessive and truly accepting of the individual. Fundamentally, it is an attitude of basic trust and belief in the inherent goodness and trustworthiness of human nature and the learner. For educators, this goes beyond a mere theoretical concept; it represents an existential commitment to valuing and respecting human beings.

➤ *Empathic Understanding*

Empathic understanding is another essential competency of the teacher, involving the ability to deeply comprehend the learner's inner experiences, capacities, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. Moreover, it includes the skill to respond to the learner with simplicity and sensitivity, effectively conveying this understanding in a respectful and delicate manner.

Carl Rogers explained the promising benefits of adopting these conditions. When a person feels accepted and valued, they are more likely to cultivate a compassionate attitude toward themselves. Being truly heard with empathy enables them to better attend to their inner experiences. As they come to understand and appreciate themselves, their sense of self becomes more aligned with these experiences, leading to greater authenticity and genuineness. This process, reflecting the supportive attitudes of the therapist, empowers the individual to foster their own growth more effectively. Ultimately, it allows them greater freedom to embrace and express their true, whole self.

Education is the most powerful way to shape our future because it teaches the new generation what is real and how society works. In this regard, Alberto Zucconi, President of the Person-Centered Approach Institute (IACP), states: "Education needs a new paradigm that serves people's needs and supports social responsibility, public service, and sustainable development".

According to Costa (2014), education becomes more effective when it focuses on people and enables individuals to connect with themselves, others, and the world. This approach contrasts with traditional education, which often suppresses natural human potential. Effective education should foster and support the development and realization of values such as empathy, respect, meaningful connection, creativity, and resilience.

Several scholars, such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, who conducted research on how students learn, laid the groundwork for student-centered learning. Carl Rogers further enriched this perspective with his research on human behavior, significantly shaping person-centered education. His work emphasizes the value of student-centered and lifelong learning, highlighting the role of teachers as facilitators rather than traditional instructors. To fulfill this role effectively, teachers must be able to build a supportive and empowering learning environment with their students—one grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual respect.

A perfect illustration of the topic would require my mentioning many more authors, famous mentors like Maria Montessori and Malcolm Knowles, and Ron Clark, but it would be a task impossible to cover everything in this paper. I want to present some important features of these representatives' position in terms of adopting PCA in education.

Maria Montessori (1870-1956) was a forerunner of student-centered learning, facilitating preschool children to learn through independent self-directed activities. Montessori Method represents a structured and practical example of learner-centered approach focusing on individual development, autonomy, and experiential learning in prepared environment.

With regard to Malcolm Knowles, he is also one of the major figures in student-centered adult education who has applied Rogers' ideas. His theories emphasize the importance of self-directed learning, practical experience, and relevance to learners' need.

Ron Clark has significantly contributed to the implementation of PCA in education through his innovative, student-focused teaching methods. In *the Ron Clark Story*, his teaching style reflects key PCA principles such as empathy, respect, and learner autonomy. By creating a supportive and motivating classroom environment, Clark empowers students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to believe themselves and take ownership of their learning.

The ancient philosopher Confucius once emphasized the importance of active engagement in learning when he said: "Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand, step back and I will act." This idea anticipates the principles of the person-centered approach, highlighting that true understanding and growth happen through personal involvement and empowerment rather than passive reception.

David Aspy and Flora Roebuck conducted the largest field study ever undertaken across 42 U.S. states and 7 countries between the 1970s and 1980s. In a 12-year study, they investigated the factors that contributed to student success, enhanced creativity, increased critical thinking and interaction, reduced violence, and greater satisfaction for both teachers and students. Their findings reinforced Carl Rogers' earlier conclusions: the most effective teachers were those who demonstrated empathy, genuinely valued their students,

and maintained authenticity in their teaching practices (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977, 1983).

Kember (2009) discussed the relevance of person-centered education and emphasized that the Person-Centered Approach (PCA) has positive effects across all levels and grades of education.

Alberto Zucconi put forward the idea that the mentors who adopt PCA in education should be willing to share their power and place greater trust in their students' innate capacity and motivation to learn.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The fundamental concept of the person-centered approach is that while every individual is unique, there are universal qualities shared by all humans. Therefore, the primary goal of education is to foster the development of individuality and to create supportive conditions that enable the realization of each learner's creative potential. This approach advocates for an educational environment that encourages students to explore and cultivate their personal strengths and abilities.

