The Use and Challenges of Learner-Centered Pedagogy: Basic School Teachers’ Perspective

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\textbf{ABSTRACT}

The purpose of the study was to identify the instructional strategies that basic (primary) school teachers often use in learner-centered pedagogy and examine the challenges associated with the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. A mixed-method research design was used to study basic school teachers’ use of learner-centered pedagogy and the challenges they face in the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. The sample for the study consisted of 53 public school teachers and 32 private school teachers selected through convenience sampling. A Use of Learner-Centered Pedagogy Questionnaire (ULCPQ) was administered to the sample. After the analysis of the quantitative data collected with the ULCPQ, a semi-structured interview guide named Challenges of Learner-Centered Pedagogy (CLCP) was administered to 15 basic school teachers at their convenience. The study found that the top three learner-centered instructional strategies used by the participants are discussion, brainstorming, and cooperative learning instructional strategies. In their application of learner-centered instructional strategies, the participants for the study reported that there are four key challenges to the use of learner-centered instruction. The four challenges are inadequate teaching and learning resources, inadequate time, weak teacher knowledge of learner-centered instruction, and large class size.

\textbf{Keywords:} Basic school, instructional strategies, learner-centered pedagogy, teaching.

1. \textbf{Introduction}

As research into learning psychology increases, teaching psychology is evolving accordingly, leading to new and effective teaching approaches. These approaches put the learner at the center of the teaching and learning process. Learners become rational thinkers, creators, and problem solvers, while teachers are seen to be innovative, creative, and knowledgeable as they apply these teaching approaches. To bring the best out of learners, the current psychology of teaching promotes giving a high degree of autonomy to learners. To make the potential of the student visible and efficient, teachers must give the learners the autonomy to explore, investigate, manipulate, enquire, and produce tangible products to solve problems. Madani (2019) expounds that the primary function of education is to provide learners with adequate skills and knowledge that will make learners informed, concerned, and participatory citizens of society. This points to the fact that the teaching and learning environment should be altered from an objective teacher to a more subjective teacher position.

Current promising instructional practices accentuate the use of a subjective approach that includes setting learning goals, subject matter, and a conducive learning environment that increases productive teaching and learning. In the subjective learning environment, learners have opportunities to practice new learning and gain new knowledge and skills to perfect, novel facts to be assimilated, new anger to be confronted, novel knowledge to map quests, novel puzzles to surmise, and novel routes to comprehend. Teachers direct learners to interact, listen, react, and communicate with others through collaboration and interaction (Webb, 2009). This paves the way for a significant shift from the conventional teacher-focus methodology to a learner-centered approach that makes learners active participants in the classroom setting.
Learner-centered pedagogy promotes higher-order thinking practice, challenges-orientated hands-on activities, and helps learners take responsibility for their learning.

There has been a consistent call for a shift, backed by empirical evidence, from the teacher-centered methods of pedagogy to learner-centered pedagogy (Crick & McCombs, 2006; Harris & Cullen, 2008). The use of learner-centered pedagogy promotes a democratic approach to teaching that modifies the teacher from the center of the teaching-learning process to the sideline (Cornelius-White, 2007). This change is accomplished by making learners active participants in classroom activities and engaging in self-directed learning outside the classroom (Wright, 2011). The extent to which the shift has influenced teaching and learning in Ghanaian public basic schools is largely empirically unknown. Therefore, this study sought to study the frequency of use of learner-centered pedagogy in a municipality in Ghana. The study examined the learner-centered instructional strategies commonly used by basic school teachers and the challenges they face in applying the learner-centered instructional strategies.

1.1. Learner-Centered Pedagogy

A successful contemporary educational institution transforms learners into people with diverse competencies such as problem-solving, communication and collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and leadership skills. These competencies are what the world of work looks for. To produce graduates who meet this demand, there is a shift towards using instructional strategies that help acquire these competencies. This implies that teachers must have adequate pedagogical content knowledge to avoid overreliance on teacher-centered pedagogy. Good knowledge of pedagogical content is a prerequisite for the effective use of learner-centered pedagogy. Learner-centered pedagogy is based on the assumption that, in the classroom setting, learners come from multidimensional backgrounds, so teachers must utilize varied teaching methods that satisfy the needs and capabilities of learners.

