

## ***Issues that restrain teachers from adapting student-centered instruction in lebanese school***

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**Abstract:** The typical Lebanese classroom is teacher centered, whereby the teacher is respected and is considered to be the bearer of all information. Student centered teaching methods are not in the Lebanese teacher expectations and the usual teacher-student relationships in that learner are not expected to assume responsibility for their educational development by taking a center-stage role in their own learning process. This paper aims to highlight the issues that prevent teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching method. A small scale survey from 100 teachers of 10 different schools selected from various areas in Lebanon was undertaken. The survey results were compared and tested in order to evaluate the reason for not adapting student centered instruction in the Lebanese schools.

**Key words:** active learning, Learner centered, Lebanon, student-centered learning, teacher-centered learning, traditional curriculum, constructivism.

# **I**ntroduction

The majority of the Lebanese classroom is traditional classroom with teacher centered teaching approach. The teacher centered teaching approach has its historical roots set back since the beginning of the Lebanese public education. In typical Lebanese classroom the teacher is seen as the master and the learner as the novice, and thus the teacher needs to be respected to a high degree.

Learners in Lebanese classroom set quietly and neatly in their seats, while the teacher is up front pouring wisdom and knowledge into their brains is absurd. Students see their teachers as the fountains of information they cannot do without. The classroom setting is based on a lecture seminar style, since the teacher is presumed to know what is best for his/her students.

The intention of this research is to determine the factors that inhibit schools from adopting Learner centered education approach in Lebanese classrooms. The research within this paper is, in part, based on a ten-part questionnaire that is designed to gauge both teachers and learner perspective s toward a learner centered teaching approach.

## **Learner centered education**

Learner Centered Education is the type of classroom setting wherein the learners are committed to take roles in their own learning. Specially, is to promote learners to engaging in small-group work. Additionally, the teachers' responsibilities are to encourage students and to provoke their levels of curiosity (NUNAN D., 1998:235). Where the learners in the classrooms, carry the role of a researchers in their own learning experience; and the teacher carry the role of director and coordinator of the research, guiding them onto the right direction. NUNAN in 1999 articulate that "in a learner-centered classroom, key decisions about what will be taught, how it will be taught, when it will be taught, and how it will be assessed will be made with reference to the learner (1999:11). Brown in 2001 stressed that the learners' needs and desires should be taken into account in the curriculum design with reference to the learner-centered classroom. According to Brown, the learner-centered education should focus on or account for learners' needs, styles and goals, without predetermining objectives. This approach gives some control to the student which encourages the student creativity and innovation and enhances the student's sense of competence and self worth (BROWN, 2001:46-47).

Perhaps the most significant goal of Learner Centered Education approach is that learners can engage in meaningful communication in and out of the classroom setting, which will help him/her to gain more confidence. Also learners can develop the habit to engage learning outside the classroom.

## **Lebanon**

Lebanon is a small democratic country located on the east of the Mediterranean Sea. It stretches over a tiny territory of 10,452 square meters (ESIS, 2001). In 2009 The Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs estimated the population of Lebanon to be a little less than 4 million, including a wide range of diversity. There are at least 18 different religious sects and 19 different political parties (BUREAU OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS, 2008). The current Lebanese constitution was written in 1926 and specifies a unique political system based on a balance of political power among the various religious groups.

