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## Achieving Democratic Education in Africa Through Learner-Centred Pedagogy: The Challenge of Transition

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By

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### Abstract

*A fundamental goal of education in any democratic society is to produce enlightened, responsible, active and critical citizens who can make informed and reasoned decisions on issues confronting the local and global community. This can be achieved through an establishment of an efficient democratic system of education. Democratic education rides on the wheels of learner-centred pedagogy. Learner-centred pedagogy has become the bedrock of teaching and learning in many developed and developing countries with long history of democratic traditions. In some countries where it has been adopted in' Africa, transition from traditional to learner centred methods of assessing students' learning poses a serious challenge. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the problems and constraints that constitute this challenge. In doing this, the author first explains the link between democracy and education, and the role of learner centred instruction/assessment in realising democratic ends of education. The paper concludes with some suggestions on strategies, based on African context, that could be adopted to make assessment of learning under learner-centred pedagogy more efficient.*

### Introduction

In many African countries and, in fact, in most developed and developing countries, there is a growing awareness that teaching and assessment of student's learning based on the traditional teaching methods are not yielding the required results. The explanation is that traditional teaching and assessment methods are basically authoritarian. As a result learning and assessment are ineffective in that they promote dependence, rigidity, passivity, a false certainty about knowledge and a uniform approach to a diverse group of people (Weimer, 2002). Researchers in education have sought for an alternative approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The result is learner-centred methodology.

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Learner-centred teaching has for long been promoted as a methodology in Africa, (Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) (2003)

O'Sullivan (2004); Tabulawa (1998, 2003), in other developing countries (Tatto 1999) and in the developed world (Cuban 1993).

In the immediate post-apartheid South Africa for example, a new Outcomes-based Education (OBE) curriculum was introduced. This curriculum strongly encourages learner-centred pedagogy in general. This is because learner-centred teaching is seen as the most appropriate means of breaking the authoritarian social relations of apartheid by fostering democratic education through learner participation, promoting knowledge relevant to learners' social contexts and experiences, and stimulating the development of critical thinking and problem solving (South Africa Department of Education 1996,1997). Moreover, education in general and the curriculum in particular, are seen as central to addressing the imbalances of the past by empowering individuals with conceptually deep and useful knowledge and to producing a just, democratic and internationally competitive nation (Department of Education op.cit).

In Namibia a main justification for adopting learner-centred education in the national educational system since independence in 1990, for example, is that in the "new context of Education For All, teacher-centred education is ineffective" In the Ministry's document it was stated that:

*As we make the transition from educating an elite to education for all we are also making another shift, from teacher-centred to learner-centred education. We are accustomed to classrooms where attention and activities are focused on the teacher. Indeed, we have probably all encountered teachers set in their ways that pay little attention to the backgrounds, interests and orientations of their students. . . . Few people learn easily or well in that setting. Much of the significant learning that does take place is accomplished despite, not because of, the teacher. Teacher-centred instruction is inefficient and frustrating to most learners and certainly is inconsistent with education for all' (Namibia Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993: 10).*

In Rwanda, the National Council for Higher Education has recommended the introduction of Learner-centred education in all higher institution with effect from the academic year that started in January 2007. The Council in its policy document: *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework of Rwanda,* recommended generic learning outcomes for awards at each level of higher education. These generic learning outcomes are expected to empower the learner with, among other things, applied knowledge and understanding, generic cognitive skills, autonomy, accountability, working with other skills etc. These skills are the hallmarks of learner-centred pedagogy.

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educational policies of Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zambia etc.

A common feature that runs through all the countries mentioned above is an establishment of a developing democratic system, that is struggling very hard to endure.

In any democratic society, education remains at the core of national stability, security, and an instrument for political and economic growth and development. Dewey (1927) maintains that "a society which makes provision for participation in the good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible forms of associated life promotes democracy. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals personal interest in social relationship and control, and the habits of mind which secure social change without introducing disorder."

### **Education and Democracy**

It is sometimes argued that the larger purpose of all education is to foster democratic values. In our attempt to examine the relationship between education, democracy and learner-centred pedagogy, we shall start by seeking answers to the following questions: What does democracy mean?, What is the relationship between education and democracy?, and What then is democratic education?

