



## Learner-centred teaching method in modern-day society: Issues and opportunities

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### Abstract

Since change is the only thing that is permanent, several methods of teaching and learning will continue to evolve in the education sector. Hence, this position paper tries to find out the concept of learner-centered and teacher-centered teaching methods of instruction. It explains the reasons for the adoption of this instructional strategy in the classroom today in preference to earlier ones. Further, it examines the merits and the pitfalls of its adoption in teaching-learning process. The authors also focused on the characteristics of this instructional strategy in teaching and learning process. The possibilities of this method of instruction were not left out of discussion. The paper concludes by advising educators' or teachers not to dominate the teaching-learning process, but to allow students to confront issues (new challenges) by using their past experiences and enabling new means to acquire such knowledge through the process of personal discovery in order to imbibe in them the lifelong method of education.

**Keywords:** problem-based learning, teaching method, child-centred learning, active learning, personalized learning, and learner-controlled instruction

### Introduction

The method of teaching and learning in most Nigerian higher institutions today are dominantly teacher-led; whereby the teacher is the sole and the utmost authority in the classroom. He has the encyclopaedic knowledge, the required skills, and teaches, directs or channels the affairs of the students by providing them with the needed information/materials to be studied. But, with the technological breakthrough of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, and the needs of the present dynamic economy and generation of learners basically requires a shift from the traditional approach to the learner-centered teaching approach.

Technology brings different ways of doing things. Human beings are constantly striving to improve their environments, economically, politically, culturally, etc., in order to make better conditions of living. This improvement is not only limited to the aforementioned areas but also included in the education sector, which empowers and triggers all other sectors. With new technological breakthroughs, the need to better the society, and the move for teacher/educators to put into practice these advancements into their teaching practice, a new method of course design and delivery, which focuses on active learning, critical thinking, and maximum use of student-faculty known as, "Learner-centred" teaching has emerged.

In this method of instruction, educators/teachers must take into consideration the people they are teaching in view of the fact the each comes to class with their own peculiarities, such as the level of education, experience and goals. Hence, the instructional strategy must be fashioned to take care of these peculiarities. Consequently, year in year out, educators plan and device the easiest means of imparting knowledge and/or experiences to both present and upcoming generations; learner/student-centred teaching method has come to be, and it is one of the instructional methods designed by professionals (mainly educators) to confront or knock over many instructional methods in schools that do not in one way or the other improve or facilitate student learning.

In learning-centred teaching method approach, the two educational philosophies that come to mind for lots of people are Progressivism and Existentialism. These two philosophies are commonly associated with this term. The proponents of these philosophies believe and emphasize that learning is achieved through experience and experimentation. They place less emphasis on planned curriculum but stressed on the hands-on learning experience of the learner. They advocate for students' or learners' freedom. They are highly interested in the needs, interests, and readiness of each learner/child. Progressivisms' believe on learning community, while the teachers' serve further as guides and facilitators of knowledge.

In the same way, names like John Dewey and Jean Jacques Roseau are associated with progressivisms. They are of the view that education has a high value for student freedom and enormous choice. Included in this view is that students decide about what they learn, how they will learn it, and the teachers serve as guides and facilitators of knowledge.

The Concept of Learner-Centred Teaching Method Approach  
 The origin of this term "learner-centeredness" dates back to 80s in the United States of America, when in 1983, "A Nation at Risk" was published (Neal, 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>. It was the foremost educational reform and used as a framework to guide educational reforms in States. The report however alleged that the educational programmes in the U.S. was nothing to talk about, and were far behind other country's education programmes and were mediocre in terms of providing accurate curriculum in the nation's schools.

This model of teaching was a framework to guide educational reform which was in response to "A Nation at Risk." It was a powerful document, published in 1983 by the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education. This document, as expressed by Phungphol (2005) <sup>[15]</sup>, "exposed the slipping educational standards, deteriorating teaching quality, and declining academic achievement among American children and strongly recommended the need for educational reform."