All actions in the teaching and learning process should be focused on the learners. Teachers only facilitate learning. Therefore, opportunities are to be created for learners to solve problems by applying already learned materials. This will encourage learners to apply their knowledge and skills to solve problems that mitigate the development of society. The teacher-centered learning environments predominantly encourage the accumulation of facts. However, learners in this modern society are not just required to acquire knowledge; they must make prudent use of their knowledge and skills outside the classroom. Unlike teacher-centered pedagogy, learner-centered pedagogy places the learner at the crux of the teaching-learning process. It aims to provide learners with interactive, flexible, and collaborative learning through an egalitarian and child-friendly avenue where learners’ desires, grievances, and goals are acknowledged (Singh, 2011).

The primary characteristic of learner-centered pedagogy is that learners control and dictate the pace of the teaching-learning process, but only to the degree that permits the acquisition of curricula permissible knowledge and skills. The teacher allows learners to learn from their peers and also serves as a facilitator or assistant. The shift in autonomy from teachers to learners makes learner-centered pedagogy an instructional technique emphasizing meaningful learning (Bar & Tagg, 1995). Learner-centered pedagogy provides learners with a platform for progressive self-directed learning that helps assess the commitment and dexterity of learners. Learners can learn what is important to them as they participate in various activities. Learner-centered pedagogy includes innovative instructional strategies such as interactive, experiential, and independent teaching and learning strategies. Learner-centered pedagogy leads to increased enthusiasm for learning, greater recollection of cognitive processes, deeper comprehension, and a more positive attitude toward the content to be learned.

The learner-centered pedagogy is grounded in constructivist epistemology postulated by Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. This theory holds that knowledge is impermanent, internally created, socioculturally surmised, and nonobjective (Crotty, 1998; Fosnot & Perry, 1996; Hendry et al., 1999). Constructivism shuns teacher-dominated teaching methods. Instead, it aligns with instructional strategies that consider the learners as individuals who can autonomously construct knowledge based on previous experience and knowledge. The constructivist posits that when learners are given time and opportunity to build their ideas and thoughts on a given concept, it helps them to create and understand the ideas, knowledge, and concepts they have created. Constructivism considers that learners are not empty vessels waiting to be filled by teachers. Instead, knowledge is constructed by learners through experimental, interactive, and collaborative learning processes that make learners the architects of knowledge and meaning. It is based on the learners’ capabilities, desires, curiosity, and enthusiasm. Constructivism assumes that the nature of learning is self-directed, collaborative, and innovative.

Although the teacher is passive in this teaching-learning approach, he or she must streamline the content the learners are learning in the right direction. According to Moate and Cox (2015), the teacher’s main function is to provide learners with teaching and learning resources and a conducive environment that supports the learner-centered approach rather than the didactic method. In addition to teaching and learning resources, the teacher selects the appropriate learner-centered instructional strategies and drives the teaching and learning process. Learner-centered pedagogies can be challenging to implement in a standards-based curriculum and assessment culture. Teachers are not free to modify the teaching and learning process to the extent that the curricular planners’ pace of covering content is much slower than anticipated. Teachers face the dilemma of preparing students for life and passing standardized tests. The quickest way of preparing students to pass standardized tests is by applying teacher-centered pedagogies tailored toward preparation for passing tests. Some teachers do not consider learner-centered approaches appropriate for preparing learners to pass tests. However, as noted by Darsh (2018), learner-centered pedagogies effectively prepare students for life.
and tests. Teachers must only understand the 'complexities
involved in their new roles as facilitators of knowledge
building rather than transmitters of knowledge' (Dole
et al., 2016, p. 3).

1.2. Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study was to investigate the instruc-
tional strategies used by teachers and the challenges
that hinder the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy.
Specifically, the study sought to (i) identify what basic
school teachers often use in learner-centered pedagogy and
(ii) examine the challenges associated with the imple-
mentation of learner-centered pedagogy.

1.3. Research Questions
The study answered the following research questions:
1. What are the learner-centered instructional strate-
gies commonly used by basic school teachers?
2. What are the challenges associated with the imple-
mentation of learner-centered pedagogy in basic
school?