By conventional definition, democracy "is a system of government that honors equity and freedom- a system where every adult has one vote, and all may speak freely" Peter Levine (2006). Though this conception of democracy agrees largely with the original Greek idea (i.e government of the people by the people for the people), citizens of most developing countries know too well that they are yet to be blessed with that type of system. For one thing, no political institution in Africa (including those that canvass free elections, equal civil rights etc) could claim "inherent sanctity" that could usher in such a haven. For our purpose in this paper, we would prefer to adopt John Dewey's definition of democracy. *In Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey stressed that democracy "is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience." (p.87). In this sense, democracy is not seen as a completed process once the democratic type of government is established. Rather, it is seen as a continuing project going hand in hand with education.

Most philosophers seem to agree that the relationship between education and democracy is that of inter-dependence. For instance, Perry (1954) maintains that "Education is not merely a boon conferred by democracy, but a condition of its survival and of its becoming that which it undertakes to be". In Dewey's assessment, an educated populace secures the necessary freedoms upon which a democratic society is built. According to him". . . a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education." By implication educated people are by far the most likely to participate in democracy. This suggests too that education prepares people for citizenship. This interrelationship between education and democracy is reflected in a new curriculum for Citizenship Education which was developed in Nigeria to reflect the transition to constitutional democracy and the new Constitution in 1999. The philosophy of the social studies

education entrenched in the curriculum hinges in part on the idea that Nigerian schools should not only train individuals to be just and competent individuals, but to function as contributing and participatory members of a free constitutional democratic nation. Abullahi, A, Sadiq et al.(1999).

### **Democratic Education**

Gribble (2005), defined democratic education in its simplest form as; "education in which teachers and learners work together as equals". In this sense, democratic education aims to develop real democracy through active participation by all those involved in classrooms and educational institutions. In this type of education students have the power to make decisions about their learning, because power is shared rather than appropriated in advance by a minority of people. (Apple and Beane (1995). In line with this thinking, democratic education school is seen as characterized by free flow and exchange of ideas including marginal ones; critical thinking and reflection on ideas, opinions, problems and policies; concern both for the public good and for the rights of individuals and minorities; and belief in the individual and collective capacity of people to generate possibilities for resolving problems (pp. 6-7).

### **Features of Learner-Centred Pedagogy that Promote Democratic Education**

As both a philosophy and methodology of instruction, learner-centred pedagogy incorporates all the principles that characterize democracy and by implication, democratic education.

Although the concept of learner-centred education is continuously being defined and redefined by theorists and applied researchers, the models of learner-centred pedagogy in the research literature have several elements in common. Learner-centred pedagogy is a system of instruction based on a student's individual choices, interests, needs, abilities, learning styles, types of intelligences and educational goals within an authentic context where situated thinking is deemed important (APA, 1997; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Weimer, 2002). Unlike the traditional lecture method that is basically authoritarian, whereby the burden of communicating course materials, designing assignments and tests, grading etc, resides primarily on the teacher, learner-centred pedagogy is grounded on the principles of promoting collaboration, team spirit, caring, participation, growth and recognition of each individual's right in the promotion of authentic learning as against competition. Justifying the adoption of learner-centred education policy in Namibia, Swarts P. (2003) stated: "A learner-centred approach demands a high degree of learner participation, contribution and production... [it] is based on a democratic pedagogy, a methodology which promotes learning through understanding and practice directed towards empowerment of a reflective, critical and active citizenship." (The Broad Curriculum for the Basic Education Teacher's Diploma (BETD Namibia, pp. 1-2).  
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Learner-centred instruction approaches the design of instruction from the perspective of the learner rather than from the perspective of the teacher. The teacher

tailors instruction and subject matter to students' needs, interests and capacities (Dewey, 1916). The instructional approach based on the principles of learner-centredness: emphasizes the student as the main agent of learning; makes student learning the principal goal; concentrates on the use of intentional processes on students' part; encourages teacher-student interaction in which students become more active learners; expects the teacher to act as a facilitator or a guide; de-emphasizes the frequency of information transmission, but focuses more on students learning, views each phase of instruction in terms of its effects on students' learning (APA, 1997; Fosnot, 1996; Henson, 2003; McCombs & Whisler).