Harold Lyon (2014) cited Carl Rogers' ideas expressed in their dialogue: "Schools can, if they wish, deal with

students in ways that stimulate and facilitate significant and self-reliant learning. This approach is based on person-centered freedom – to learn and to live. It eliminates every one of the elements of conventional education. It does not rely on a carefully prescribed curriculum, but rather on one that is largely self-chosen; instead of standard assignments for all, each student sets his own assignment; lectures constitute the most infrequent mode of instruction; standardized tests lose their sanctified place; grades are either self-determined or become a relatively unimportant index of learning"

Personally-oriented education prioritizes the student as the central focus of the learning process. Grounded in the principles of humanistic pedagogy, it emphasizes respect for the individual, natural learning processes, recognition of personal developmental characteristics, and the cultivation of empathy and kindness. In this model, students are regarded as active collaborators in their educational journey rather than passive recipients.

A student-oriented lesson, unlike a traditional one, first of all changes the type of interaction "teacher-student". From the command style, the teacher moves to cooperation, focusing on the analysis not so much of the results as of the procedural activity of the student. The table shows the main differences between traditional and student-centered lessons (look at Table 1).

Table 1. Main Differences Between Traditional and Student-Centered Lessons

Traditional lesson	Student-centered lesson
1. Fixed knowledge and skills	1. Personal experience growth
2. Teachers set tasks and methods	2. Students choose tasks and methods
3. Teachers try to interest students	3. Focus on students' real interests
4. Individual lessons for some	4. Individual lessons for all
5. Teachers plan and direct activities	5. Students plan own activities
6. Teachers evaluate and correct mistakes	6. Students self-evaluate and correct
7. Teachers set and monitor rules	7. Students create and monitor rules
8. Teacher resolve conflicts	8. Students discuss and resolve conflicts

It is possible to implement personality-oriented learning when personality-oriented pedagogical technologies are used and the professional positions of the teacher is redefined.

According to I. Yakimanskaya and O. Yakunina, (2000) There are several positions which the teacher should take into account when developing a student-oriented lesson:

➤ *Reliance on Subjective Experience:*

In student-centered lessons, teachers should respect each student's perspective on the topic. Instead of judging answers as right or wrong, teachers need to create an open dialogue where students feel safe to share their ideas. Teachers should guide students to identify and support

responses that align well with the lesson's objectives and scientific content.

➤ *Knowledge of Psychophysical Features:*

Teachers must understand not only the difficulty of the material but also each student's individual learning preferences. Providing diverse formats (words, symbols, drawings, models) allows students to engage with content in ways that suit them best, encouraging creativity and personal expression.

➤ *As Equal Partners:*

Educational communication should enable students to choose tasks that interest them most in content and format, promoting active participation. Teachers should use frontal



methods only to present information, while individual and group work should focus on independent learning and collaboration.

It should be stated that there are some challenges related to the implementation of PCA in contemporary education for a number of reasons. Some of these are illustrated in the diagram below.

After analyzing the characteristics of student-centered technologies and comparing them with traditional teaching methods, it becomes evident that, at the turn of the century, the student-centered school model stands out as one of the most promising. This is due to several key factors:

- It places the student at the core of the educational process as an active participant in learning, aligning with the global trend of education humanization.
- Student-centered learning methods promote health-preserving practices.
- More and more parents are seeking educational environments that are not only service-oriented but also supportive, inclusive, and attentive to their child's individuality.

## V. CONCLUSION

In today's modern education system, the Person-Centered Approach (PCA) is highly important. In a world full of choices and constant information flow, students often feel confused and struggle to make decisions. PCA helps learners understand themselves better — what they truly need and how to reach their goals. The teacher plays a fundamental role in this process. More than just a source of knowledge, the teacher must also act as a guide and psychologist — someone who recognizes and nurtures the potential within every student. It is vital for teachers to believe in their students, even those who consider themselves weak, and to support the discovery and development of each learner's unique talents and capabilities. Ultimately, the effectiveness of this approach depends on the teacher's sensitivity, patience, and commitment. The ability to lead students toward meaningful learning outcomes — while respecting their individuality — is what defines true person-centered education.

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