The Implementation of the Learner-Centered Instruction at Knowledge University

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Abstract:

Learner-centered instruction focuses on promoting lifelong learning and independent problem-solving skills. LCI practice has its roots in constructivist theory of learning that highlights the critical role of learners in the learning process with relation to their prior knowledge. This study tries to answer the following questions: do they have positive attitudes towards the LCI? And do teachers of Knowledge University implement the LCI in their teaching? This study aims at finding out Knowledge University teachers' attitudes towards the LCI. It also aims at investigating the implementation of the LCI by Knowledge University teachers. The sample of this study includes all the permanent teachers working at Knowledge University in the academic year 2017-2018. Two questionnaires were prepared as the tools of the study; the first for teachers' attitudes towards LCI and the second for implementing LCI. The results revealed that teachers in general have positive attitudes and most of the implement LCI in their classes. Although teachers have positive attitudes towards continuous assessment, the assessment system at the university does not allow using such methods widely.

Key Words: LCI, teachers' attitudes, continuous assessment

1. Introduction

The term Learner-Centered-Instruction (LCI) refers to a wide range of educational programs, experiences, approaches, and strategies that aim at reaching out the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individuals or groups of learners. To carry out this task, educators, schools, counselors, and other learning specialists may arrange a wide variety of educational methods, from tailoring assignments and instructional techniques in the classroom to totally reshaping the ways in which students are put into groups and taught in a school, David (2009).

LCI most likely emerged in response to educational philosophies that did not fully consider what students needed to know or what methods would be most useful in facilitating the learning process for the students. For instance, many traditional approaches to learning could be considered "school-centered," rather than learner-centered, which is, schools are pretty often organized in ways that work well for organizational operations, but that might not reflect the most effective ways to educate students. For example, it is far more manageable—from an institutional, administrative, or logistical perspective—if all students are being taught in classrooms under the supervision of teachers, if they are given a fixed set of course options to choose from, if they all use the same textbooks and learning resources, or if their education unfolds according to a predetermined schedule, Weimer (1974).

Proponents of learner-centered instruction have challenged didactic methods of teaching, citing that the exclusive use of lectures and assigned reading material promote rote learning of facts instead of critical analysis and problem-solving skills. Learner-centered instruction reportedly benefits students' acquisition, retention and transfer of knowledge, self-awareness, critical thinking, and motivation (Malone, 2008). Furthermore, the term "learner-centered instruction" is used frequently to describe efforts to "move away from instructional methods that rely on mass transmission of knowledge" (Paris & Combs, 2006, p. 571) toward a more constructivist, inquiry-based approach. Although various definitions and descriptions of learner-centered instruction are used in the field, the approach generally implies a focus on individual learners (and all that they bring to the learning situation), combined with an emphasis on effective teaching practices

1.1 Statement of the problem

When students work alone, they don't learn to collaborate with other students, and their communication skills may not develop. Furthermore, teacher-centered instruction doesn't allow students to express themselves, ask questions, and direct their own learning. Traditional teacher-centered learning, in a large number of cases, ends up with a variety of problems when faced with the challenges of our modern life-world and a developing globalized job-market. Efficient communicative, cross-cultural, problem-solving and meta-cognitive skills as well as lifelong learning abilities can only be acquired through individual performance and interaction with others, preferably in a smaller and comprehensive study group. The traditional role of the teacher or instructor is, therefore, being substituted by the concept of a tutor or facilitator of the student's learning process. On an international level passive learning methods, therefore, need to be replaced by an active learning pedagogy to prepare learners for their new role as global citizens.

The process of curriculum development in KRG focuses on seeking information (students' autonomy), learning a second language and critical thinking (*On Route to Quality, 2011: p. 29*). To ensure students' autonomy, researchers need to investigate the attitude of teachers towards the Learner-Centered-Instruction (LCI) and its implementation. This approach emphasizes students' autonomy and critical thinking through different strategies and activities inside and outside the class. Knowledge University encourages its teachers to implement the LCI to achieve its mission and vision in preparing autonomous learners and critical thinkers to compete in the labor market to find jobs and develop their region.

This study tries to answer the following questions:

1-Do teachers of Knowledge University have positive attitudes towards the LCI?

2- Do teachers of Knowledge University implement the LCI in their teaching?

