

# STUDENT – CENTRED LEARNING: A WAY FORWARD TO LEARNING IN HIGHER INSTITUTION IN NIGERIA



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## **Abstract**

*The term Student-Centred Learning (SCL) is widely used in teaching and learning. The traditional or convectional learning approach has been subjected to criticism in recent years with the evolution of different learning theories and approaches and with the application of new pedagogical method within the higher education setting. That there is need for paradigm shift from the teacher to the student. This paper examines the concept Student-Centred*

*Learning (SCL). It x-rays some learning approaches such as Student-Centred Learning approach, Knowledge-Centred Learning approach, Learner-Centred approach, Assessment-Centred approach and community-Centred approach. This paper examines the different techniques used in student-centred learning which includes: Active-Learning, cooperative-Learning, collaborative-Learning, Problem based learning, small-group learning and project-Based Learning. The implication of students-centred learning in curriculum, assessment, teacher-centred and student-centred learning were x-ray. This paper recommended that the teacher-centred and student-centred learning approaches be used side by side to promote effective learning in our higher institutions.*

The traditional or conventional learning approach has been subjected to criticism in recent years with the evolution of different learning theories and approaches and with the application of new pedagogical methods within the higher education settings.

The term Students-Centred Learning (SCL) is widely used in teaching and learning. Many terms have been linked with Student-Centred Learning such as Flexible Learning approach (Taylor 2000), Experiential Learning (Burnard 1999), Self-Directed Learning and therefore slightly over used term student-centred learning can mean different thing to different people. In addition, in practice, it is also described by a range of terms and this has led to confusion surrounding the implementation.

The concept Student-Centred Learning has been credited as early as 1905 to Haryward and in 1956 to Dewey's work, Carl Rogers the father of client-centred counseling is also associated with expanding this approach into a general theory of education. The term Student-Centred Learning is also associated with the work of Piaget and more recently with Malcolm Knowless (Burnard 1999). Rogers (1983) in his book "Freedom to Learn for the 80s described the shift in power from expert teacher to the student learner driven by a need for a change in the traditional environment where in this so called educational atmosphere, students become passive, apathetic and bored. In the school system, the concept of Child-Centred education has been derived in particular from the work of Froebel and the idea that the teacher should not interfere with this process of maturation, but act as a guide (Simon 1999). Simon highlighted that this was linked with the process of development or readiness, that the child will learn when he/she is ready.

The paradigm shift away from teaching to an emphasis on learning has encouraged power to be moved from the teacher to the student. The teacher focused on transmission of information formats, such as lecture method have begun to be increasingly criticized and this has pave way for a widespread use of the term Student-Centred Learning. Lea et al (2003) maintain that one of the issues with Student-Centred Learning is the fact that many institutions and educators claim to be putting Student-Centred Learning into practice, but in reality they are not. A variety of phrases have been coined to describe a critical shift in mission and purpose of higher education.

Barr and Tagg (1995) expressed the change as a move from an "Instruction paradigm" in which universities delivered instruction to transfer knowledge from faculty to students" to a "learning paradigm" in which universities produce learning through "Student-discovery and construction of knowledge".

Student-Centred Learning is based on the philosophy that the student is at the heart of learning process. This is a motion which underlines all attempts at applying the Student-Centred Learning approach. While this means that the student is the focal point of the process, the role of the teacher remains paramount, when one considers that students are not all the same. Each student may require different ways of learning,

researching and analyzing the information available. Some students may require more support in embarking on a programme of studies.

In conventional also referred to as traditional learning tends to consider students as passive receptors of information without consideration of the need to actively participate in the learning process. Indeed, it is a non participatory approach where students are rarely expected to ask questions or to challenge the theories of the academic.

Within the conventional learning approach, the pedagogic method used are, lecture method, note taking, and memorizing information for later recognition or reproduction (MacLellan and Soden 2004).

### **The Concept, Student-Centred Learning**

Student-Centred Learning (SCL) has no universally agreed definition, despite its being a term often used by educationists and policy makers.

According to Emeasoba (2015) Student-Centred Learning approach is a process in which students influence the content, activities, materials and pace of the learning. This model places the students in the centre of the learning process. In this process, the instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them the skills they need to acquire in order to learn effectively.

According to Collins and O’ Brien (2003) Student-Centred Learning (SCL) is an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials and pace of learning. It is the centre of the learning process. Here the instructor provides the students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skill they need to do so effectively.

According to McCombs and Whistler (1997) state that Student-Centred Learning is a learning approach where by the “learners are treated as co-creator in the learning process as individuals with idea and issues that deserves attention and consideration”.