2. Methodology
A mixed-method research design was used to study basic
school teachers’ use of selected learner-centered instruc-
tional strategies and their challenges in implementing
learner-centered pedagogy. The mixed method research
was employed due to the information required to answer
the two research questions. The researchers wanted to find
out the frequency of using specific instructional strate-
gies. To get this data, using a questionnaire to collect
quantitative data from a large sample of basic school
teachers was appropriate. A semi-structured interview was
conducted to explore the challenges basic school teach-
ers face in implementing learner-centered pedagogy. The
sample for the study was 85 basic school teachers. The
85 basic school teachers were sampled using a conve-
nience sampling procedure. The sample consisted of 53
public school teachers and 32 private school teachers. The
researchers approached the teachers while the teachers
were in their classrooms. They were informed about the
purpose of the study and ensured the anonymity of their
identity and the information they would provide. A Use of
Learner-Centered Pedagogy Questionnaire (ULCPQ) was
administered to the sample. Qualitative data was collected
through structured interviews.

After analyzing the quantitative data collected with
the ULCPQ, a semi-structured interview guide named
Challenges of Learner-Centered Pedagogy (CLCP) was
administered to each of the 15 basic school teachers at their
convenience. These teachers consisted of nine public school
teachers and six private school teachers who were ran-
domly selected from the 85 basic school teachers to ensure
the sample for the interview was representative of the
participants who completed the ULCPQ. The participants
were given pseudo-names (e.g., Private School Teacher 1
and Public School Teacher 7) to make their responses
anonymous. The data collected from the questionnaire was
analyzed using frequencies, while the data obtained from
the CLCP interview schedule was analyzed descriptively.
The key disadvantage of using this design was the weak
power of generalization of the findings. The sample was
obtained through convenient sampling; therefore, the sam-
ple is not representative of basic school teachers in the
municipality where the study was conducted. Therefore,
the study’s findings are limited to the sample and only
suggest that other basic school teachers in the municipality
may have similar views about the use and challenges of
implementing learner-centered instructional strategies.

3. Results
This section has been organized into two parts according
to data type. The first part results from the quantitative
data obtained from the 85 basic school teachers. The
result is aggregated by teacher type: private and pub-
lic basic school teachers. The second part is the result of
the interview, which was conducted to determine the
challenges the basic school teachers face in implementing
learner-centered pedagogy. The qualitative result is pre-
sented descriptively.

3.1. Use of Selected Instructional Strategies
A list of instructional strategies was listed for teachers
to indicate their frequency of use of each of the instruc-
tional strategies. The results have been presented in Tables I
and II.

It can be seen from Table I that 47 public school teachers
indicated that the dominant teaching method they use in
their classrooms is discussion. The least used instructional
strategy is debate. Only two teachers indicated that they use
debate most of the time. The teachers who reported using
the project-based method occasionally were 33, while 32
teachers used role-play occasionally. The lecture method,
a teacher-centered teaching method, was most often used
by 7 teachers, while 12 teachers reported that they had
never used it. Brainstorming was the second most com-
monly used teaching method. For cooperative learning, 25
teachers reported that they used cooperative learning most
of the time, while 24 teachers used it occasionally.

As shown in Table II, the responses of the private school
teachers were similar to those of the public school teach-
ers. The dominant teaching method most often used is
discussion, whereas the underutilized teaching method
encompasses simulation and debate. The teaching meth-
ods that most private school teachers used the least were
project-based (1) and inquiry-based (1). Out of the 32
private school teachers, 17 used role-play occasionally, 16
used inquiry-based occasionally, 14 also indicated that
project-based was also used occasionally, and 13 teachers
reported that debate as a teaching method was occasion-
ally utilized. Like public school teachers, private school
teachers rarely used brainstorming. It was revealed that
11 private school teachers used debate, simulation, and
project-based teaching methods. 9 teachers reported that
simulation was never used in their classroom instruction.
3.2. Challenges of Implementing Learner-centered Pedagogy

CLCP was carried out after the administration of the ULCPQ. The interview was conducted using 9 public and 6 private school teachers. The interview took place two weeks after basic school teachers had completed responding to statements in the ULCPQ. It sought to explore the challenges of implementing learner-centered pedagogy. Each interview session lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interview was conducted in the classroom during break time. The interview focused on the challenges elementary school teachers face in implementing learner-centered pedagogy in the classroom.

