

## **IMPLEMENTING STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING ACTIVITIES: VIEWS OF ENGLISH FOREIGN LEARNERS AT HIGHER EDUCATION –MODEL-**

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### Abstract:

The study aimed at measuring the degree of practicing Learner-Centered Approach (LCA) activities in the English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom according to views of (200) English students who study in the Colleges of Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan. The researcher designed a questionnaire to gather information from the students' points of views about applying activities of LCA in the English departments. After analyzing data by computing means and standards deviations, the results indicated that the students' responses on applying LCA activities in EFL environment were low. The main reason of writing this paper is to get benefits from the results in improving English classes to be based on learner-centered class activities and the scope of the study related to methodologies in teaching and learning English. However, the researcher discussed the results and gave solutions. Based on the results of the study, the researcher suggested recommendations for future researches and implications to adopt using LCA activities in the EFL environment effectively.

**Keywords:** Learner-Centered Class, EFL classroom, colleges of Albalqa' Applied University, teacher-centered learning

### Introduction

Over the last decade, the instructional approaches have shifted from traditional approach (teacher-centered class) to constructive one (student-centered learning approach). In the teacher-centered approach (TCA), the focus is on the teacher as a dominant and he is responsible for teaching and learning process. Teacher-centered approach is defined by (Bowers and Flinders, 1990) as an industrial production so that the student is the product. On the other hand, student-centered learning (CCL) focuses on the student as facilitator who shares teachers in the process and the focus is on students' individual differences, interest, and the students' needs. The learner-centered approach (LCA) is defined by (Baldauf and Moni 2006) as life-long education because LCA makes the student active, develops the students' skills in problem-solving, and motivates students.

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In LCA, the teachers should verify his methods and activities to make the educational process flexible in order to motivate the students so they are urged to use LCA approaches such as cooperative strategies and using technology (Nicola, 1993). For instance, several studies were conducted about the effect of using different cooperative strategies on learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Jordanian universities and schools and all of them revealed positive effects while applying different CL strategies in English Foreign Language (EFL) environment; for instance, (Zu'bi & Kitishat, 2013) investigated a study about the impact of student teams-achievement divisions (STAD) strategy on FL reading achievement then the results of the study showed that STAD developed the academic achievements of average students.

Moreover, technology plays an important role to achieve LCA goals; it enables teachers to respond to students' needs and using the suitable technological devices in teaching and learning language develops the skills and components of language and offers ongoing assessment for the students so they become responsible for their own learning and can assess their learning themselves. Also, it makes education interactive and the teachers take role as facilitators and the students become more active. In Jordan, the results of several studies (Al-zu'bi, 2012; Al-zu'bi, 2013a; Al-zu'bi, 2013b; Al-zu'bi, 2015 & Al-zu'bi, 2018) aimed at studying the effect of using several technological devices on the four skills of English language and components or evaluation showed that using technology is effective and has positive effectiveness on learning English language skills and its components. For example, one of the previous studies (Al-zu'bi, 2013a) showed that using mobile-based email improved the students' writing skills and building vocabularies.

Not only using cooperative learning strategies or computer assisted language learning (CALL) achieve student-centered class, but also using different methods in learning EFL that focus on the needs and interests of the students leads to student-centered class like using extensive reading method. For example, in Jordan, (Alzu'bi, 2014) urged to use extensive reading method to improve English language proficiency for its positive effectiveness on learning English.

In Jordan, English is taught at schools and universities as a foreign language. Students learn English and follow a system that includes the teacher, curriculum, classrooms activities, teaching methods, and family which impact on the learning process. Unfortunately, the teachers don't verify their methods in particular at the university level. Also, they don't focus on the high levels of thinking either at school level or university level (Alzu'bi, 2014).

However, the students' problem in learning any foreign language can be solved according to the modern theory of learning by adopting learner-centered approach (Obskov, et al., 2015). The teachers should pay attention on the needs of the students by adopting LCA; thus

the researcher conducted the present study to offer a convincing answer if LCA strategies and activities are applied at English departments in Jordanian universities according to the students views themselves.