1.2.   Aims

This study aims at finding out Knowledge University teachers' attitudes towards the LCI. It also aims at investigating the implementation of the LCI by Knowledge University teachers; moreover it provides feedback on how to benefit from the merits of LCI which can also be expanded to all the other universities in KRG.

1.3. Significance of the study

Learner-centered instruction atmospheres have been shown to be practical in higher education. They have been defined specifically within higher education as both a mindset and a culture within a given educational institution and as learning approach broadly related to, and supported by constructivists theories of learning. They are characterized by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning and foster transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and reflective thinking, Armstrong (2012).

Hoidn (2017), the revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance, approved by the ministers of European higher education in May (2015: p. 78), include the following passage on student-centered learning: "Institutions should ensure that programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and should ensure that the assessment of students reflects this approach."

2. Learner-Centered-Instruction, its principles and theories

2.1. What is Learner-Centered-Instruction?

Learner-centered-instruction broadly includes educational methods that divert the focus of learning process from instructors to learners. In original usage, LCI aims to develop autonomous learners and independent students by putting the learning responsibility on the learners in the learning process (Jeffery H.D Cornelius –White & Adam P. Harbaugh 2010). LCI focuses on promoting lifelong learning and independent problem-solving skills. LCI practice has its roots in constructivist theory of learning that highlights the critical role of learners in the meaning making process with relation to their prior knowledge.

LCI puts students' interests first, acknowledging their voice as central to the learning experience. Nave (2015) discusses, in a student-centered learning space, students choose what they will learn, how they will learn, and how they will assess their own learning. This is in contrast to traditional education, also dubbed "teacher-centered learning", which situates the teacher as the primarily "active" role while students take a more "passive", receptive role. In a

teacher-centered classroom, teachers choose what the students will learn, how the students will learn, and how the students will be assessed on their learning. In contrast, LCI requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning and with their own pace of learning. Furthermore, LCI emphasizes each student's interests, abilities, and learning styles, viewing the teacher as a facilitator of learning for individuals rather than for the class as a whole.

2.2. The Theories behind Learner-Centered-Instruction

Theorists like John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, whose collective work focused on how students learn, have all supported the move to LCI. Carl Roger's ideas about the formation of the individual also contributed to learner-centered-instruction. Rogers wrote that "the only learning which significantly influences behavior and education is self-discovered". Maria Montessori was one of the pioneers of LCI who depicted how preschool children learn through independent self-directed interaction with previously presented activities.

Self-determination theory focuses on the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-motivated and 'self-determined'. When students are given the opportunity to gauge their learning, learning becomes an incentive.
LCI means inverting the traditional teacher-centered understanding of the learning process and putting students at the center of the learning process. In the teacher-centered classroom, teachers are the primary source for knowledge. On the other hand, in LCI classrooms, active learning is strongly encouraged. Armstrong (2012: p. 49) claimed that "traditional education ignores or suppresses learner responsibility".

A further distinction from a teacher-centered classroom to that of a student-centered classroom is when the teacher acts as a facilitator, as opposed to instructor. In essence, the teacher's goal in the learning process is to guide students into making new interpretations of the learning material, thereby 'experiencing' content, reaffirming Rogers' notion that "significant learning is acquired through doing".

Through peer-to-peer interaction, collaborative thinking can lead to an abundance of knowledge. In placing a teacher closer to a peer level, knowledge and learning is enhanced, serving the student and classroom overall. According to Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), students typically learn vicariously through one another. Vygotsky (1997, p. 368) proclaims, "Learning which is oriented toward developmental levels

that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of the child's overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process but rather lags behind this process."

2.3.   Principles of Learner-Centered-Instruction

Weimer's "Leaner centered teaching" book (1974) highlights the main principles of learner-centered-instruction as followings:

1. LCI engages students in the hard, messy work of learning. Students develop sophisticated learning skills when they are given opportunities to practice and take responsibilities for their learning.

Teachers are doing too many learning tasks for students. They ask the questions, call on students, and add detail to their answers. Teachers offer the examples, organize the content, and do the preview and the review.

2. LCI includes explicit skill instruction. Learner-centered teachers teach students how to think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyze arguments, generate hypotheses—all those learning skills are essential to mastering material in the discipline. Research consistently confirms that learning skills develop faster if they are taught explicitly along with the content.