## **Traditional learner centered approaches**

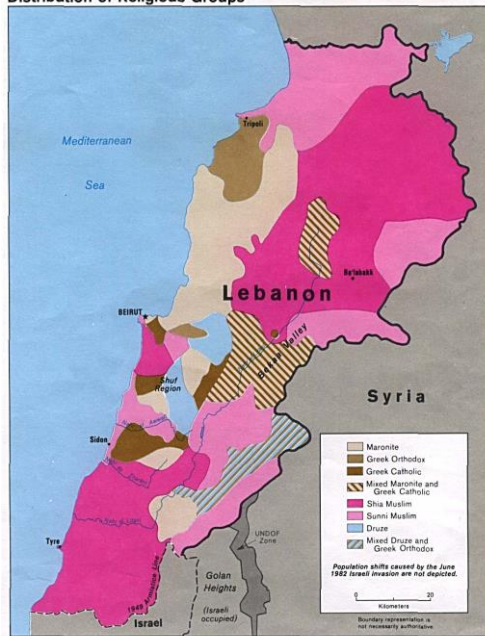
The Lebanese traditional view of teaching-Teacher Centered Classroom-is still widespread. Overall, the teacher considered respected professions; the teachers are wise, respected in and out of class, never contradicted, outline student paths, credited with student excellence, always right, and respected more with age. In the Lebanese classroom hierarchy places the teacher at the top. Lebanese learners expected to speak up only when invited to do so by the teacher, to follow a strict order, to respect the teacher at all times, to listen to the teacher giving lectures. Large numbers of Lebanese learners see learning as a task that is forced upon them by powers outside their control. Consequently, since learners are used to this type of teaching style, where the learner is a passive participant, it is therefore a great hurdle for the teacher to have his/her students overcome such mental restraints in the classroom. And that make it difficult for the teacher to get his/her students to assume increased responsibility for their own learning and development. WALLACE & WILDY in 1995 argued that the traditional institutes style promote seclusion; where the principal take control over all the teachers, school policy and classroom decisions, and the teacher in a instruction role transmitting the curriculum package to the students utilizing the teacher-centered approach, (WALLACE & WILDY, 1995: 15). WINDSCHITL in (2002) explained that the efforts to implement to student-centered learning practices in schools are met with conceptual, pedagogical, cultural, and political challenges that cause the renovation complicated.

## Cultural and religion implications

The unwillingness of Lebanese to deviate from the traditional view of teaching is perhaps best explained in terms of its ancient cultural history and religions. Religions had a profound influence on both political and social aspects of life in Lebanon, with a sufficient impact on education. As we mentioned previously, there are at least 18 different religious sects and 19 different political parties in Lebanon. Religions anchor Lebanese to strict social codes and principles with deeply embedded roots. Religions with its emphasis on family values and respect for age and learning, has been particularly influential on Lebanese. In addition the current Lebanese constitution specifies a unique political system

based on a balance of political power among the various religious groups. When a people are face up new situations in which they lack knowledge structures and cognitive strategies, they fall back on their leaders to guide them. This vertical hierarchy system occupies a prominent place in the Lebanese way of life. This may be especially true in teaching; this vertical hierarchy certainly has had a tremendous influence on Lebanese education, with the teacher at the top of the hierarchy, in that it places the responsibility on the educator to provide all the necessary information the learners will need in their learning endeavors. Therefore, any attempt to get the average Lebanese learner to accept the learner centered teaching approach as being acceptable will most likely be met with resistance, at least in the initial stages.

Distribution of Religious Groups



## **Research study**

### **1.- Research questions and hypothesis**

In this research study, the following research questions and hypothesis were addressed:

Guiding Research Question: What are the self reported teachers' perceptions on the factors that inhibit teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach?

Hypothesis: There is relationship between not adopting a student-centered teaching approach and:

- I. School Facilities and Resources
  - Inadequate library resources
  - Inadequate lab equipments
  - Inadequate technology resources
- II. Class Size
- III. Standard Curriculum and Standard Tests
- IV. School Leadership
- V. Staff professional development.

### **2.- Research mythology**

First of all, it is important to note that this research study is a small-scale and not professional research on a 'large-scale'. The instrument in this study was a paper survey that was used to gather data from 100 teachers from 10 schools ranging from middle to secondary schools selected from various areas in Lebanon. Participants completed a 10 minute surveys. The schools chosen for this study were located in urban areas with diverse populations, representing an array of ethnicities and socio-economic levels. The teachers from all schools were treated as a single group; therefore no distinction was made among the schools. This study was conducted in a manner that protected the confidentiality of the participants. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in paper and pencil form. Survey items were developed based on an extensive literature review as well as querying participants using an exploratory questionnaire. The study gathered quantitative data to answer the research questions.

