Evaluating the Appropriateness of Learner-centered Education in Higher Education

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Mohamed Mabrouk Masaud \ English Language Teaching - Omar Al-Mukhtar University \

mmabroukm@googlemail.com

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Abstract :

This study aims at introducing learner-centered education as an alternative to the conventional education that exists in higher education institutions in Libyan universities. The assumption is that the didactic teaching hinders learners from participating effectively in the learning process. The study will explore possible obstacles and factors that influence the learning situation. Possible ways to improve the situation will be suggested. This will include adopting the ways of learning which encourage learners to be active participants rather than recipient of knowledge. This study is an attempt to introduce the learner-centered approach to both teachers and learners. It is hoped that it will be possible to replace the strict teacher-centered approach to learning which prevail in Libyan universities with the suggested approach. The ultimate goal is to encourage learners to be themselves, and to learn by themselves instead of passively regurgitate information remembered from lectures. By the end of the study, some suggestions are introduced in an attempt to encourage both university teachers and students to adopt the learner-centered education. This of course necessitate the modification of both teachers and learners roles in the learning process.

Keywords: learner-centered education, learner-centered approach, didactic teaching, the Libyan university.

تقييم مدى ملاءمة التعليم المتمحور حول المتعلم في التعليم العالي

د. محمد المبروك مسعود سلطان

الملخص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم التعليم المتمحور حول المتعلم كبديل للتعليم التقليدي الموجود في مؤسسات التعليم العالي في الجامعات الليبية. الافتراض هو أن التعليم التلقيني يعيق المتعلمين من المشاركة الفعالة في عملية التعلم. ستكشف الدراسة العقبات والعوامل المحتملة التي تؤثر على حالة التعلم. سيتم اقتراح الطرق الممكنة لتحسين الواقع التعليمي. وسيشمل ذلك تبني طرق التعلم التي تشجع المتعلمين على أن يكونوا مشاركين نشطين بدل ان يكونوا متلقين للمعرفة. هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لتقديم النهج الذي يركز على المتعلم لكل من المعلمين والمتعلمين، ومن المأمول أنه سيكون من الممكن استبدال النهج الصارم الذي يركز على المعلم في العملية التعليمية والذي يسود الجامعات الليبية بالنهج المقترح. الهدف النهائي هو تشجيع المتعلمين على أن يكونوا على طبيعتهم،

وأن يتعلموا بأنفسهم بدلاً من استرجاع المعلومات التي يتم تذكرها من المحاضرات بشكل سلبي. بحلول نهاية الدراسة، يتم تقديم بعض الاقتراحات في محاولة لتشجيع أعضاء هيئة التدريس بالجامعة والطلاب على تبني التعليم المتمحور حول المتعلم، وهذا بالطبع يستلزم تعديل أدوار كل من المعلمين والمتعلمين في العملية التعليمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم المتمحور حول المتعلم، النهج الذي يركز على المتعلم، التعليم التلقيني، الجامعات الليبية .

1.1. Introduction

This study is concerned with two main issues: the first is the examination of the existing teaching process. The second issue is introducing learner-centered education as an alternative to the conventional education that exists in higher education in Libyan universities. The assumption is that the didactic teaching hinders learners from participating effectively in the learning process. The study will explore possible obstacles and factors that influence the learning situation. Possible ways to improve the situation will be suggested. This will include democratizing the ways of learning and encouraging learners to be active participants rather than recipient of knowledge. In other words, an attempt will be made to introduce the learner-centered approach to both teachers and learners. It is hoped that it will be possible to replace the strict teacher-centered approach to learning which prevail in Libya with suggested approach. The ultimate goal is to find possible ways to liberalize earners and encourage them to be themselves, and to learn by themselves instead of passively regurgitate information remembered from lectures.

This does not imply the elimination or marginalization of the teachers' role. Rather, it suggests that this role should be modified in order to enable learners to take responsibility for learning. Teachers should also play the facilitator role. The way in which teachers' role should be modified is that teachers and learners should become partners in the learning process.

1.2. Background

Students who joined the Libyan Universities are adults: they are 18-19 years old. Some mature students such as teachers may attend to get a better qualification. Knowles (1990:28) distinguishes between two types of learning theories: "**Pedagogy**" and "**andragogy**". He defines pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children. And andragogy as the art and science of helping adults learn. The pedagogical model gives the teachers full responsibility for making all decisions about what will be learned, how it will be learned and if it has been learned. According to this model, learning is a teacher centered process where learners have little or no role.