3. LCI encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it. Learner-centered teachers talk about learning. In casual conversations, they ask students what they are learning. In class they may talk about their own learning. They challenge student assumptions about learning and encourage them to accept responsibility for decisions they make about learning; like how they study for exams, when they do assigned reading, whether they revise their writing or check their answers. Learner-centered teachers include assignment components in which students reflect, analyze and critique what they are learning and how they are learning it. The goal is to make students aware of themselves as learners and to make learning skills something students want to develop.

4. LCI motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes. Generally, teachers make too many of the decisions about learning for students. Teachers decide what students should learn, how they learn it, the pace at which they learn,

the conditions under which they learn and then teachers determine whether students have learned. Students aren't in a position to decide what content should be included in the course or which textbook is best, but when teachers make all the decisions, the motivation to learn decreases and learners become dependent. Learner-centered teachers search out ethically responsible ways to share power with students. They might give students some choices about which assignments they complete. They might make classroom policies something students can discuss. They might let students set assignment deadlines within a given time window and ask them to help create assessment criteria.

5. LCI encourages collaboration. It sees classrooms (online or face-to-face) as communities of learners. Learner-centered teachers recognize, and research consistently confirms, that students can learn from and with each other. Certainly the teacher has the expertise and an obligation to share it, but teachers can learn from students as well. Learner-centered teachers work to develop structures that promote shared commitments to learning. They see learning individually and collectively as the most important goal of any educational experience.

2.4.   Learner-centered assessment

One of the most critical differences between learner-centered learning and teacher-centered learning is in assessment. LCI typically involves more formative and continual assessment rather than formal assessment applying by teacher-centered learning methods. In LCI, students participate in the evaluation of their learning, which means students are involved in deciding how to demonstrate their learning. Developing assessment that supports learning and motivation is essential to the success of learner-centered approaches. Observation, Self-assessment, Peer-assessment, Projects, Seminars, and Portfolios are some of the ways used in LCI assessment (Nancy, John, and Fisher, 2016; Jacobs, Renandya, Power, and Michael, 2016),

3.   Research methodology(sample, instrument, validity and reliability)

The sample for this study includes all the permanent teachers working at Knowledge University in the academic year 2017-2018 which is 62. The number of teachers in each college is shown in table (1).

Table (1): the number of teachers in the colleges

No.	College	Permanent Teachers
1	Administration	16
2	Engineering	12
3	Science	18
4	Law	11
5	Arts	5
Total		62

The tools used to achieve the aims of this study are two questionnaires prepared by the researchers based on the main principles of the LCI, their experience in teaching, and the comments given by the jury members[1]. One questionnaire reflects the attitudes of the teachers towards Leaner-Centered-Instruction and the other reveals the degree to which each teacher is implementing LCI model in their lectures.

Face validity of the tools is checked by exposing them to a number of specialists in Linguistics, Applied Linguistics and teacher-development-committees in Kurdistan region and also at US Universities. Reliability was computed using test-re-test method.

The questionnaires were designed using goggle form[2]. The first questionnaire consists of 21 items and the second one consists of 25 items. Four items namely (10, 13, 21, and 24) were principles of teacher-centered approach which were added to check reliability of answers. Item 25 presents different techniques in the LCI. The questionnaires were emailed to all of the teachers, either to their account at Knowledge University, their personal emails. Or the

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[1] The jury members were (Prof.Sara Zimmerman, Prof. Mellanie Green, Barbara Bonham from Appalachian university, USA and Prof.Abdullatif Al Jumaily, Prof.Jabbar Darwesh from Baghdad University and Asst. Prof.Dr.Anjuman Sabir from Salahaddin University-Erbil.

[2] The link to the first questionnaire is:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/105TyqygQhScQZY2e39jCisDSplzI8b1Hop9Re3RsYCs/edit
And the link to the second questionnaire is:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1QZOSpv2n3nBkqGvRq2-TPGKZmJ29vdg-nIxMuZNHXok/edit

University teachers' Viber group. Teachers received the questionnaires and answered the questions according to their currently used methods and approaches while lecturing at Knowledge University. The researchers received 28 responses regarding teachers' attitudes and 39 responses regarding the implementation of LCI.

The data is later studied and analyzed using Percentage, independent sample t-test and SPSS program version 23 was used. Teachers' attitudes were considered Positive if the percentage of "agree" in the first questionnaire is above 80.

See tables (2 &3).