This educational reform was directed at reforming the educational standards, the content, and the teachers (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>. By early '90s the educational reform was found to be critically flawed for having used the wrong framework for reform. This report eventually resulted in further public demand for improved teacher preparation and more accountability from schools. This particular reform efforts as Zhao (2009) <sup>[22]</sup> observed, was "aimed at closing the achievement gaps between sub-groups of students and between the United States and other countries." Nonetheless, all these reforms are focused on replacing the much-criticized "teacher-centeredness" with "learner-centred approach" which has definitely come to stay with us today in our various institutions and/or schools.

Nevertheless, the learner-centred teaching method is one of the instructional strategies that have come into view since the 1980s. The term "Learner-centred education" is often referred to as "Student-centred learning" The term covers a broad diversity of possible instructional strategies and intellectual programmes. It refers to a teacher's beliefs that place primary responsibility for learning on the student, with the teacher seen more as a partner in the learning process facilitating opportunities for the learning to occur (Neal, 2016) <sup>[14]</sup>.

Hubball and Gold (2007) <sup>[8]</sup>, as cited by Grimes (2011) <sup>[7]</sup> defined learner-centred teaching curriculum as, "curriculum that maintains a coherent program of study that is responsive to the needs and circumstances of the pedagogical context and is carefully designed to develop students' knowledge, abilities, and skills through multiple integrated and progressively challenging course learning experiences." In the same development, Prindle, Kennedy, and Rudolph (2000) <sup>[17]</sup> describe the model as providing flexible responses to learner needs to achieve academic goals.

The learner-centred teaching method is an instructional strategy that shifts the focus of classroom activity instruction from the teacher to the learners. It refers to a wide variety of educational programmes, learning experiences, instructional approaches, and academic-support strategies that are intended to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students and groups of students (<https://www.edglossary.org/student-centred-learning/>).

In this mode of learning, students are encouraged to work individually on any given coursework. But as society progresses, new methods of instruction started emerging into the scene Akyildiz (2014) <sup>[1]</sup> views student-centred learning as a progressive approach to teaching by which students are active in the classroom, encouraged to interact with one another and become more aware of the material they use in learning, and why it is important in their study. It is also a situation in which students achievements are measured based on their individual performances. This method of instruction is active learning that gives the learners the opportunity to brainstorm during class hours. The learners are given the onus to express themselves in class assigned problems. In this case, students are given the opportunity to individually ask and answer questions, and solve problems on their own.

Learners are involved in cooperative learning by which they debate, discuss, explain, or brainstorm on issues during class periods. Collaboration or teamwork is the focus of students as they critically construct ideas and consult each other on a given task. In effect, this method is based on the constructivist approach to teaching and learning. In a student-

centred learning situation, Marcia (2013) <sup>[12]</sup> observed that classrooms don't usually have rows of desks facing teacher's desk. Instead, the desks or tables are arranged in such a way that students can easily collaborate on projects or on analysing readings instead of listening to lectures.

In this method of instruction, teachers don't dictate what students learn, but become co-participants, co-learner, participates in discussions, and sometimes ask open-ended questions that make students think critically, and at the same time correct some misconceptions held by students where necessary. In fact, teachers in this situation become facilitators' in the entire education process.

In a learner-centred classroom, students have the chance to practice (hands-on-brains-on), a greater measure of control over time, pace, convenience and learning pathways; for this reason, they develop sophisticated learning skills. This learning method provides for learners' total socialization, practical involvement and interaction. Usually, a business-like approach is adopted in the teaching and learning process as each learner helps the other to achieve a common goal. Learning becomes more independent as learners select most of what is to be learnt, and also checkmate (control and monitor) themselves in view of the progress made in the learning process. Also, in course of teaching-learning process, learners must feel safe and accepted.

As a final point, in learner-centred teaching, Mishra (2005) affirmed that the focus of the activity is on the students, while the teacher establishes the lesson content and provides the tools and structure to complete the activity. At the same time, all the students participate in the evaluation of the activities so involved by criticizing themselves and their peers. The total focus is on group cooperation, collaboration and communication. Learner-centred teaching methodology enables learning to take place outside of the traditional classroom.