*A. The problem of the study.*

The researcher believes that the student is the center of the educational process. He noticed that most of the learning activities in the EFL classes at Al-Balqa Applied University are traditionally applied by the instructors; they transfer the information and evaluate the students' learning while the students are passive because they record the given information by the instructor directly without finding them by research. Both instructor and student should use the active learning activities and strategies inside English classrooms such as cooperative learning strategies, using technology, getting benefits from office hours and finding activities those suite large classes.

The instructors of English language should change their classical role from tellers and dominants to coordinators and facilitators. Kapretev (2006) states that the foreign language teachers can create conditions for its learning and they should be changed from the "sage on the stage" to "guide on side".

Before solving the previous problems, the researcher tries to conduct the present study in order to find out the degree of applying LCA activities inside English environment in order to change the role of both (students and the teachers).

*B. Purpose and question of the Study:*

The purpose of the study is to measure the English students' views about the degree of using LCA activities in EFL classrooms. To fulfill the purpose of the study, the study tried to answer the main following question.

- What is the degree of practicing LCA activities in the EFL classrooms based on English students' views?

*C. Definition of Concepts*

LCA: is a strategy used in EFL environment wherein the students are the center of the teaching and learning process who are the decision makers (Nunan, 1999) and learn the foreign language themselves by using different types of learner-centered techniques that achieve their needs and interests such as cooperative learning strategies and technological devices (Brown, 2001:46-47). Furthermore, LCA emphasizes on the teacher roles as motivator and facilitator.

Computer- assisted language learning (CALL): It is an approach that includes several technological devices for teaching and learning English.

Cooperative learning: It is an approach used by the English teachers to facilitate learning in the classroom which arranges students into groups in order to learn English. It is an educational approach which aims to organize classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences (Robyn, 2016).

*D. Limitation of the study*

This study was applied on the views of 200 English Language students in Al-Balqa Applied University at English departments.

Related studies

The researcher divided the related studies into two parts; the first one contains four studies about the effect of LCA on improving English students' achievement. The second part includes three studies on the attitudes of both "the students and the teachers" towards LCA.

*A. Part one:*

The first four studies claimed that using LCA activities in the English environment improve learners' achievement in learning English and motivating students learning as follows:

The first study was conducted by Philominraj and et al (2017) that aimed at finding the effect of learner-centered approach model (visual learning) on English language learning. The researchers selected 504 students from ten higher secondary schools to respond on a questionnaire which includes topics concerning their exposure to environment and visual and audiovisual tools. After analyzing the data, the study emphasized the importance of using visual learning in creating learning situation.

The second study conducted by Matukhin and Bolgova(2015) focuses on the effect of learner-centered approach on the psychological and pedagogical conditions in teaching foreign language to engineering students at the Tomsk Polytechnic University. Also, the results of the study indicated that the learner-centered approach improved engineering students' teaching foreign language and it has positive effects on the student's personality, the internal factors (individual psychological characteristics of a student) and the external ones psychological and pedagogical conditions of the educational process.

The third study was investigated by Alexandra (2013) which aimed at discussing the importance of using learner-centred approach in the English class. The study defined learner-centered approach, gave the reasons why it is important, then gave a practice to examine the effect of learner-centered activities on developing language skills needed in a business environment. The study concluded that the learner-centered approach to teaching English is more effective than the teacher-centered approach because learner-centered approach concentrates on the students' needs and fulfill those needs by developing students' ability to use language effectively in real-life contexts rather than knowledge transmission.

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The last study (Matsau2007) Investigated the impact of learner-centered approach on teaching of English and Sesotho languages in Lesotho secondary schools. After the researcher described the learner-centered approach and its applications in the class, the finding revealed that that learner-centered activities are not only effective for languages learning but it also affects positively on all subjects. Also, the study suggested several important implications like the importance of cooperation among all teachers and to work as a team and the importance of training teachers on how to use learner-centered activities.

*B. Part two:*

For students' attitudes towards LCA, Jambor (2007) conducted a study that aimed at discovering the students' attitudes toward the learner centered approach in English classes. The researcher selected his sample from Hoseo University students. The instruments of the study were questionnaire and recordings. The result of the study revealed that the students' attitudes towards learner centered approach were negative although the subjects showed an overall improvement in their communication skills.