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[14] mentions the banking concept of education: teachers issue and make "deposit" which learners receive, memorize and repeat. Freire described the attitude and practices of a typical classroom as follows:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught.

- The teachers know everything and the students know nothing.

- The teacher talks and the students listen meekly.

- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about.

- The teachers choose and enforces his/her choice and the students comply.

- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher.

- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it.

- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined.

- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his/her own professional authority, which he/she sets in opposition to the freedom of the students.

- The teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects.

These attitudes and practices are similar to what are found in not just the university but also found in other schools in Libya [14] .

1.3. The study aims

Generally speaking, the study has four aims:

- To raise the issue of self-directed learning and other issues related to this topic such as styles of learning, learner autonomy, learning as a lifelong process, the teacher-learner relationship among students and teachers.

- To introduce discussion of the learner-centered approach as a possible alternative to the conventional teaching approach in Libyan Universities.

- To highlight the roles and the attitudes of both teachers and learners towards the existing teaching process.

- To explore the obstacles and factors that hinder university students from being independent learners.

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1.4. Perspectives from Literature:

In *Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1977) Knowles presents principles and techniques which emphasize assessing learners' needs, defining purpose and objectives, organizing programs, evaluating programs, managing principles and methods for courses, workshops and other types of educational activities. The learning approach is based on these principles which specifically relate to the education of adults.

In "*the Adult learner: A Neglected Species*", Knowles (1990:212) examines different theories of learning. He discusses some of the problems associated with traditional education. He says, "*In traditional education, the learning activity is structured by teachers and the institution. The imposed structure conflicts with adult's deep psychological need to be self-directing and may induce resistance, apathy or withdrawal.* He reaches the conclusion that adults are often taught like children. Knowles argues that adults bring motivation, expectation and experience to learning. He also emphasizes the notion that adult learners learn on their own initiative. They learn more deeply and permanently by participating in learning rather than being taught.

The Notion that learners should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own education is described by Boud [2] *Developing Student Autonomy in Learning*. This book represents a collection of articles written by university teachers who address the issue of learner autonomy. It attempts to illustrate how autonomy can be introduced to learners, how courses, which encourage autonomy, can be planned and how it can ensure that assessment practices support autonomy. The second part of the book presents case studies written by university teachers who describe ways of dealing with the autonomy issue.

Boud [3] *Appreciation Adult Learning: From the Learners' Perspective*, aims to raise the awareness of teachers of adults of the importance of the learner-centered Perspective. Griffin presents her experience as a university teacher. According to Griffin, independence means everyone feels equal and is in no level of hierarchy. She defines authority and power in a very interesting way which is worth exploring. She says that "*power is the ability to do and empowering of oneself is enabled by naming one's gifts and beginning to use them*". Thus, she believes that by recognizing one's abilities, one can become able to use them and be independent. She also distinguishes between authority and being authoritarian. She says,

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"you can't deny that you speak with authority, but it is not being authoritarian". To summarize, Griffin presents the tow words "power and authority" in a positive way. These terms are, however, often perceived as negative. For example, teachers may use their power and authority in such a way that learners' participation is prevented. This may be the case in many countries which traditional educational system prevail.

Candy (1988) *Evolution, Revolution and Devolution: Increasing Learner-control in the Instructional setting,* is chapter 13 which is cited in Boud and Griffin (1988) examines the evidence both for and against increasing learner-control in adult education. He presents different views which explain adult learners' reluctance to accept responsibility for decision making and for their own learning.

The role of the teacher as a facilitator is examined in chapter 17 from Boud and Griffin (1988: 222-229). *A Facilitator's View of Adult Learning*. Boud defines a facilitator as "any one who helps others to learn". In this chapter he aims to establish the characteristics of facilitating adult learning, emphasizing the notion that facilitators are adult learners too. This is emphasized by Freire [15] *A pedagogy for liberation*, when he states that "*Liberatory education is fundamentally a situation where the teacher and the students both have to be learners. Both have to be cognitive subjects, in spite of being different"*.