#### The Concept of Teacher-Centred Teaching Methodology

As observed in the field of education, the definition of terms are rarely precise; but most of the times, it is common to have two or more working definitions to address the same term. Consequently, in the traditional teaching method approach (Teacher-centred), most teachers spend most of all their time verbally passing on instructions to learners/students in the classroom, while these learners/students patiently watch and listening to this verbalized instruction with passion. The teaching method is highly controlled (Akyildiz, 2014) <sup>[1]</sup>, teachers decide on what is to be taught, when it will be taught, and how it will be taught and where it will be taught. The instructor's role is to transfer knowledge to the learner by all means available. The content selected is not mostly based on students' interests, but based on the essentials of what is to be taught by the teacher.

In the same development, the teacher directs, leads student practice and rehearsals, disciplines, and promotes high academic standards in the classrooms. Sometimes, the learner takes the instruction without question. This method presents the teacher as the most active person in the class. He or she does most of the talking, given instructions, read aloud the content of the lesson, and demonstrates concepts in the class; while students sit and listen to all the verbalization that goes on, takes notes, and perhaps answer some teacher's questions. As Phungphol (2005) <sup>[15]</sup> put it, "These teachers' methods strongly promote rote or parrot learning, the kind of learning that the students commit the materials into memory without understanding. To do well in the tests and examinations, the

students are expected to parrot back the materials from memory.” Students are forced to memorize more and more materials beyond their memory capacity. In view of this type of learning, school learning becomes too stressful, boring, and no longer enjoyable to students. They are not motivated to learn because of the high failure rate in school which does not augur well to their parents.

In teacher-centred teaching approach, the teachers are preoccupied with covering the content as prescribed in the curriculum, hence, can be referred to as “subject matters-centred” “content-centred.” or teaching approach. In this case, they are not concerned with how well the students are learning their materials. As it encourages rote learning, learners are unable to use their knowledge after completing their schooling, thereby defeating the process of lifelong learning.

**Why Do We Need a Learner-Centred Teaching Method Approach?**

Prior to the student-centred teaching method approach, countless traditional methods were used, often organized and managed in ways that suit organizational practices, which do not reflect the most effective ways to educate our students. For instance, all students are being taught in classrooms under the supervision of a teacher who gives a fixed set of course options to choose from; the teacher uses the same textbooks and learning resources, and education unfolds according to a predetermined schedule.

Learner-centred learning approach is no more new in most colleges and universities worldwide, as these institutions are finding themselves under increasing pressure to change the practices of teaching. Researchers have shown that the learner-centred method teaching method approach is superior to the traditional teacher-centred approach to instruction (Felder, 2014). Scholars have also argued that this term, “learner-centered” or “Student-centred” teaching method approach was born out of the present social realities and discrepancies of educational decisions by professionals that did not entirely address or consider the plight of students, as to what they needed to learn and the best method(s) to facilitate effective learning for individual or group of students.

In accordance with the above, Yuen, Lee, Law & Chan (2008) <sup>[21]</sup>, citing UNESCO (2002) affirmed that the basis for this change pressure is hinged on ICT. Therefore, ICT has made it possible for the adoption of learner-centred learning which facilitates the online mode. In the same way, the ability to become lifelong learners within a context of collaborative inquiry and, especially the ability to work and learn from experts and peers in a connected global community as observed by (Law, Pelgrum & Plomp, 2008) <sup>[11]</sup>, has made it possible for the adoption of this type of teaching and learning methodology.

Therefore, the underlying principle behind the learner-centred teaching method is that schools should be designed in such a way as to improve student learning. Drucker (1996) <sup>[5]</sup> has listed three major forces in the process of achieving a learner-centred approach, especially in distance education thus:

1. Application of new technology, such as computers, telecasts via satellite, and the Internet;
2. Demands of a knowledge-based society in which organized learning must become a lifelong process for knowledge workers; and
3. New theory about how human beings learn.