### **Research Evidence on the Effectiveness of Democratic Education in Promoting Democratic Values**

There is relatively widespread agreement among researchers (Kyle and Jenks (2002), on democratic education and pedagogical skills that students learn in good part by doing and by working in groups. It is through participation and active engagement in the class, not through rote memorization, that students develop into democratic citizens (p. 155).

Education agenda driven by a commitment to participatory democracy.. entails promoting active, engaged participation in the classroom and-for adult citizens-in democratic governance; facilitating self-development/self-actualization; fostering critical thinking, writing, and reading skills (Kyle et al op.cit. p. 158). It follows therefore that, if schools are to educate for democracy then they must practice what they preach. They must be organized in such a way as to develop democratic skills and values through experience. This means a shift of power and authority away from staff to students, both in terms of decisions about how the institution is run and in terms of what is learned in the classroom and how. Teaching and learning in such a situation will be characterized by a variety of teaching methods which regularly include such skills as problem solving, discussions and projects etc where the students themselves are influential in shaping the direction the work takes.

Research evidence from developed and developing countries suggests that a democratic school environment can indeed foster democratic values, skills and behaviours. Hepburn, summarizing five pieces of research in the United States, concluded that:

*Collectively, the five research studies reviewed here provide evidence that democratic schooling is more than just a philosopher's dream. Carried out in different conceptual frameworks with differing methods, these studies indicate that democratic education is not only possible but that it is feasible, even within the bureaucratic structure of American schools and in the shifting attitudes of society. Moreover, the five studies add to the evidence, collected in other democratic countries, that democratic experiences in the school and the classroom do contribute to the participatory awareness, skills and attitudes fundamental to life in democratic societies' (1984:261).*

John and Osborn, (1992) compared two secondary schools in Britain, one traditional and authoritarian and one democratic, in terms of the development of civic attitudes. The research suggested that there were somewhat stronger democratic attitudes among the students from the democratic school than the traditional one. Also, students at the democratic school were more ardent supporters of race and gender equality but were also more skeptical about whether the government actually operated democratically. The findings also suggested that the democratic school was more likely to encourage freedom of expression in the classroom.

Research studies conducted in some African countries, where learner-centred education is in practice, shows that more democratically organized schools affect student attitudes and learning. In a study carried out by Harber, (1993) in two schools in Tanzania with active student councils, it was noted by both staff and students that they felt that participation had helped to develop high performance, responsibility, confidence, problem-solving through discussion and a friendlier and more co-operative environment.

Brock-Utne, et al (1994) reported an interesting study carried out in SWAPO (South West African Peoples Organization) school at Loudima in Congo Brazzaville. After independence the students from Loudima were moved to a 'normal' (traditional) school at Mweshipandeka in northern Namibia. The transferred students from Loudima were used to a learner-centred curriculum that used group, discussion, problem solving and critical thinking. Because these latter had developed more critical and inquiry skills which encouraged them to challenge teachers, this had had an impact on them as they were seen as "rude" and "lacking respect" by their teachers brought up under traditional authoritarian system of education. The research showed however, that in general terms the students from Loudima performed relatively better in subjects where critical skills, inquiry and group activity were needed. (Brock-Utne, Appiah-Endresen and Oliver, 1994: 17).

What all these tend to indicate is that in relative terms school organizations which encourage and reward student involvement are linked to higher learning. Achievement is higher where students take responsibility for their own learning. Effective schools are those which encourage a mix of teaching methods that includes individualized and co-operative learning as well as limited amounts of enthusiastic and motivated whole-Class teaching.

Despite these research evidences in favour of democratic education, its implementation in institutions of learning has proved pretty difficult. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that for any genuine democratic education to be implemented and the students assessed effectively, it has to be learner centred

pedagogy driven. On its part learner-centred pedagogy ride on the wheels of certain teaching techniques (Okenyi 2007) whose basic principles of assessment differ appreciably from the traditional methods of assessing students' learning.