Public School Teacher 1 explained that the main challenge in implementing learner-centered pedagogy is inadequate teaching-learning resources. The interviewee explained that inadequate teaching-learning resources inhibit the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy by encouraging teaching methods that do not rely heavily on teaching-learning resources. Public School Teacher 5 and Private School Teacher 3 stated that inadequate basic teaching-learning resources, such as learners’ readers and poster colors, hinder the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. Private School Teacher 1 also supported the view that inadequate teaching-learning resources hinder the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. The interviewee explained that the availability of teaching-learning resources is one of the critical elements of learner-centered pedagogy. Other interviewees supported these views.

Public School Teacher 5 also clarified that inadequate time on the teaching timetable impedes the effective implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. Public School Teacher 6 also mentioned time as a challenge. As noted by Public School Teacher 6:

“Learner-centered pedagogy is beneficial to learners; however, it involves the use of more instructional time so that learners can grasp the content being taught.” (Public School Teacher 6).

Additionally, Public School Teacher 6 indicates that inadequate time on the schedule impedes the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. The teacher explained that there is so much content to be covered in a term, and teaching strategies that allow a lot of content to be covered quickly are preferred.

Private School Teacher 2 also mentioned time as a challenge to implementing learner-centered instruction. To this teacher:

“The biggest challenge to the use of learner-centered pedagogy is time to plan and enact activities in the classroom.” (Private School Teacher 2).

Other issues raised with respect to time were related to activities and giving individual attention to learners. Most of the teachers who were interviewed were of the opinion that it takes time to create a learner-centered activity that both the learners and the teacher can easily follow. Besides this, it also takes time to attend to individual learners or groups as they perform their activities.

The hyperactive nature of the learners was cited as one of the challenges. Only Private School Teacher 4 revealed that:

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### TABLE I: Public School Teachers’ Use of Selected Instructional Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-based</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry-based</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trip</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE II: Private School Teachers’ Use of Selected Instructional Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional strategies</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorming</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project-based</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry-based</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simulation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trip</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“The hyperactive nature of some learners makes it difficult to implement learner-centered pedagogy in the classroom. Although learners are the focus of the teaching-learning process, the attitudes of some of them toward learning interfere with the smooth implementation of learner-centered pedagogy.” (Private School Teacher 4).

Public School Teacher 7 expressed that an obstacle to implementing learner-centered pedagogy is the large class size. Large class size does not allow the facilitator (teacher) to scaffold low-achieving learners in the classroom. This deters the teacher from using pluridimensional teaching methods in their instructional process. Public School Teacher 2 was of the view that large class sizes also hamper the effective implementation of learner-centered pedagogy in the classroom.

Public School Teacher 9 said that if teachers’ knowledge about the use of the various learner-centered approaches is weak, they will not apply learner-centered instruction in their classroom, even if there is enough time. To this teacher: “Learner-centered instructional strategies may not be time-consuming if the teacher knows how to teach with such an approach. I think the problem is that teachers do not use these approaches because they do not know how to teach using such approaches.” (Public School Teacher 9).

As explained by Public School Teacher 9, teachers tend to use teaching strategies they are familiar with, comfortable using, and effective in facilitating learning in students. These factors (familiarity, ease of use, and effectiveness) are dependent on the teacher’s knowledge of the use of the learner-centered pedagogy. Teachers will not employ teaching strategies they are not conversant with or have little knowledge about its effectiveness or application.

4. Discussion

The private and public school teachers who participated in the study often used discussion, brainstorming, and cooperative learning methods in their instructional process. Conversely, these teachers seldom used debate, simulation, and lecture as instructional strategies in their classrooms. The public school teachers often used inquiry-based teaching strategies than their counterparts in the private schools. The teachers’ use of learner-centered pedagogies was challenged by factors including inadequate teaching and learning resources, large class size, inadequate teaching and learning resources for the various contents, and teachers’ knowledge of learner-centered pedagogies.

As noted by Gutek (2014), learner-centered pedagogy shifts the teacher’s role from an all-knowing perspective to a facilitator of knowledge acquisition. It is not just a shift in roles in the teaching and learning process that matters. The teacher’s ideas about the entire process of curriculum change are also important. According to Anderson (2016), learner-centered pedagogy alters teachers’ cognition concerning pedagogy and curriculum planning. The central idea of learner-centered pedagogy is guiding learners to autonomously exhibit their endowed potential in the teaching-learning processes (Boyadzhieva, 2016). The learner-centered pedagogy allows learners to explore, enquire, analyze, manipulate, and draw evaluative conclusions. In this process, the use of multifaceted instructional strategies by teachers in teaching-learning processes that harness learners’ capabilities, skills, and talents in a conducive learning environment is essential. Therefore, using learner-centered pedagogy requires effort and knowledge concerning pluridimensional instructional strategies.