Beard and Hartley (1984) deal with the topic of learning and teaching in higher education. Part one of *"Teaching and Learning in Higher Education"* gives consideration to the objectives of teaching and learning. In part two, the psychology of learning and differences between individuals are discussed in order to illustrate the problems that students face in learning. Part three focusses on developing study skills in order to acquire and use information. This chapter is meant to highlight the concerns of learners. In part four, the authors describe different ways of teaching. It is interesting that the lecture method is praised for its economy and availability. This idea can be linked to both teachers and students' opinions of lecturing in Libyan universities. This concept of lecturing is also discussed by Freire (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire notion of "the banking concept of education" will be examined and linked with the learning situation in Libyan Universities. It is important to raise the issue of oppression which Freire (1972: 40) refers to. He claims that

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the banking concept of education *"maintain and even stimulates attitudes and practices which mirror oppressive society as a whole"*.

Freire [15] *A pedagogy for Liberation* highlight the importance of learners' participation and demonstration of learning. He illustrates what might be the goals of education, saying *"I am not against a curriculum or a program, but only against the authoritarian and elitist ways of organizing the studies. I am defending the critical participation of the students in their education"*.

White (1990) *Education and the good life*, tackles the notion of learner autonomy. This leads to an exploration of related issues such as personal autonomy and the role of education in helping people to be autonomous. White explores Eamonn Callan's view of autonomy and schooling and also Joseph Raz's account of the value of personal autonomy.

Elias and Merriam (1980) Philosophical of Adult Education, illustrates five steps of philosophy of adult education:

- Liberal Education.
- Behaviorist education.
- Progressive education.
- Humanistic education.
- Radical education.

This book describes the purpose of each philosophy, the role of learners and teachers and the methods that is commonly used in each type of education. This description of different types of philosophy will help to illustrate the philosophy of education which underpin education in Libyan universities.

2.1. Data Collection Tools

In this study, a questionnaire is used to collect data from university students. The questionnaire consists of thirteen questions. Every question is accompanied by four answers to the question and a residual. The residual is meant to give respondents an opportunity to give their own answer if they do not agree with the four answers provided. The respondents' answers are counted to establish the frequency of students' choice. The percentage of answers is used as an indication of students' preferences and opinions. Interviews have been

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conducted to explore teachers' opinion of the existing teaching process, their understanding of learner-centered education and their judgment of the obstacles that might prevent applying this approach. The interview is   an important tool of data collection in qualitative research. It enables the researcher to get an access to the respondents' perceptions, meanings and the way they define situations and their construction of reality.

2.2. Sampling

It is believed that qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to investigate the topic of learner-centered education. The researcher selected two Libyan universities from which the sample was taken. The sample included university teachers and students.   In this study, for reasons which are beyond the researcher's control, it was not possible to obtain random sampling to conduct the questionnaire. Also due to the sensitivity of the issue of learner-centered education and the related political issues and time constraints, the researcher selected only those who are willing to complete the questionnaire and to take the interviews. One hundred students from four University campuses completed the questionnaire and six university teachers were interviewed. Lists of students' names were not available to select students randomly. Thus, the researcher took the sample which was available.

2.3. Data Analysis

Two tools are used to collect data. The first is a questionnaire which includes questions followed by choices. Every question is followed by four options and the fifth choice is left residual for students to provide their own answers if they don't agree with the options provided. The second tool is the interview. Seven interviews were conducted. The researcher preferred to use Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework of analyzing data. This framework has three main components.

1) Data reduction.
2) Data display.
3) Drawing and verifying conclusions.

Data reduction

It means reducing the data without losing any information. Data is segmented and summarized so it can be put in a diagram.

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Data display

Researchers may use different ways of displaying data such as graphs, charts, diagrams, etc. The data display is used almost in all stages. It is an appropriate way to organize and summarize the data.

Drawing and verifying conclusions

Reducing and displaying data help researchers to have an overview of the whole work and assess them to draw conclusions.

The previous three components involve three main operations: coding, memoing and developing propositions.

Codes are the names or labels which are put against the pieces of data. This helps to find an index for classifying and organizing data.

Memoing may begin at the start of the analysis, along with coding. It helps researchers to write up ideas or observations about codes and their relationships with each other. Memoing may show things that happen during data collection and influence quality of data.

Developing propositions.

The third part of the analysis is conclusion drawing and verifying. This stage involves developing propositions. It is the process which integrates previous analytical processes in order to combine what has been done in one meaningful and coherent picture of the data.

3.1. Results and Analysis

3.1.1. Students Questionnaire

The students questionnaire is meant to explore students' opinions on the following subjects:

- The reasons that encourage students join the university.
- Whether the university education helps students in their life.
- The purpose of the learning process.
- Students' role in the learning process.
- Teachers' role.
- Teachers - learners relationship.
- The learning activities which are used in the class.
- The reasons that may prevented students from participating effectively in learning.