### **Principles of Assessment Based on Learner-Centred Education**

It is considered necessary here to show how researchers have tried through definition, to focus on the principles that underpin assessment of student's learning based on learner-centred teaching techniques. For instance, Andrews (1994) states:

*Learner-centered assessment is a form of assessment that is derived from the specification of a set of outcomes; that so clearly states both the outcomes – specific and generic – that assessors, students and interested third parties can all make reasonably, objective judgments with respect to student achievement or non achievement of these outcomes; and that certifies student progress on the basis of demonstrated achievement of these outcomes. Assessments are not tied to time in formal educational settings (Andrews; in Wolf 1994:1).*

In the above definition, the focus is on "specification of a set of outcomes". Such outcomes must be so obvious to the teacher, the student, and most (important these days), the third parties (i.e. parents and employers), that the inferences drawn from them must be reasonably objective and demonstrable. There is a temptation to argue here that a score given to student at the end of every examination or continuous assessment is an "outcome" and demonstrates the amount of learning he has acquired from a teaching programme. And so to that extent, there is basically no difference between assessment of student's learning from the perspectives of traditional and learner-centred teaching. We shall be quick to point out here that such an observation is flawed in the sense that "outcomes" in learner-centred education go beyond numerical scores. Outcomes in learner-centred assessment in order to make sense must be viewed from the context of the basic principles of learner-centred assessment enunciated by Spady & Marshall (1994). According to them the following principles should guide planning and execution of assessment of the students taught whose learning was facilitated using learner-centred techniques:

**Clarity of Focus about Outcomes:** This requires that all the learner's assessment tasks must be derived from outcomes that are clearly and explicitly well-defined, and that the students should know what they are aiming for. These are essential if the assessment is expected to produce evidence from which valid inferences can be made about learners' achievements. By inference, the basic tenets of validity which maintains that learners should not be assessed on things that they have not been helped to learn must apply here.

**Designing Backwards:** This sounds contradictory but true with reference to designing assessment curriculum for learner-centred education. Here Spady et al (op cit), seem to be suggesting that the curriculum should be designed backward using the major outcomes as the focus and linking all planning, teaching and assessment decisions

directly to these outcomes. When this principle is applied to assessment it requires that teachers need to be able to describe the purpose of each assessment task in terms of (a) how it provides information about learners' current understanding, (b) how it provides information on learners' readiness to proceed to the next step in learning and (c) how it provides information on each learner's progress towards longterm outcomes. There is a clear link here to the commonsense notion that each assessment task should inform the teacher about the readiness of learners to proceed to more complex learning. Aloshna, Andeyar and Killen (2003).

**Consistency with High Expectations of Success.** This principle is consistent with the learner-centred education principle that education is for *all* learners, and that teachers should make provisions for all learners to succeed by providing them encouragement to engage deeply with the issues they are learning and to achieve a high challenging standard. Based on this principle, assessment tasks must be challenging, not simply routine; the assessment must provide scope for learners to demonstrate deep level understanding and high levels of achievement; it must be possible to discriminate between low and high levels of achievement; and, excellence in student achievement must be recognised and rewarded. It is essentially because of this principle that learner centred education emphasises the use of criterion-referenced assessment rather than norm-referenced assessment.

### **The Principle of Expanded Opportunity**

This principle embodies the idea, that given adequate opportunity and time, all learners can succeed. What really matters is that learners are ultimately successful in their learning, not that they learn in a particular way or within a fixed period of time. Learners who do not achieve appropriately high levels of understanding at their first attempt must be provided with further opportunities to learn and to demonstrate their learning. Obviously this poses some practical constraints to teachers since in all formal education system; learners attend school for a limited number of days each year. Aloshna et al (op cit) suggest that since it is incumbent on teachers to adapt to the needs of their learners, the implication of this principle to teachers is that they need to investigate alternative methods of assessment and to question their traditional approaches on issues such as assignment due dates. This principle however, is in correspondence with the basic assessment principle of fairness. It is not fair to expect that all learners will learn and be ready for assessment at the same time. Nor is it fair to judge learners' achievements on the basis of a very limited number of opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned.

According to Killen (2002) the principle of assessment outlined above are in agreement with the fundamental principles of learner-centred education. We summarize some of the learner-centred principles below as expounded in Killen (op cit.):

Assessment procedures should focus on outcomes being tested so that valid inferences could be made from the learning achieved.

Assessment should reflect the knowledge and skills that are most important for learners to learn (that is, the building blocks for the achievement of long-term outcomes).