On the other hand, for teachers' attitudes towards LCA, two studies were conducted to find out the teachers' attitudes towards LCA; the first one done by Salleh and Yusoff (2016) that aimed at examining two major variables: Firstly, the teachers' attitudes towards using of SCL in English language classes, secondly, the extent of practicing SCL by the teachers in their classrooms. a sample of 147 answered a questionnaire then this research showed that there were positive attitudes of the English language teachers towards student-centered learning. Apart from that, the findings also revealed that there was a positive relationship between student-centered learning practices and students' achievement in the English language subject but the relationship was a weak relationship. The researcher suggested important recommendations like conducting further other studies in the future and improving teacher training. The second study conducted by Idris(2016) to find out the instructors' perspective towards student-centered learning in teaching English language as a second language in Saudi Petroleum Services Polytechnic in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The sample of the study consisted thirty-five teachers who teach Saudi Aramco apprentices. Also, the study examines whether using Student-Centered Learning (SCL) is more effective in teaching English language than the traditional teaching approaches. The results showed significant change in teachers' perspectives regarding Student-Centered Learning SCL and positive impact of SCL.

The present study is unique and different from the previous studies because its main purpose to measure the extent or the degree of using LCA activities in the English learning

environment but the different purposes of the previous studies are to find the students' or instructors' attitudes towards LCA or to find the effect of using LCA on achievement. Thus, this study is important because it is a base for other researches.

#### Methods and procedures

##### A. *The subject of the study*

The sample of the study consists of (200) students whose major is English Language and Literature in different English Departments in Albalqa' Applied University.

##### B. *The instrument of the study*

The students' views were assessed by students' scaled designed by the researcher himself. It was administered in April 2018. The questionnaire consists of 25 items about several activities of LCA (See Table 2). For the validity of the scale, the researcher gave the first draft to a panel of experts to make comments on then he edited and produced the final draft in its present shape. For the reliability of the instrument, the researcher ensured that the scale was reliable by computing Cronbach Alpha.

##### C. *Statistical analysis*

To compare the results, the researcher analyzed the obtained data by using the means and the standard deviation

##### D. Procedures of the study

1. The researcher started with reviewing the related studies about the impact of LCA on achievement and attitudes of learners and teachers towards using LCA activities.
2. The researcher designed the instrument of the study according to the activities and elements of LCA which mentioned in the literature review.
3. The researcher established validity and reliability of the instrument.
4. The researcher selected the sample of the study and held meeting with them to make them recognizing the purpose of the study and to start the experiment.
5. The researcher collected the information and analyzed the obtained data.
6. The researcher discusses the findings and suggested recommendations and implications to teaching and learning English via LCA activities.

#### Results

To find the students' views towards using different activities of LCA, the means scores and standard deviations were computed in table 2. Also, the researcher adopts the following measurement to make judgment on each item in Table 1:

Table 1

Scale of Statement Strength according to the Means Scores

Level-1-	Level-2-	Level-3-
Strong	Medium	Weak
Above .79%	.51%- .78%	Beneath .50

Table 2

Means Scores and Standard Deviations of the Participants viewstowards practicing Learner-Centered Approach(LCA)

No.	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree
1	I am closely and extensively involved in making decisions inside the English class.	.70	.459	Medium
2	The instructors are well-trained.	.52	.501	Medium
3	Iam involved in selecting the curriculum or planning lessons.	.42	.494	Weak
4	The English classes are Lack of educational resources and equipment for learning.	.53	.501	Medium
5	I learn from my mistakes.	.74	.442	Medium
6	The instructors verify the ways of assessment and evaluations.	.45	.498	Weak
7	I am involved in the evaluation practices.	.51	.501	Medium
8	The English instructors care of students' Socio-economic background.	.45	.499	Weak
9	I am creative and active inside English department.	.49	.501	Weak
10	The English instructors give the students the opportunity to Small group discussions at the beginning and end of each class.	.61	.489	Medium
11	My instructor deals with us equally.	.49	.501	Weak
12	I read my friends' papers and comment on them.	.46	.499	Weak
13	I attend conferences, academic meetings or any activities inside my college.	.46	.499	Weak
14	The physical characteristics of the classroom are suitable.	.47	.501	Weak
15	I can show my homework to my classmates.	.63	.484	Medium
16	The instructors Use the content to stimulate students.	.62	.488	Medium
17	My instructor is director and facilitator.	.55	.499	Medium
18	I am involved in participation.	.80	.397	Strong