Brandes and Ginnis (1986) describe Student-Centred Learning as a process whereby the learner has full responsibility for his learning. The student makes choice and participate fully in the learning while the teacher becomes a facilitator and a guide.

### **Some Learning Environments or Approaches**

- Knowledge –centred learning
- Learner-Centred
- Assessment-Centred
- Community-Centred

### **Approaches**

1. Knowledge-Centred learning approach grows out of research on novice and expert that has revealed that experts have organized knowledge very differently from that of novices. So knowledge-Centred learning stresses learners developing their knowledge to facilitate transfer of their learning to new contexts and application of their learning to open-ended challenges such as problem solving, critical thinking, and design.
2. In a learner-centred learning environment or approach (McCombs and Whistler (1997) state that “learners are treated as co-creators in the learning process, as individuals with ideas and issues that deserve attention and consideration”. Learner-centred learning environment or approach recognize that the prior knowledge of learners powerfully influences future learning and thus attempt to build on prior knowledge.
3. Assessment-centred learning environment approach provides opportunities for feedback and improvement throughout the learning process leading to evaluation and judgment at the end of the learning process. Assessment for feedback and improvement is referred to as formative assessment. Nicol and Dick (2006) indicate that formative assessment can promote the development of capacities and attitude used in lifelong learning. Assessment-centred learning emphasizes congruence between learning goal and what is assessed.
4. Community Centred environment approach recognized that individual learner take many cues and insights from learners around them, so that community-centred learning approach facilitates purposeful interaction among learners to promote and sustain learnings.

### **Techniques of Student-Centred Learning**

These techniques such as active learning, cooperative learning, collaborative learning, problem based learning, small group and project based learning should be employed in teaching and learning. If these techniques are properly implemented can lead to increased motivation to learn, better understanding of the subject-matter and retention of knowledge.

**Active Learning:** According to Emeasoba (2015) Active learning is anything that student do in a classroom other than merely passively listening to an instructor’s lecture. This includes everything from listening practices which help the students to absorb what they hear, to short writing exercise in which students react to lecture materials, to complex group exercise in which students apply course materials “real life” situation to new problem.

**Cooperative Learning:** This is a Student-Centred Learning pedagogy in which students work in groups to help one another to learn. This educational method promotes

active learning activities which students do as groups of three or more, rather than alone or in pairs. This educational method employs structured groups of students which are assigned to different and complex exercises.

**Problem Based Learning:** This is Student-Centred Learning educational method in which students learn and acquire experiences by creating a learning problems. They learn through thinking strategies.

**Collaborative Learning:** This is Student-Centred Learning pedagogy in which two or three or more students work together to learn a task. This collaborative task performance reduces the tediousness of the task, and speed up the learning as they learn from each other.

According to Emeasoba (2015) Collaborative learning refers to those classroom strategies which have the instructor and the student placed on an equal footing working together in, for example, designing assignment, choosing texts, and presenting material to the class. Collaborative learning is a more radical departure from tradition than merely utilizing techniques aimed at enhancing student retention of material presented by the instructor.

**Small Group Learning:** Small group learning is Student-Centred Learning strategy in which the group task has to be carefully planned for the benefit of the group. The material is learned according to the ability of the group to achieve a common goal.

Small learning allows students to develop problem solving, interpersonal and communication skills for internal and external benefits.

**Project Based Learning:** This is a Student-Centred Learning pedagogy in which a task is selected by the student to explore the real-world problem, experiment, observe the problem, and draw conclusion.

Project based learning is a teaching method, in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge (Emeasoba 2015).

### **Implication for Curriculum Design**

In relation to curriculum design, Student-centredness includes the idea that students have choice in what they study & how to study. However, to what extent can that be carried out in the structures of today's universities?

Modularization, which will be expected in all undergraduate courses from 2016, provides a structure that allows students an element of choice in what modules they study. Donnelly and Fitzmaurice (2005) on signing modules for learning, highlighted the importance of attempting to focus on the needs of the students at the early stage of the curriculum design. Choice in the curriculum is not without difficulties

and Edwards argues about the dangers of individuality in the concept of the social learning and how this can in a seemingly contradictory way lead to disempowerment (2001).

One, student-centred approach to curriculum design, problem based learning (PBL) allows for some choice within a programme of area that students may study. It allow students to set some of their own learning objectives/outcome, dependent on prior knowledge. Problem Based Learning, through the use of problems/issues/triggers, encourage the students to develop their own learning goal, thereby filling in the gap in their knowledge or understanding. This element of choice or control is referred to in many of the definitions of student-centred learning. This aspect of responsibility aligns with the Lea etal (2003) view that Student-Centred Learning involves “increased responsibility and accountability on the part of the students. Problem based learning is higher with the student choice aspect of the Student-Centred Learning continuum than the usual problem-solving exercises performed in a lecture.