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- What should be the role of the teacher.

- Teachers' attitudes towards learners' contribution in the learning process.

- The learning styles that learners think they might help them to participate effectively in learning.

3.1.2. Interviews with teachers

Semi-structured interviews are used to collect data. The following points guide the interviewer to cover the issues that that enable the researcher to answer research questions:

- The objectives of higher education.

- The dominant teaching method or methods which are used in the university.

- The advantages and disadvantages of these methods.

- Teachers-learners relationship from teachers perspective.

- What teachers think of the learner-centered approach.

- The methods that can be used to apply it.

- The advantages and the disadvantages of the learner-centered approach.

- The obstacles that may prevent applying the learner-centered approach.

3.2. What did students say?

3.2.1. The reasons that make students join the university

44% of the sample say that they are interested in their field of specialization and they are willing to continue their study. This is a good indication that students expect the university to be the place where they learn and obtain further studies in their field of interest. Also, it is a good thing that students have an internal, motivation to learn. 25% of the sample choose to say that joining the university makes them feel that they are important members in their families. It is obvious that this choice expresses extrinsic motivation to join the university. 7% of the sample express that they join the university to get a qualification and secure a job. This is also an extrinsic motivation. Finally, 14% of the sample reflect one of the principles of the socialist policies. Students are distributed at universities according to the needs of their society.

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3.2.2. Education is important for life

40% of the students declare that the university education is not related to their life. But they are still optimistic about the future and think that it might help them in the future. 25% expect that education makes them able to solve their problems. 21% express that higher education may provide them with a qualification which helps them to get a job. This may be a result of the policy of providing jobs for all people. 14% of the students think that the knowledge and the theories they study are directly related to their life. This can be a very interesting view in which one may ask those students how is their education is directly related to real life.

3.2.3. The purpose of the learning process

One has to express his amazement that 44% of learners believe that the purpose of education should be developing learners' competency and mastery of specific skills to enable learners to continue learning as a lifelong process. One can build on that as a good cause for supporting the argument for a change. 25% of students think that the purpose of education should be facilitating learners' personal growth so they can solve their problems. 17% of students are in favor of providing learners with specific information for specific purpose or a specific job. This opinion may be linked to one of the declared objectives of the university. 14% of respondents decide that the purpose of the learning process should be developing learners' conceptual and theoretical understanding. This might be one of the objectives that may serve the conventional education. Teachers explain and students understand.

3.2.4. Learners' role: how do they participate in learning

The question is essential because it illustrate exactly students role in the learning process. It may clarify whether their role is active or passive. 79% of students state what is expected or assumed in traditional education. They say they listen to their teachers, write notes and read books recommended by teachers. This can be an indication that teachers are the knowledge providers and they are in control. 15% of students say that they depend on notes and observations that teachers dictate to students and this helps them to pass the examinations.

3% of students pick the option which says that the learners participate in learning by participating in group discussions, attending seminars, writing essays and doing presentations. This view is emphasized neither by university teachers nor by the 94% of students who state that they listen to their teachers lecturing or dictating notes. Only 3% of

students claim that teachers and learners involve in a dialogue and a critical examination of controversial issues.

3.2.5. The teachers' role in the learning process

Students view of teachers' role does not really surprise the researcher, 58% of the sample say that the teacher explains lessons and provide students with information that help them to pass the examinations. Since the learners is prevented from actively participating in learning, one can expect teachers to take control and to be the knowledge providers. 28% of students say that their teachers provide them with the titles of subjects and instruct them to prepare themselves for the examinations. 14% of the sample say that their teachers train them to use skills that enable them to learn. It would be interesting to discover what these skills are. None of the students choose option (b) which says that teachers "identify in cooperation with learners, social and political issues and plan learning activity around them".

3.2.6. Teacher-learner relationship

It is worth mentioning that teachers are highly respected in Libyan schools and universities. This high status might have been inherited from cultural and religious literature. 53% of respondents say that their relationship with teachers is based on respect and cooperation. This notion is essential Teachers can be important figures in any in any change that might take place. 29% of students state that their relationship is very formal and contact occurs only in classes. This relationship needs to be evaluated and enhanced by both teachers and learners in order to define their roles in working as partners rather than rivals. 12% of students say that teachers are authoritarian and they distance themselves from learners. This view is very serious and it is reminiscent of Freire's criticism of the "banking concept of education". 6% of students say that it is students who keep away from teachers and do not feel comfortable with them.