19	I use technology and multimedia.	.66	.473	Medium
20	I participate and vote on important issues for the college.	.47	.500	Weak
21	I take tests when I think I am ready.	.47	.500	Weak
22	The teacher speaks less than all the students in class.	.47	.501	Weak
23	I am free to select my choices.	.55	.499	Medium
24	I respect my classmates and teachers.	.79	.412	Strong
25	My instructors give the students the chance to select preferable strategies in learning like cooperative learning strategies or individual learning.	.79	.408	Strong
Total		.56	.222	Medium
QALL		14.08	5.546	

In Table 2, the total's percentage of the mean score is (56%) which means that the degree of applying different activities that based on Learner-Centered Approach(LCA) according to views of (200) English students is weak. The students rated the following highest statements: "No.18, No.24, No.25" However, they gave low ratings to the most of the statements as follows: "No.3, No.6, No8, No.9, No.11, No.12, No,13, No14, No.20, No.21 and No.22". It means that most of LCA activities weren't strongly available from students' perspectives.

## Discussion

The results of the previous conducted studies have indicated positive influence of adopting LCA on students' achievement and positive teachers' and students' attitudes towards using LCA in teaching and learning process. For example, (Philominraj and et al, 2017) found out that LCA had positive effect on English language learning. Also, a study is carried out by Salleh and Yusoff (2016) which found out that there were positive attitudes of the English language teachers and students towards student-centered learning.

The results of the previous studies are expected because of the advantages of using LCA activities especially in teaching and learning language. For the students, it focuses on their needs and makes them active. LCA activities also helps students to build students' self-esteem and positive attitudes towards learning English, and enjoy learning and work together to achieve their goals. For teachers, they have not to do a lot of traditional work.



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As a result, the researcher conducted the present study to make sure that LCA activities are practiced in the EFL environment to get benefits from. However, the researcher himself is pessimist because the results of this study showed that the total percentage of applying LCA in EFL environment is low which means that most of LCA activities are not adopted in the EFL environment such as involving the students in selecting their curriculum, verifying the methods of evaluations, caring of students' Socio-economic background, attending academic meetings, and the students' passivity. The current study doesn't agree with the previous studies. However, it agreed with the result of Jambor (2007) study which revealed that the students' attitudes towards learner centered approach were negative.

The explanation for the previous negative results of the study is the fact that the instructors don't adopt LCA activities in their English classes because they are traditional; in other words, the English classes in the English department are Teacher- Centered Classes for several reasons such as; they act as dominants, they don't verify their methods and approaches and they don't provide opportunities to use target language. Also, most of the instructors weren't given training over LCA activities so the students react negatively on this approach negatively. Moreover, this approach requires long time.

Another possible explanation for not using the different activities of LCA is that the instructors are not democratic while dealing with the students. This explanation approves the results of Al-Zubi (2018) who conducted a study to find the degree of practicing democracy in the tefl classrooms according to the instructors' perceptions. The result of his study indicated that the English instructors didn't apply the principles of democracy inside EFL environment.

#### Recommendation

The study recommended English language instructors in Jordanto change their classical methods in teaching process and to adopt the learner centered approach for teaching EFL or other subjects to get benefit from so the ministry of education and higher education should encourage the teachers at universities and schools to use this approach by conducting seminars and training courses. Also, it suggests to conduct other studies about the degree of applying LCA at schools and universities. Other studies may also be conducted about the positive impacts of Student-Centered Learning on students' achievements in different fields. Also, future studies need to be conducted with different levels of instructor of different specializations to show their attitudes towards LCA. Finally, large number of different samples should be selected in future studies to make generalization.

#### Conclusion

Based on the results of the previous related studies, it is clear that using LCL activities approach has great effect on learning especially in learning language. Also, most of the students' and teachers' attitudes towards adopting LCA are positive. However, the present study concluded that the degree of applying LCA activities in the EFL environment is low according to the students' perspectives; because the low percentage of (56.0%) indicates that the instructors at AAU don't apply most of those activities in teaching EFL at Albalqa Applied University. As a result, the study recommends the instructors to focus on the activities of LCA to get benefits from.

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