The study’s findings on the frequent use of discussion, brainstorming, and cooperative learning methods are consistent with some previous studies. For example, An and Mindrila (2020) found that teachers often use cooperative learning approaches in their lessons. For basic school learners, learning in groups facilitates learning better due to their innate tendency to play and interact with each other. Samperio Sanchez (2017) reported that teachers often use brainstorming and question and answer, a variant of the discussion method, in their lessons. The study found that basic school teachers do not often use the lecture method. This result is consistent with the study by Ünal (2017). Ünal studied the preferences of teaching methods and techniques in mathematics and found that mathematics teachers only sometimes use the lecture method. According to the study, the teachers used the lecture method to save time. This may be one reason why the lecture method was not used often by the basic school teachers who participated in the study.

The current study found inadequate teaching and learning resources as a factor that hinders the application of learner-centered instructional strategies in classrooms. Bußljeta (2013) posits that teaching-learning resources make the teaching process interesting and more attractive to the learners. It helps the teacher in the smooth organization and conduct of classroom activities. The absence or inadequacy of teaching and learning resources makes teaching and learning unattractive to both learners and the teacher. To create an interactive classroom does not require only the use of words. Learners should also engage with teaching and learning resources. It may be for this reason that Vavrus and Bartlett (2012) asserted that inadequate teaching-learning resources are a major drawback to implementing learner-centered pedagogy.

The study also found that large class sizes challenge the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. The tenet of learner-centered pedagogy is to increase learners’ performance in teaching-learning. Class size, which involves poor spacing and seating arrangement, makes it difficult to implement learner-centered pedagogy. This is consistent with the findings of O’Sullivan (2004), Chipiko and Shawa (2014) and Kumar (2016). The authors reported in their respective studies that large class sizes impede the implementation of learner-centered pedagogy. This confirms that many learners in one class and inadequate classroom space are among the difficulties teachers in the study area face in implementing learner-centered pedagogy. Where the class size is large, pedagogies that require paying close attention to individual learners or groups of learners are difficult to implement unless the teacher possesses a good knowledge of the application of learner-centered pedagogies.
The teacher’s knowledge of learner-centered pedagogies influences his/her use of learner-centered instructional pedagogies. Teachers may know learner-centered instructional strategies in theory; however, a degree of expertise is required to implement them effectively in their classrooms. Integrating learner-centered instructional strategies in lessons requires expertise (Metto & Makewa, 2014). This may account for the teachers’ seldom use of learner-centered instructional strategies like debate. In the study by An and Mindrila (2020), participants reported that one of the challenges to implementing learner-centered pedagogy is a lack of or low knowledge of using such teaching strategies. The lack of expertise in applying learner-centered pedagogy could account for the participants’ perception that inadequate time hinders using learner-centered instructional strategies.

The last key challenge to using learner-centered pedagogies reported by the participants is inadequate time. The perception that inadequate time hinders implementing learner-centered instructional strategies may hold. As reported by the participants, it takes much time to plan or create learner-centered activities and enact them in the classroom. It also takes time to attend to individual learners and assist those with difficulties while implementing learner-centered instructional strategies. However, time will pose a huge challenge to basic teachers who cannot apply learner-centered instructional strategies in lessons. Such teachers are more likely to find the planning of learner-centered instructional strategies laborious.

5. Conclusion

Effective basic school teachers constantly generate opportunities for learners to learn and technically manage instruction. They maximize instructional time and bring about meaningful learning in learners by employing learner-centered instructional strategies. The application of learner-centered instructional strategies promotes meaningful and lasting learning. The basic school teachers who participated in the study employed various learner-centered instructional strategies. The participants of the study employed multiple instructional strategies in their classroom. The top three learner-centered instructional strategies used by the participants are discussion, brainstorming, and cooperative learning instructional strategies. In their application of learner-centered instructional strategies, the participants reported they faced some challenges. The current study found four key challenges to the use of learner-centered instruction. The four challenges are inadequate teaching and learning resources, time, teachers’ knowledge of learner-centered instruction, and large class sizes.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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