3.2.7. The learning activities used in the class

This item is an attempt to explore students' view of the types of teaching methods or styles used in classes. 68% of students emphasized the view of the conventional education. They choose the option which says that teachers explain subjects and students listen to them. This may indicate that the dominant teaching method is lecturing which may be described as the "jug and mug process". The second most popular response was surprising. 28% of the

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respondents state that students do not attend lectures, do not care about them and copy notes to prepare for the examinations. This could be an indication that students see no benefit in attending lectures. Also, it shows that their objective of studying at the university is to pass the examination and the learning process is not really important to them. Only 4% of students say that teachers involve themselves in a dialogue with the whole class. None of the students selects the option which says that learners discuss issues in small groups and receive feedback from teachers. Since education is didactic, there is no place for learning activities like group discussions.

3.2.8. Do the teaching methods prevent students from participating in learning?

39% of students decide that learners are prevented from participating in learning and their role is that of passive recipient. 25% of the respondents agreed that the teaching methods prevent learners from being involved in the learning process, but there is still an opportunity to play a minor role. The assumption behind this notion is that although the teaching method may limit learners' role, learners as individuals may be able to prove themselves and create the opportunity to participate in the learning process. Thus, one can say that 64% of respondents think that the teaching methods hinders' participation in learning. 32% of the respondents did not agree with the notion that teaching methods may be an obstacle to learners' participation and think that learners can participate effectively in learning. Finally, only 4% of respondents select the option which states that learners participate effectively in learning.

3.2.9. Reasons that may prevent learners' participations in the learning process.

46% of respondents say that students have got used to the dominant teaching method where teachers explain and students listen to understand and memorize. Students join the university after they have spent twelve years studying in primary school, preparatory school and secondary school. This period of time is enough to domesticate them. They become the victims of an education system that forces them to be passive recipient rather than positive participant. 28% of respondents think that students lack experience and knowledge, and feel shy to hold a discussion with teachers or with someone older than them. This may indicate that students have become the victims of an education system which lowers their self-esteem and makes them think that they lack knowledge and experience. 15% of respondents were of

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the view that the educational system gives teachers full power and control over the learning process. 11% of respondents think that the way students have been brought up in their families does not allow them to argue with parents or their teachers. Whatever parents or teachers say is a priori.

3.2.10. The styles that promote students learning

In this part of the questionnaire, the teachers provide only the learning styles that are likely to be used or might be used in the Libyan Universities. 64% of students select the style which allows them to participate in group discussions, write assignments, do research and participate in seminars. This choice might be seen as indication of the acceptance of learner-centered education among university students. It may implicitly indicate that learners are fed up of didactic teaching and they seek an alternative which will enable them to be knowledge seekers rather than knowledge recipient. 21% of respondents still prefer the style where teachers explain subjects and tell learners what to do. This may explain that the traditional teaching style is powerful. 14% of the sample preferred the problems solving learning style. And only 1% of the sample choose the "didactic teaching" where teachers dictate notes which help the students to pass the examinations.

3.2.11. The role of the teacher in the learning process.

This choice is an attempt to encourage learners to think of what the teachers' role should be and whether this role is still vital in the learning process. The outcome is surprising. 62% of the sample think that the teacher is the expert who provides students with knowledge. In their answer to the question of the styles that promote students learning, which is mentioned above, 64% of students prefer the learning style which encourage learners' participation in the learning process. This may indicate that after twelve years of depending on teachers to provide knowledge, it certainly takes some time to build students confidence to be independent learners. 17% of respondents think that the teacher's role is that of a coordinator who suggests learning activities and does not control them. This view can be an encouraging gesture that some students are willing to be independent. 14% of the respondents select the option which says that the teacher is the manager of the learning process who controls it and predicts its outcomes. Finally, only 7% think that learners are self-directed and the teacher

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has no role at all. It seems that the ides of changing teacher's role is not popular amount Libyan students.