Assessment should challenge learners to the limits of their understanding and their ability to apply their knowledge. It will, therefore, discriminate between those who have achieved high standards and those who have not.

### **Assessment should be Reliable and Fair**

This aims at minimising measurement errors and allowing learners to demonstrate their understanding at appropriate times and in ways that will produce consistent results. It also seeks to make quality performance explicit and to provide learners the opportunity to demonstrate their individual understanding not influenced by any irrelevant factors such as the learner's cultural or economic background.

Assessment tasks should be valid, authentic and meaningful so that they support every learner's opportunity to learn and, because learners are individuals, assessment should allow this individuality to be demonstrated"

Learner-centred assessment should be criterion referenced as against norm-referenced. It is continuous and integral with learning practices

Assessment should be used for formative and summative purposes Learner-centred assessment is aligned with other aspects of the system.

### **Need For Paradigm Shift**

From the foregoing, it is clear that to achieve effective assessment under the learner-centred education format there is need for a paradigm shift, a shift from traditional pencil and paper assessment that tends to focus on rote learning and emphasis on test scores at the expense of skills-oriented outcomes learning, to a learning and teaching method that focuses not only on how we teach but more importantly on how to assess the learners so as to achieve the goal of realistic appraisal of the learning achieved. Assessment of students' learning under learner centred education calls for more creativity on the part of teachers to evolve more varied forms of assessment that place a strong emphasis on student learning outcomes. Broadfoot (1993) has indicated that in this new paradigm "... *it is learning itself, rather than simply the measurement of that learning, which is its central purpose*". He recommends certain forms of assessment that will increase the validity of evaluating student achievement based on this paradigm. These include portfolios and authentic assessment which may incorporate: exhibitions of learning; oral; practical; performances; individual or group presentations; essay examinations; research projects and scientific experiments.

### **Problems and Constraints Affecting Transition from Traditional to Learner-Centred methods of Assessing Students' Learning**

#### **Resistance to Change**

There is a natural resistance to change in human nature. In any environment where there is a call for a change from the traditional methods of doing things to a new

one, initial resistance is likely to occur. Changing from traditional to learner-centred method of assessing learning is like transiting from a familiar terrain to another full of doubts and uncertainties. Adoption of any innovation involves altering human behavior, and the predisposition to accept change. In our own circumstances, We shall examine the nature of this initial resistance from the perspectives of the lecturer, the student and the faculty.

### **Lecturer Resistance**

Many teachers in higher institutions in Africa are yet to be convinced that changing to learner-centred method is absolutely necessary. Some tend to feel that it is just a preference of one learning theory to another without adequate research evidence for the preference. The situation is not much different in other lands. In an effort to explain why teachers tend to prefer traditional method of teaching and assessment, Haas and Keeley (1998) posit that lecturers simply have not been exposed to other pedagogical styles and assessment strategies associated with them. Other reasons include:

- lack of access to proper training in the innovative assessment system (Jacobson, 2000, 2001),
- pressure from students who are themselves resistant to change (Child & Williams, 1996),
- Class sizes that number in the dozens or hundreds whereby the easiest assessment model may seem the, and only viable option (Haas & Keeley, 1998), and
- lack of incentives and presence of actual disincentives (Hannah & English, 1999).

### **Student Resistance**

In the same vein, our students are used to the system of teaching whereby the teachers have been telling them everything they needed to know. From the students' perspectives, learner-centred teaching method threatens this. It tends to shift a lot of responsibilities to students. Some of these responsibilities include: substituting active learning experiences for lectures, holding students responsible for material that has not been explicitly discussed and requesting that they fill up the gaps through research, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring creative or critical thinking that cannot be solved by following text examples, assigning variety of unconventional writing exercises etc, to students (Felder R & Brent R 1996). This scenario is bound to arouse some resistance from among the students.

Personal experience has shown that some of our students seem to feel that the entire thing about learner-centred education is transferring the burden of teaching from the teachers to them. Others dismiss the whole idea as a huge joke. A few have even tended to be violent when you insist on using the same method in all the subsequent lessons and using the outcomes as basis for assessment basis. A colleague was

explicitly told by a student that the government is paying him (the teacher) to teach them, not for them to teach themselves.