### 3.- Data results and discussion

#### I-Lack of resources in schools

Access to resources in schools is a necessary condition to the integration of learner centered education approach in education. Effective adoption and integration of learner centered education approach into schools depends mainly on the availability and accessibility of resources such as technology resources, labs, no library ...etc. Research indicates that uses of technology can improve student outcomes. Lack of resources is identified as a significant barrier toward implementation of Learner Centered Education Approach. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers (91%) reported that their schools lack the resources needed in order to integrate the Learner Centered Education Approach in their classroom. Among the (91%) of the teachers:

- (89%) reported that their schools have inadequate lab equipments,
- (91%) reported that their schools have inadequate technology resources,
- (91%) reported that their school library's resources are inadequate.

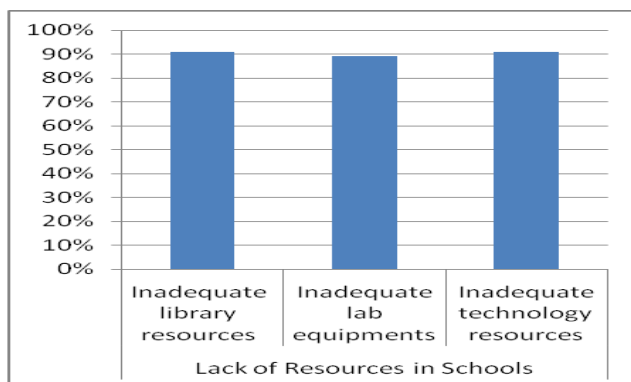


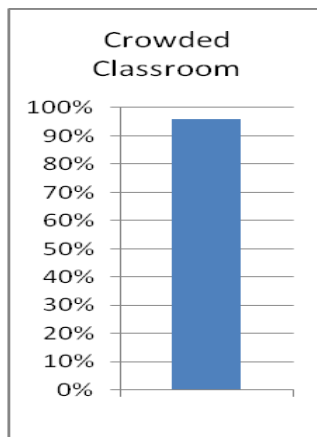
Fig. 1: Lack of schools' resources is a factor which inhibits teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach in Lebanese schools.

The results point toward that the lack of schools' resources is a factor which inhibits teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach in Lebanese schools.

#### II- Class size

The belief that small classes are better is widely held today. Many schools consider small classes are essential to good student learning. O'CONNELL, & SMITH in 2000, explained that smaller classes can enhance the teacher's capability to supervise student performance and learning. Class sizes also used as an important indicator of an

institution's commitment and the nature of the experience students will have. In order to satisfy public accountability, many schools develop performance indicators related to their teaching function such as Student/ teacher ratios and class sizes. Small class sizes generally are treated as signifying a better learning experience for students, and hence, a better quality of education. Despite that fact, middle and secondary school teachers in Lebanon usually keep their classrooms teacher-centered, this is because a vast majority of schools are overcrowded, and have large classes. The result of the survey confirms that the majority of the teachers (96%) agree that large number of students in a class is a factor that inhibits school teachers from adopting a student-centered approach in their classroom. Some teachers commented that in their larger classes they are unable to devote time to each student; they spend more time on controlling students' behaviors.



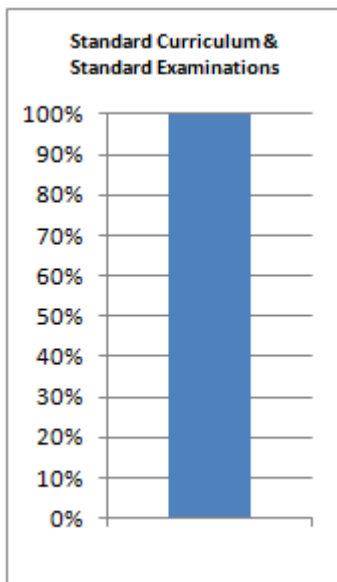
*Fig. 2: 96% of the teachers reported that crowded classroom is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach*

The results showed that crowded classroom is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

### III- Standard curriculum and standard examinations

The result of the survey showed that all the teachers (100%) reported that the intense of the standard curriculum and standard examinations is influencing their acceptance of student centered teaching approach. Teachers commented that the overcrowded standard curriculum and extremely busy work day is pushing many teachers to select the traditional lecturing method. Teachers mentioned that most of the time they feel under pressure trying to enable pupils pass the standard examinations and are therefore forced to cram the curriculum in too little time in order to cover all the content of the standard curriculum. Teachers feels that time are their greatest challenges

in accomplishing the curriculum; they had not enough time to cover the entire standard curriculum subjects and to meet the needs of all learners.