3.2.12. Teachers attitudes towards Students' contribution in the learning process

It seems that in traditional education, learners' contribution to the learning process is either limited or does not exist at all. Considering the question of whether learners feel appreciated by teachers or not, 63% of respondents select the moderate view that some teachers appreciate students' contribution and others do not care. Thus, it could be considered positive that half of the sample think that teachers appreciate students' contribution to the learning process. 19% of the respondents think that students' contribution is not respected or appreciated by teachers and whatever students say or do is always wrong. One can say that this kind of attitude endangers the learning process in general. 18% of respondents say that they could not tell whether their contribution is appreciated or not simply because there is no contribution from learners. They can not give any contribution which may oppose teachers' views. Not even a single student choose the option which says that working in groups, asking questions and expressing different opinions are appreciated by teachers.

3.2.13. The learning styles that help students to participate in the learning process.

This question and its options may seem to be similar to the question which is concerned with the learning styles that promote effective learning. It is believed that this question is a direct one which asks students to be decisive and say which style that would choose to participate in learning.

64% of respondents say that they would prefer a learner-centered education that enables them to work in group discussion, do presentations, write essays and attend seminars. Unexpectedly, 14% choose to be self-directed learners who are equal to teacher and with them, they decide the issues that can be used in learning. 11% would prefer the safe way so they can get qualifications which are considered licenses for jobs. 11% choose the defeatist view which says that it is not possible for them to participate in learning simply because teachers control the learning process and the assessment.

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3.3. The teaching process

3.3.1. The university mission.

Teachers have been asked about the objectives of higher education. Generally speaking, teachers expressed similar but different views. Interviewee 1, a former dean of the faculty of education says. *"Traditionally higher education has three functions. First, preparing a highly trained and qualified professionals. Second, participating in research work. Third, serving the community.* This summarizes the three missions or the roles of the university. The same experienced teacher highlights a rift between what is considered to be "propaganda" and what can be found in reality.

He says *"but in reality, the main objective of the Arab universities is to prepare a qualified professional who graduate from the university. We can say that the main objective is teaching students.*

Interviewee 2 says *"there are theoretical objectives but the main objective is to give a qualification. Students seek qualifications so they can get jobs".*

Interviewee 3 says *"in our Arab countries, the objective of the learning process is to create a **good citizen** who is productive and has an important role in the society".* This is sounds like the type of propaganda that bother teachers and students are accustomed to hear from government official when they address an audience.

Interviewee 4 expresses what might be described as a frustrating view. He says *"one feels that there is no clear objective for the university. If there is an objective, it is to gather a large number of (youths) students. They spend few years in the university, from 8 o'clock in the morning till 5/6 in the evening. Nothing is serious. In many faculties, students are provided with 15-20 pages of notes to study in a whole year.*

3.3.2. Teaching methods

Generally speaking, didactic teaching is the dominant type of teaching in Libyan educational institutions. It seems that some of the teachers interviewed are aware of the problems caused by this approach. Teachers justify using didactic teaching by saying that due to the large number of students, the lack of facilities and shortage of staff, the didactic teaching is used. They express the following points which reflect their views:

- *There are two teaching methods: lecturing and information dictation"*

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- Didactic teaching is an old fashioned and a useless approach.

-It makes students think that there is no point in attending lectures. They can always take notes from their colleagues and copy them.

-It encourages learners to memorize information instead of analyzing them. This can be easily described as "the jug and mug process".

- It does not allow any discussion and learners will not be allowed to express their views. Since teachers are seen as knowledge providers, learners can not learn the skills that enable them to seek knowledge. They cannot learn how to argue and substantiate their argument with evidence.

- It creates a barrier between teachers and learners. Teachers are seen as tyrants who represent the oppressive government. In the long term, learners become good citizens who accept what their government say to them or chooses for them.

One teacher claimed that "Although, there are serious attempts in the Arab countries to change didactic teaching, it is still the dominant approach. To a certain extent it becomes an institution. It is difficult to get rid of it, simply because we cannot change the whole system.

3.3.3. An examination process rather than a learning process

The teaching process is entirely orientated towards assessment. One of the interviewees, who was a dean of the faculty of education, describes it as "an assessment of a bad quality".

-There is a total concentration on examinations. Teachers say that students always ask whether an issue or a topic is included in the examinations. The students think that any piece of knowledge which is not covered by the exam, should be disregarded.

- The university as an institution considered passing the final examination to be the only measurement of whether students have gained knowledge of the subject matters.

-This may be the reason for the widespread "cheating phenomenon", favoritism and giving private lessons to university students.

3.3.4. Teacher-learner relationship

According to both teachers and students, this relationship can be described as a transmitter-recipient relationship.

- There are some elements in this relationship which may lead students to have little respect for their knowledge provider.