Table (2): Attitudes towards LCI
Number of participants and percentage of responses

No. of item	No. of participants	Agree %	Agree to some extent %	Disagree %
1	26	77.8	22.2	-
2	26	84.6	15.4	-
3	26	96.2	-	3.8
4	26	69.2	30.8	-
5	26	73.1	26.9	-
6	26	84	12	4
7	26	69.2	30.8	-
8	26	76.9	23.1	-
9	26	57.7	38.5	3.8
10	26	76.9	23.1	-
11	26	73.1	23.1	3.8
12	26	65.4	26.9	7.7
13	26	84.6	15.4	-
14	26	84.6	15.4	-
15	26	76	19.2	4.8
16	26	76.9	23.1	-
17	26	92	4	4
18	26	61.5	3.6	3.8
19	26	60	36	4
20	26	88.5	11.5	4
21	26	92.3	7.7	-

Table (2): Implementation of the LCI

Number of participants and percentage of responses

No. of item	No. of participants	I always do	I sometimes do	I rarely do
1	39	61.5	38.5	-
2	39	97.4	2.6	-
3	39	53.8	38.5	7.7
4	39	84.6	15.4	-
5	39	71.8	25.6	2.6
6	39	82.1	17.9	-
7	39	82.1	12.8	5.1
8	39	69.2	28.2	2.6
9	39	71.8	23.1	5.1
10	39	53.8	38.5	7.7
11	39	51.3	41	7.7
12	39	76.9	20.5	2.6
13	39	71.8	17.9	10.3
14	39	89.7	10.3	-
15	39	86.8	13.2	-
16	39	66.7	33.3	-
17	39	57.9	28.9	13.2
18	39	79.5	17.9	2.6
19	39	73.7	26.3	-
20	39	78.9	18.4	2.6
21	39	68.4	26.3	5.3
22	39	76.3	23.7	-
23	39	94.7	5.3	-
24	39	63.2	26.3	10.5
25	39	Percentage of use of LCI techniques		
a	Short-answer questions	38.5		
b	Projects	25.6		
c	Individual work	15.4		
d	Debates	28.2		
e	Oral reports	5.1		
f	Open-ended questions	17.9		

g	Peer correction	5.1		
h	Demonstrations	5.1		
I	Role playing	10.3		
J	Problem solving	20.5		
k	Written work	20.5		
l	Learner-learner interaction	12.8		

Results, conclusions and recommendations

The results presented in table 2 show that 75% of the participants have positive attitudes towards LCI while 28.57% have negative attitudes towards it. The results demonstrated in table 3, show that 74.94 of the teachers always implement the principles of LCI while 22.884 sometimes implement these principles and only 5.45% rarely use LCI. Comparing the last result with the results of the items that reflect the teacher-centered instruction (items no. 10,13,21,24) in questionnaire2, independent sample t-test was used and found that there is a significant difference between these two results and this shows that Knowledge University teachers or most of the teachers do not use the teacher-centered instruction widely. See tables (5&6). As for assessment methods in CLI, the results show that 96.2% of the teachers have positive attitudes towards using continuous assessment. Regarding implementing this type of assessment, results show that 53.8% of the teachers always use continuous assessment, 38.5% sometimes use it and 7.7% rarely use it. The reason is that teachers like to use it but the assessment system at most universities in KRG is teacher-centered where written examinations are almost the only method of assessment neglecting all other activities students do during the academic year. The system devotes only 10 marks for students' projects, seminars, reports and other activities.

As for the techniques used, their rank and percentage of use is shown in table 4. It is clear that Short-answer questions, Debates, problem solving and projects are mostly used by teachers. This is another indication of implementing LCI by Knowledge University teachers.

Table 4: Techniques, percentage of use and their Rank

Rank	technique	%
1	Short-answer questions	38.5
2	Debates	28.2
3	Projects	25.6
4	Problem solving	20.5
4	Demonstrations	20.5
4	Written Work	20.5
5	Open-ended questions	17.9
6	Individual work	15.4
7	Learner-learner questions\ interaction	12.8
8	Role Playing	10.3
9	Oral works	5.1
9	Peer correction	5.1

Table (5): Independent Sample t-test

Group Statistics

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
x	TCI always	4	64.3000	7.84262	3.92131
	LCI rarely	10	5.1800	3.50105	1.10713

