A Comparison of Teacher-Centered and Student-Centered Approaches in Educational Settings

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Abstract: Student-centered instruction in the classroom has recently challenged teacher-centeredness for allowing students to construct their understandings using their experiences and actions. Student-centered pedagogy is based on constructivist and democratic principles. That students make sense of what they learn in a classroom environment in which they are stimulated to develop their reflective and critical thinking and sense of responsibility come to the fore in student-centered pedagogy. Teacher-centered instruction on the other hand relied heavily on the behaviorist theory which was based on the idea that behavior changes are caused by external stimuli. Compared with student-centered classroom, students in teacher-centered classroom are passive and respond to environmental stimuli. Teacher has the ultimate authority and is in charge of learning for that reason students do not have adequate opportunities to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. This article endeavors to compare student-centered and teacher-centered approaches and documents their general features in the classroom.

Keywords: Teacher-Centeredness, Student-Centeredness, Classroom Instruction, Skills Development

1. Introduction

Educators have always endeavoured to search for the ideal method to implement in the classroom for effective learning and teaching. Nevertheless, classrooms operate either with teacher-centered or student-centered approaches. The use of traditional methods has received criticism for not creating an environment in the classroom to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills. For that reason, there has been a shift from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness in classroom instruction.

Teacher-centeredness refers to communication of knowledge to students in a learning environment in which the teacher has the primary responsibility (Mascolo, 2009). Lectures are solely used as a means of dissemination of knowledge to students. While teachers are active, students are passive in teacher-centered classroom. In contrast to teacher-centeredness student-centered instruction provides a learning setting to the students in which they construct their skills and understanding. However, in teacher-centered classroom, there is a false assumption that teachers have a diminishing role in the learning process. Rather, teachers have facilitating role in the classroom. In other words, teachers' role is not eliminated in the learning process. Similarly, in student-centered classroom students do not construct their understandings by themselves instead teachers help them construct knowledge.

2. Literature Review

Teacher-centered approach relied on the behaviourist theory which was based on the idea that behaviour changes are caused by external stimuli (Skinner, 1974). According to the theory students are passive and respond to environmental stimuli. In teacher-centered classrooms, the teacher is in charge of learning; therefore, he/she transmits knowledge to the students. As the teacher holds the ultimate authority, the students do not collaborate. The content is decided and the learning tasks are structured by the teacher. The instruction is delivered through lecturing and provision of feedback and correct answers are widely used. The teacher is the primary source of information and the textbook is the center of activities. Peyton, More and Young (2010) stated that:

> In a typical teacher-centered classroom, the teacher spends most of the time presenting the day's content to the class from the whiteboard/Promethean board or overhead projector. The students should be taking notes and asking questions during the lecture. This process should be completed with ease and not troublesome for students (p.21).

Control has been priority in teacher-centered classrooms for that reason; teacher-centeredness has received criticism for favouring passive students rather than active ones in the classroom (Freiberg, 1999). It should be noted that the primary goal in the classroom is to empower learning. In this respect, in order for teachers to maintain control over students, they need to ensure that they enable the students to participate actively in the classroom. If teachers are knowledgeable in the content they present and apply motivational strategies while teaching, students maintain their attention, actively engaged in the classroom and become academically successful. For that reason, some researchers support the use of teacher-centered approach because it allows teaching students in short steps (Espenshade & Radford, 2009).

In student centered classrooms, teachers avoid transmissions of knowledge directly. Rather, students play active role in the learning process through trying "to make sense of what they are learning by relating it to prior knowledge and by discussing it with others" (Brophy, 1999, p.49). Students are provided opportunities to learn independently in student-centered learning and they are involved in the activities, materials and content. Creation of meaning comes to the fore in student-centered learning and learning is influenced by the prior knowledge. Student-centeredness focus on cooperative learning in which a group of students work together to complete a given task for that reason it enhances student-to-student interaction (Condelli & Wrigley, 2009). Cooperative learning enables the students to seek for understanding. The search for constructing meaning and productivity leads to increased intrinsic motivation which will facilitate higher achievement in the classroom. Simply put, student-centered approach is based on the idea that students are engaged in knowledge construction using their experiences and actions. The proper implementation of student-centered instruction promotes motivation to learn, develops understanding, and facilitates knowledge retention (Collins & O'Brien, 2003).

Cooperative learning gives students the authority to engage in the learning process. To accomplish tasks the students set goals and develop ideas, involve in thoughtful discourse, explore different perspectives and improve their learning. Effective learning occurs by means of providing democratic education to students (Goodlad, 2004). Similarly, Dewey (1997) emphasizes the role of active collaboration to

establish a democratic society. When students are encouraged to create their own understanding in a classroom climate, they develop their individual responsibility.

Teachers who are dedicated to teacher-centeredness prefer textbook dominated instruction. It should be borne in mind that textbook dominated pedagogy limits problem solving and decision making skills of students. The implementation of discussion-oriented activities helps students deal with multiple perspectives and build a community of dignity for diverse ideas. Democratic principles (Dewey, 1994) underpinned student-centered approach. The idea of giving responsibility to students, allowing them to act effectively, and stimulating reflective and critical thinking in the classroom enrich democratic society. Student-centeredness is an effective pedagogy to equip students with the necessary skills to generate a more democratic society. Another principle student-centered approach rested on is constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) which is based on the idea that students construct their own understanding by means of experiences.

Furthermore, building a comfortable learning environment is an essential factor in student achievement. With this in regard, student-centered classroom pervades activities which create fun. Also, the impact of self-confidence in achievement cannot be underestimated. That students take an active role and present information to the others and share classroom responsibilities increase their self-confidence.

However, in student-centered classrooms control may become difficult due to behaviour problems. Although this will be tedious, teachers can turn it to an advantage by encouraging them to increase their sense of responsibility. Mart (2013) states that "passionate teachers know that it is their role to encourage students for an active learning and concern themselves with promoting students' intellectual and moral development" (p. 438). It is recommended that teachers enhance intrinsic motivation of students in student-centered classrooms which benefits students to develop their autonomy and encourage them to make responsible choices. Mart (2013) stresses the importance of motivation and argues that it is "one of the leading factors in educational achievement, can be easily maintained by commitment" (p. 338). As long as teachers sustain their personal commitment to teaching Extrinsic motivation on the other hand may negatively influence students' motivation because it encourages them to develop appropriate behaviours just to get the reward (DeVries & Zan, 1994).

It should be underlined that students cannot construct their skills and understandings by themselves without a facilitator. In the concept of zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1978) refers to the difference what a learner can do without help and what he/she can do with an accomplished peer. Mascala, Fischer and Pollack (1997) argue that without a skilled partner or adult the zone of proximal development cannot be created by students themselves. Without teacher direction, it is not possible for students to achieve higher learning outcomes.

3. Conclusion

Although the use of student-centered approach has been favoured in the classroom recently, the role of teachers for effective learning is essential. Providing a classroom environment in which active engagement is stimulated by the teacher helps students become academically successful. Student-centeredness enhances cooperative learning, develops problem solving and decision making skills,

stimulates reflective and critical thinking skills; however, the role of teacher is not eliminated in the classroom.

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