### **Language Problem**

Another challenge Learner-centred approach imposes on the students is in the area of language competence. By nature, the approach requires students to make personal contributions both at the class level and in their small groups. It also requires collecting and analyzing a lot of secondary data from multiple sources: textbooks, library resources, websites etc. These require competency in some foreign languages which many of the students do not possess. In many countries in Africa today, many post-secondary school students lack the basic communication skills in English needed to prepare them for advanced learning in higher institutions. As a result, many universities in Africa put in place such make-shift/remedial mechanisms as "basic communication skills" "Intensive language programmes", "Bridging Courses" etc, aimed at ameliorating the perceived deficiencies. Bad news however, is that most students do not take these courses seriously and yet manage to obtain fantastic scores in them without comparable improvement in their communication skills. A factor that may be responsible for this curious development is number. The number of students who go through these programmes is often so overwhelming that it defies effective supervision during examinations.

### **Resistance from Faculty/Institutional Traditions**

Faculties in higher institutions provide teachers with clearly defined course outlines/module, or may require teachers to draw them and submit for approval. Teachers are required to "cover" all or some stated percentage of the topics contained in these modules before submitting students for examination on them. There is also the issue of assigning 40% to CAT and 60% to final examinations. In fairness to the respective faculties or institutions these are necessary to meet up with the requirements of content validity of the programmes and certification of the products of the programmes in question. In the traditional method of lecturing, many teachers rush to meet up with these surface learning demands in diverse ways but which may be in contrast to learner centred approach to teaching.

In view of this situation, a teacher employing some of the learner-centred approaches discussed above is likely to be confronted by the following concerns: Inability to "cover" the course outline/module when time is spent on active learning exercises. Loss of class control when students are working or are arguing in groups during a class session. Non-availability of recommended reading materials, and or inability of students to understand them when available. Persistent request by some curious students for "right answers" to open-ended problems especially those demanding critical and or creative thinking. Cheating by some lazy students who prefer to copy their colleagues' homework, presentation, or group projects. Students getting credits for group assignments without participating in doing them. Inability of the teacher to monitor the accuracy/authenticity of facts given by students when

engaged in peer teaching and learning etc. Inadequate infrastructural and personnel demands needed to effectively carry out learner-centred methods.

### **Other Problems and Constraints Posed by Traditional Systems of Education.**

Centralised examinations system is a feature of most educational systems in the world. Centralized examinations in any country are directly linked to access to power (you have to get a certain mark to go to the next level, which admits you into a narrower and narrower elite).

Assessment and examinations are parts of every such curriculum: the backwash effect of assessment and examinations on teaching methods and on what is taught is too obvious to need mentioning here. According to Brodie, K. (2000). "The traditional system of education is examination-dominated. Teachers teach *for* the examination and not *for* learning".

Much formal testing in schools is modelled on the national examination papers (RNEC in Rwanda, WAEC, NECO in Nigeria, Grade 10 in Namibia etc). Many schools use several weeks per year only *for* revision *for* formal testing and examinations, and *for* the tests and examinations themselves. In some parts of Nigeria, *for* instance, private school directors make *fortunes from* desperate students by training them on how to make A's in public examinations at the expense of authentic skills that may be required at the working places. At the end we turn out graduates who are experts in passing exams. Because learner-centred pedagogy focuses on quality of the products that can employ their skills creatively under simulated working environment situation, these types of assessment that are pencil and paper oriented, and which serve as ends not as means to life-long learning are not encouraged.

For so many reasons completely out of control of the school systems and central examination bodies, the contents of student assessment and examination are often designed to assess narrower range of skills than the curriculum as a whole, because of the dependency on the written examination. The most artificial and therefore least valid *form* of examination is the one most widely used because it is the simplest to administer and least costly: the written examination, based on memory recall.

Except perhaps in some science subjects (where laboratories are equipped and functional), there is a tendency among traditional teachers to ignore the skill that encourages reality in terms of context and therefore most valid *form* of examination. Incidentally the most valid *form* of examination is the one that employs the skills of observation and inquiry in monitoring how a learner uses his/her knowledge *and* skills in a normal or simulated real-life situation where they would normally be needed. In learner-centred pedagogy this is highly emphasized and practiced as "authentic assessment". Problem however, is that curricula are yet to be developed to train teachers in this direction and so teachers are confronted by a situation known in legal terms as *nemo dat quod non habet* (you do not give what you do not have). It has been observed that most teachers where learner-centred pedagogy is in practice generally lack "assessment literacy" in the methodology (Kaya Yilmaz (2007)). As a result they fail to elicit reliable and valid information of the learner's performance, to interpret the

information, to communicate what it means back to the learners and parents, and to know what to do to improve performance.