### Types of Learner-Centred Teaching Methodology

There are various types of learner-centred teaching methods, which are geared towards facilitating learners’ active learning in the education process. That is to say, the method shifts the centre of attention of learning or activity from the teacher to the learners or students. These methods include:-

1. **Active Learning:** This method enables learners/students to solve problems by themselves. Learner/students are given the opportunity to answer questions, initiate questions of theirs and debate on issues. Learners independently brainstorm on a given topic or subject matter during class sessions by discussing some noble ideas (Felder, 2014).
2. **Cooperative Learning:** This is a situation whereby the learners work in teams on a given problem and project, where learners depend on others and also give independent accounts of their various activities.
3. **Inductive teaching & learning:** This is a teaching philosophy that permits or allows learners to find out and experience events or phenomena to accomplish learning on their own. Learners are first presented with problems to solve, and course materials are learnt in order to solve the problems. As Florin (n.d) put it, “the learners are provided with opportunities to observe and experience, raise questions and formulate generalizations from the learning experience that they are exposed to. Learners use the under-listed inductive methods to address the challenges posed to them. They are: - (i) Problem-based learning (ii) Discovery learning (iii) Project-based learning (iv) Inquiry-based learning (iv) Just-in-time, and (v) Case-based instruction.

Whether the assessed outcome is short-term mastery, long-term retention, the learner-centred methodology has over and over again been shown to be better-quality to the traditional teacher-centred approach to instruction. Learner-centred methodology improves students/learners critical thinking skills, in-depth of understanding of course materials, and further builds students’ self-confidence and develops creative problem-solving skills in learners. Lastly, positive attitudes toward the subject being taught and skills are enhanced.

### Characteristics of learner-centred teaching methodology

Scholars or advocates of student-centred learning, such as Weimer (2012) <sup>[20]</sup>, Felder (2014), have proposed essential characteristics of learner-centred teaching method approaches as follows:-

**Promotes collaboration learning:** Knowledge is not entirely repository on a particular learner; hence, learner-centred methodology encourages teamwork among learners, as the classroom is seen as communities of learners, where each student consults his/her colleagues on a given issue. In this process, students see learning as both individual and collective efforts.

**Engages students:** Unlike the teacher-centred learning method approach, where students sit passively and listen to teachers’ lectures and questions, learners are actively engaged in practical terms, and subsequently, develop sophisticated learning skills.

**Inspires students:** Learner-centred teaching motivates students’ as they take control over what they learn, and also become independent of decision taking. That is, most of the decisions on what content to learn, where and how it should be learnt, including the speed, and the conditions under which

the content is to be learnt, and the evaluation criteria become prerogatives of the students/learners.

Develops mastering skilfulness: Learner-centred teachers teach students how to think critically, analyse, and evaluate arguments, which enhances problem-solving. Automatic and/or individualization of skills are guaranteed among learners. Supports reflective thinking: Learner-centred teaching encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how they are learning it.

### Merits of Learner-Centred Teaching Method

1. Blended-learning reduces the burden of teachers as experienced in the traditional classroom setup
2. Knowles (1984) <sup>[9]</sup> posits that learner-centred curriculum favour adult learners, as hypothesized in his theory of andragogy. He argued in favour adults, and sees them as, “being more self-directed learners who are experienced and that experience provides a rich resource for future learning.” The scholar further stated that their readiness to learn is based upon what they need to know and more problem-centred in their learning than subject-centred.
3. In support of Knowles (1984) <sup>[9]</sup>, Lambert & McCombs (2000) <sup>[10]</sup> also argued that learner-centred theory of instruction works well for adult learners. This, the scholars say it encourages the learner to link previous information with a new one by providing multiple ways of presenting information, which may be auditory ways, visual ways, or kinaesthetic ways.
4. Grimes (2000) <sup>[7]</sup> again favoured learner-centred instruction as it gives ample opportunity to learners to play a part in the process of their own learning via peers/teachers interaction while allowing time for reflection and self-study.
5. Engages learners as they constantly develop their critical thinking skills, and become life-long learners, who can use their knowledge in real life applications (Bosch *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[2]</sup>.
6. There is high fertilization of ideas between students, as each consults the other when engrossed in confusion and difficulties
7. Learner-centred instruction encourages reciprocal respect among the learners and as well between the instructors and the learner. At the same time, the instructor becomes a facilitator who provides the learning environment, the needs, guidance, and direction all the learning activities
8. The main focus of teaching/instruction is on the learner/student
9. Students are motivated to take personal responsibilities and generate self-esteem and confidence in themselves.
10. Learning is more practical as opposed to teacher-centred that is theoretically oriented.
11. Cooperative learning is highly practised as learners working in groups
12. There is the flexibility of ideas as learners interact, compare and contrast various possibilities of a given situation with others in the classroom
13. Multiple perspectives are considered by learners on a given event as they engage in problem-solving
14. In learner-centred learning, the student’s prior knowledge and experience very much count. In an attempt to solve a particular problem, learners frequently integrate new information into the existing one
15. In order to arrive at a better conclusion, students make connections in order to support such a conclusion with

enough evidence. This they do by consulting several sources and making cross-references