#### **Implication for Teaching/Learning Methods**

The university of Glasgow (2004) identified four main strategies in a study on Student-Centred Learning practices in their university.

1. The first strategy was to make students more active in acquiring knowledge and skill and might include exercises in class, field work, use of computer assisted learning (CAL) pages etc.
2. The second strategy was to make student more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it.
3. The third strategy was a focus on interaction such as the use of tutorials and other discussion groups.
4. The final strategy was the focus on transferable skills. It looks beyond the immediate course requirements to other benefit to the student in later world of employment.

#### **Implication/Difficulties in Assessment**

Black (1999) summarized the difficulties:

1. That the giving of marks and grades are over emphasized, while the giving of advice and the learning functions are underemphasized.
2. Learners are compared with one another which highlight competition rather than personal improvement. He explains the concept of self-assessment as essential activities to help students “take responsibility for their own learning which is an important aspect of student –centred learning (Benett 1999, Black 1999).

The addition of more formative assessment of feedback on essays, written comment on assignments, gradings will encourage Student-Centred approach.

Peer and Self Assessment both gives some control and responsibility back to the students emphasizing “an increased sense of autonomy in the learner.

The contrast can also highlight the manner in which the student would like to be assessed in order to demonstrate that they have reached the goals. This can add choice in what is to study and in addition, choice in how the student will be assessed. Choice is one of the key terms in relation to Student-Centred Learning.

### **The Effectiveness and Critiques of Student-Centred Learning**

The use of Student-Centred Learning appears to be reflective of today’s society where choice and democracy are important concepts, however, is it an effective approach to learning?

Lea et al (2003) reviewed several studies on Student-Centred Learning and found that overall it was an effective approach. A six-year study in Helsinki, which compared traditional and activating instruction, found that the activating group developed better study skills and understanding, but were slower in their study initially that the students had increased participation, motivation and grades in a first year information technology course (Hall and Saunders 1997).

94% of the students recommended Student-Centred Learning more than the conventional approach. The students in UK university elaborated on the impact of Student-Centred Learning on them, that they felt more respect for themselves in this approach. That it was more interesting, exciting and it boosted their confidence.

### **Disadvantage of Student-Centred Learning**

Despite its popularity, is not without its critics. The main critique of Student-Centred Learning is its focus on the individual learning. In addition, there are some difficulties in its implementation, that is the resources needed to implement it, the belief system of the student and staff and student’s lack of familiarity with the terms.

Simon (1999) highlight that “if each child is unique, and each requires a specific pedagogical approach appropriate to him or her, and to no other, the construction of an all embracing pedagogy or general principle of teaching become an impossibility.

There is isolation from peer group in Student-Centred Learning since learning is individualized.

### **Teacher-Centred Versus Student-Centred Learning**

In teacher-Centred Learning students put all of their focus on the teacher. The teacher talks the students exclusively listen. During activities, students work alone, and collaboration is discouraged.

### **Advantages of Teacher-Centred Learning**

- When education is teacher-centred, the classroom remains orderly. Students are quiet, and you retain full control of the classroom and its activities.
- Because the teacher directs all classroom activities, he don't have to worry that students will miss an important topic.

### **Disadvantages**

- When students work alone, they don't learn to collaborate with other students, and their communication skill may suffer.
- Teacher-centred instruction can be boring for students.
- Teacher-centred instruction doesn't allow students to express themselves, ask question, and direct their own learning

### **Student-Centred Learning**

When a classroom operates with student-centred learning, students and instructors share the focus. Instead of listening to the teacher exclusively, student and teachers interact equally.

### **Advantages of Students-Centred Learning**

- Students learn important communicative and collaborative skill through group work.
- Students learn to direct their own learning, ask question, and complete tasks independently.
- Students are more interested in learning activities when they can interact with one another and participate actively

### **Disadvantages of Student-Centred Learning**

- Because the students are talking, classrooms may often be noisy or chaotic.
- Teachers may have to attempt to manage all students activities at once, which can be difficult, when students are working on different stages of the same project.
- Because the teacher doesn't always deliver instruction to all students at once, some students prefer to work alone, so group work may become problematic.

### **Conclusion**

In recent years, more teachers recommend Student-Centred Learning. However, some students maintained that teacher-centred education is more effective than Student-Centred Learning.

### **Recommendation**

It is better for the teacher to use a combination of both teacher-centred and Student-Centred Learning approach.

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