A common problem noticed in countries, *for* example, where the implementation of the policy is still in its infancy state is that the faculty heads are inclined to over-elaborate objectives and competencies and to demand continuous formative assessment *from* inadequately prepared teachers covering several often unrelated subjects. This is clearly counter to a learner-centred approach. Such a situation does not provide sufficient opportunities *for* learners to construct knowledge in a holistic way, and results in an inconsistent and unreliable assessment because teachers cannot go in depth with a field of learning, and are "stretched thin" conceptually and practically.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

Many countries in Africa have experienced recurrent incidences of military coups. As a result, the need *for* such people to come to know how to live together in a pluralistic democratic society cannot be overemphasized. The conception of democracy as a way of associated living within and outside of school need to inform and shape all educational experiences of students, teachers and administrators if democratic ideals, principles and values are to be attained and practiced in most African countries. One of the reasons why democratic values, principles and ideals have not been understood and practiced adequately in Africa has to do with the fact that students hardly engage in learning experiences characterised by democratic education (SUMsek, 2004). Since learner-centred instruction has been recognized by researchers as the most suitable teaching model for realizing democratic education, there is a need to make a shift in the models of teaching from -"top-down" teacher-centred instruction to -"bottom up" learner-centred instruction.

To be successful, learner-centred instruction should be an acknowledged part of the institution's mission and actively supported by all members of the school and surrounding community. Emphasis on the quality outcomes at each level of education must be pursued vigorously. Learning outcomes should not be used, however, in a tokenistic way (for example, by being written retrospectively or only referred to in course handbooks) but communicated to students so that they can articulate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. They should be neither so prescriptive as to impede freedom of learning nor so broad as to become meaningless (Kaya Yilmaz (2007). To that end, the bureaucratic structure of the education systems in most African countries need to be de-centralised and changed to accommodate the principles and practices that underpin learner-centred assessment. This type of assessment requires fewer examinations (summative), fewer questions, and more time for discursive, analytical and synthetic thinking. Open-ended questions will be much more the norm. No doubt the questions will take more time to mark because the' examiner must also think, yet they will be much more related to the challenges the learner will meet at the working place or even in the immediate environment. In Namibia and other countries

that have implemented learner-centred education for example, some subjects in the examinations at the advanced levels of the school system do try to describe or provide information or contexts for learners to demonstrate their understanding and ability to analyse, synthesise evaluate, interpret, etc. However, in such settings, greater consistency is needed. In order to be more consistent within a learner-centred approach, greater weight needs to be given to classroom-based continuous assessment, but that assessment must also be valid and reliable. The challenge is for curricula to define and limit assessment and examination, for teachers to be well trained in understanding what learning is intended to take place and to be able to assess that consistently and authentically, and to have a high level of assessment literacy.

The different national and state Ministries of Education should provide more financial support for restructuring schools; where affordable, the class size of schools should not be more than 30 students. New textbooks and other curriculum materials compatible with learner-centred instruction/assessment should be developed; the curricula of teacher education programs should be more relevant to the culture of the specific societies in specific countries; educators need to focus their attention on how to design a coherent, pedagogically meaningful, and culturally sensitive curriculum; school teachers need to be assisted, through workshops and other means of in-service training, to make a change in their teacher-centred conception of teaching and instructional practices. Teachers' efforts to practice learner-centred instruction should be recognised and rewarded; students should be trained in such learner-centred activities as doing research, preparing investigation report, giving presentations, engaging in discussions etc.; students need to be taught how to take responsibility for their own learning. In line with this, Harris and Bell (1994) advise:

"... each of us needs to take more and more responsibility for our learning in a world where the knowledge base is increasing at a phenomenal rate, let alone the technological developments which give us all more access to information and mere difficulty in discriminating between that which is relevant and useful and that which is garbage!".

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