Table (6): **Independent Samples Test**

Independent Samples Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
x Equal variances assumed	3.786	.075	20.160	12	**.000**	59.12000	2.93247	52.73070	65.50930
Equal variances not assumed			14.509	3.490	**.000**	59.12000	4.07460	47.12423	71.11577

 In short, LCI emerged in response to educational philosophies that did not fully consider what students needed to know or what methods would be most useful in facilitating the learning process for the students. This approach emphasizes students' autonomy and critical thinking through different strategies and activities inside and outside the class. LCI broadly includes educational methods that divert the focus of learning process from instructors to learners. Theorists like John Dewey, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, whose collective work focused on how students learn, have all supported the move to LCI. This approach engages students in class activities, teaches students how to think, solve problems, evaluate evidence, analyze arguments, generate hypotheses, encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it, motivates students by giving them some control over learning processes, and encourages collaboration.

Finding out that teachers of Knowledge University have positive attitudes towards LCI and they implement the principles of LCI is a good indication of the progress this university makes in preparing graduates who are lifelong learners taking the responsibility of their learning and who are critical thinkers analyzing and criticizing what they hear or read, solving problems of their community and finding suitable solutions for the problems they face in their life.

The researchers recommend the following to implement the LCI more at Knowledge University:

1. Conducting a course for the teacher to know more about the merits implementation of LCI.
2. Decreasing the number of the students in each class towards making homogeneous classes rather than heterogeneous ones.
3. Implement a more Learner-centered system of evaluation rather than teacher-centered ones.
4. Setting up a student-consultation-center to do need analysis through face to face talk with every single student who enrollees as a freshman before the start of the academic year to find out their interests, attitudes, abilities, cultural backgrounds.... so as to guide them properly towards achieving their goals.
5. Conducting seminars on how to do projects and in class activities for both teachers and students.

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پوخته

پەروەردەی فێرخواز لە چەقی فێربوون تیشک دەخاتە سـەر بڕەودان بە پرۆسـەیەکی فێرکردنی مەودا دوورودرێژ، هەروەها بڕەودان بە تواناکانی چارەسـەری کێشـەکان بە شـــێوەیەکی ســـەربەخۆ لە لایەن فێرخـــواز. ئەم جـــۆرە پەروەردەیە لە **بیـــردۆزی بونیـادگەراییەوە** سـەرچاوەی گرتـووە کە رۆلـی فێرخواز بە گرنـگ هەڵدەسـەنگێنی پەیوەست بەو زانیاریانەی کە فێرخواز پێشوتر دەستی خستووە.

ئەم توێژینەوەی بەردەسـتت هەوڵـدەدات وەڵامی چەنـد پرسـێک بـداتەوە، لەمـانە: ئایـا مامۆسـتایانی وانەبێژانی زانکۆی نـۆلیج هەڵویـست و کاردانەوەیـان چـۆنە لە هەمبـەر **بیـردۆزی بونایـدگەرایی؟** ئایـا تـا چەنـد ئەم بیـردۆزە لە وانەکانیانـدا جێبەجـێ دەکەن. نمونەکانی ئەم توێژینەوەیە گشت مامۆستاکانی زانکۆکەکە بۆ سـاڵی خوێندنی ٢٠١٧– ٢٠١٨ لە خۆ دەگرێ. دوو راپرسی ئامادەکراون بۆ کۆکردنەوەی داتا کە دانەیەکیان بۆ زانینی هەڵویـستی وانەبێژان سـەبارەت بە بیـردۆزەکەیەو و ئەوی تـر بـۆ جێبەجێکردنی بیردۆزەکە لە وانەبێژیدا.

ئەنجامەکان دەریدەخەن کە مامۆسـتاکان بە شـێوەیەکی گشـتی هەڵویـستی ئەرێنیان هەیە سـەبارەت بە بیـردۆزی بونیـادگەرایی و لە وانەکانیانـدا بەکاریـدەهێنن. بەڵام سـەرەڕای ئەوەی کە وانەبێـژان هەڵویـسـتێکی ئەرێنیـان هەیە لە هەمبـەر پرۆسـەی هەڵسـەنگاندنی بەردەوام، سیستەمی هەڵسـەنگاندن لە زانکۆ بە شـێوەیەکی گشـتی ڕێگە بۆ بەکارهێنانی ئەم جۆرە میتۆدانە خۆش ناکات.