*Fig. 3: 100% of the teachers reported that standard curriculum and standard examinations classroom is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach*

The results reveals that overcrowded standard curriculum is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach in Lebanon.

#### IV- School leadership

Though resources is imperative, school leadership is a stronger predictor of teachers' use of Learner Centered Education Approach in teaching. For effective utilization of Learner Centered Education Approach by teachers, there is the need for a strong leadership to drive a well designed plan. On the contrary, the results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers (86%) reported that their schools policy and leaders do not accept or trust the Learner Centered Education Approach. The results confirmed that the unsupportive school leadership is factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach.



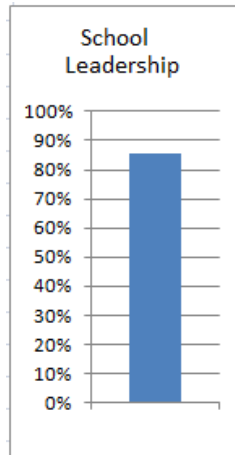
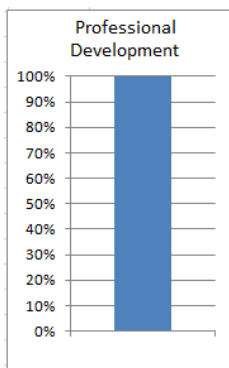


Fig. 4: 96% of the teachers reported that standard that the unsupportive school leadership is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach

Many studies have examined the relation between school leadership and the teacher efficacy. ROSS & GRAY in 2006 found that school leadership had a directly and indirectly impact the teachers' professional commitment and efficacy (ROSS & GRAY, 2006). In addition, Koh, Steers, & Terborg, explained that that school leadership is a stronger predictor of teacher beliefs, practices, commitment and the willingness to go beyond the formal requirements of the job to engage in productive functions to enhance organizational effectiveness that can contribute to higher student achievement (KOH, STEERS, & TERBORG, 1995).

#### V- Professional development

Teachers' professional development is a key factor to successful integration of student centered teaching approach into classroom teaching. Clearly, it is imperative to allow teacher trainees to apply student centered teaching approach in their programs in order to be able to use it to supplement their teaching activities. The results of the survey indicated that the majority of the teachers (100%) reported that they never had professional development training on how to integrate student centered teaching approach into classroom.



*Fig. 5: 100% of the teachers reported that lack of professional development is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach*

The results confirmed that lack of professional development training is a factor that inhibiting teachers from adopting a student-centered teaching approach.

## Conclusion

The traditional Lebanese classroom is teacher centered; where learners are passive participants, with the teacher laying down the path of learning for them. This paper describes an investigation of factors the hinder teachers' opportunity to use learner-centered teaching approach. The findings from this study are: First, several of these factors are linked to School Facilities and Resources include lack of basic school facilities such as electricity, Labs, Library. Second, lack of school resources to support learning such as technology equipments including (computers, LCDs, internet...).Third, the overcrowded classrooms lead to high pupil to teacher ratio minimises possibilities of individual attention to the pupils. Fourth, the heavy standard curriculum and schedule that the teacher should follow within short time in order to meet the standard examinations. Fifth, School policy and the unsupportive school principal. Finally: lack of staff professional development. Due to these issues, schools in Lebanon require the adaptation of traditional lecture approach of education, through which physical, human and financial resources can be controlled, also helps to controls resources and on the other end requires limited human expertise and time.

## Limitation

A replication of the study reported here to a larger sample might yield different results. The implications of the problems and challenges identified in this study beg for further research, more focussed education policies, and more support for teachers to improve pupils' opportunity-to-learn. The findings of this study should be

interpreted with caution because of the small number of teachers who participated in the study.

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