16. For students to make frantic efforts to clearly articulate, negotiate, and logically present ideas, effective communication must be at the centre of learner-centred learning.
17. Students’ usually air out their viewpoints as they consult, analyse and validate each other’s ideas.
18. Assessment is more engaging as students’ are assessed through project-oriented works, such as project reports
19. Students are more likely to retain and adopt new knowledge in view of the engaging nature of the learning mode and transfer such learning to real life.
20. As one of the benefits of the learner-centred model, Cross (2002) <sup>[4]</sup> states that learners are required to assume responsibility for their own learning; while Stefanou and Salisbury-Glennon (2002) <sup>[18]</sup> affirm that the model motivates and improves students cognitive learning strategies.
21. Magolda (1999) observed that learners are capable of thinking, evaluating evidence and using existing knowledge to decide what to believe.

### Drawback s of learner-centred teaching model

No matter how noble an invention may be, there must be some side effects of such an invention. As a result, learner-centred learning has come with its cons.

1. The educators’ requires special skills to manage cooperative learning aspect of the instructional model
2. This method of learning is time-consuming as students are usually involved in consultations and clarification of ideas before arriving at a conclusion
3. As a result time wastes, most teachers don’t like adopting this method of instruction because curriculum targets are not easy to accomplish
4. On the part of learners, I create problems for students, who by nature do not like working cooperatively.
5. Hubball, Gold, Mighty & Britnell (2007) <sup>[8]</sup> affirmed that a learner-centred curriculum takes time, the collective energy of all involved, and resources to fully implement.
6. Disappointed teachers uphold and refer to “learner-centeredness” as “buffalo-centred” approach on the ground that inexperienced learners could be as ignorant as any buffalo, hence, could be completely unfamiliar with the new materials they have to learn since the approach requires much of learner’s prior knowledge base. Therefore, they argue that the approach could not succeed with learners who lack the relevant knowledge base (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>.
7. Teachers have also disapproved this model of teaching for the reason that transferring the importance, the power, and the control from teachers to learners, particularly to very young children, won’t work as the learners are too young to know what they want to learn and how to learn it. As a result, teachers further advanced that this method of teaching may favour and produce good results with matured or more experienced learners that have relevant prior knowledge (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>.

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that there is a wave of educational reforms worldwide due to some technological breakthroughs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The advents of these newer instructional technologies have altered several methods of teaching and

learning, and the instructional setting has seriously altered faculty and student roles. As well, these technologies give teachers the opportunity to redesign learning environments that are affordable, and capable of responding to a wide variety of individual needs. Consequently, many countries are currently replacing these older forms of instructional delivery systems with newer ones. As a result, “teacher-centred teaching model” is currently being faced out with “learner-centred approach”, which is fast gaining pervasive acceptance and popularity, and also perceived as a more powerful and valuable educational practice (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>. The learner-centred approach implies that students/learners are no longer passive in the instructional process, but have become active participants of the learning progression. This model has made learning more active, flexible, critical, lively, and as well as adaptive to different learning styles (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>. Since the method of teaching and learning in most Nigerian higher institutions today are dominantly teacher-led, the promise of these advances in technology, therefore, is that Nigeria, as a nation requires a shift from the traditional approach (teacher-led) to learner-centred teaching model that will address the needs of the present dynamic economy and generation of learners. The future of this model of instruction is that nations of the world have seriously focused on it and adopting it as a more powerful and efficient educational tool. As a result, governments at all levels across the globe are currently recruiting, training and retraining their teachers for effective use of the innovative instructional strategy in their classrooms to address the contemporary poor, slipping educational standards, deteriorating teaching quality, and declining academic achievement among learners/students, which is the main focus of the learner-centeredness (Phungphol, 2005) <sup>[15]</sup>.

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