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- *students are ready to do anything to pass the examination and some teachers respond to or exploit this situation. Teachers lack honesty and credibility and consequently the whole teaching process.*

- *Some teachers state explicitly that they are in favor of the learner centered education. They stipulate that a definition of roles should be emphasized.*

- *it is obvious that teachers are in a powerful position and they do not want to lose control of the learning process. The learner's role is passive and the education can not fulfill the expectation of the majority of them. So, there is no reason to seek an effective role.*

- *Students like any other citizens in the society, may thing that this is an educational policy of the government and they cannot challenge it.*

3.3.5. Is there any political agenda?

It is generally known that education is free in all Arab countries and its objectives which are improving individuals' standard of living, eliminating the difference between classes and serving the development plans of the society, are declared. These are the slogans that have been expressed in the last seventy years.

-*In the past, the traditional type of education is sponsored by the political regimes in order to indoctrinate the policies and the ideologies of these regimes.*

It can be seen that the "banking concept of education" is likely to be used by Arab regimes to achieve certain purposes. And these objectives may not fulfill individuals' needs and objectives.

Teachers who are considered to be articulate compared with students, are critical of the didactic and claim that *"it forces students to play a passive role".*

- *It is a long journey that has left its impact on students. So, when the same students grow up to be adults and are expected to play an active role in their life, they simply cannot do that.*

3.3.6. Learner centered education

Teachers describe the learner-centered education *as an approach which allows learners' participation in the learning process, and learners become responsible for their education.*

-*Education should be modified to provide learners with skills that enable them to learn rather than providing them with prepared information needed for the examinations.*

-*Students should learn how to use the Library, the computer software, and learn how to present knowledge in the form of research, articles, essays, etc.*

Teachers think that *it is an appropriate approach which help to facilitate learners' personal growth and provide personal experience that enables learners to the type of citizens that participate effectively in changing and improving their societies.*

3.3.7. Methods that can be used in the learner-centered education

The university teachers suggest different methods that may create the opportunity and the atmosphere which encourage learners to engage in the learning process. They suggest *"seminars, research papers, topic presentations, group discussions and group work".*

They add that students should have access to what is called "virtual learning" . This is an effective way of making students responsible for their education and they become knowledge seekers.

Learners should be provided with "enquiry skills" in early stages. Activities such as group discussions should be used to enable learners to express their views. Group work, presentations, research papers, seminars should be used regularly.

Students may be given topics in advance and then asked to discuss them in the class. Also, visiting sites such as museums, historical places, forests, building sites, factories, the sea and the desert can be used to write reports and discuss them in the class.

One teacher provides what might help to link students with current issues in real life. He says *"teacher should use documentary films on television or an event that has happened recently and covered by the media. Teachers should discuss the program with students and encourage them to voice their opinions"*

One of the teachers expressed a pessimistic view. In his view, because of the large number of students and the shortage of teachers, it might not be possible to use different learning activities. He says: *"how can we cope with this large number of students? If you give every student a chance to ask or speak, the time of the class is over".*

3.3.8. Obstacles that may prevent applying the learner-centered education.

Teachers raise some issues which might be considered as obstacles in the ways of applying learner-centered education. The former dean of the faculty of education believed that *"didactic teaching is rooted in the university to the extent that it has become an institution".*

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Thus, any change should not be cosmetic and deal only with the learning methods. Innovation should tackle the university as an establishment. It should take into account the fact that didactic teaching culture is deep and that the culture of both the teachers and the learners need to change. Virtual learning which includes using the internet, is considered a suitable choice not just for the university students but also for adults who are willing to continue learning.

Another point which has been raised by one of the teachers is that *"individuals in a traditional society prefer traditional teaching methods"*. The other obstacle which one of the teachers describes is *"the lack of resources including funding, books, periodicals, and scientific equipment such as laboratories equipment and computers"*. Teachers also mention the *"the large number of students, the shortage of university teachers and the lack of building that will accommodate students"* as possible obstacles which may prevent the application of the learner-centered education. It is interesting to say that in the beginning of the 1990s, the government took irrational decision to increase the number of the university from six to fifteen universities. This was followed by allowing the establishment of private universities to operate.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The views of both partners of the learning process on higher education can be summarized as follows.

- Students still think that studying at the university may help them in their life. This of course means getting a qualification and then getting a job. In reality, the existing university does not prepare students for life in the wider sense. The majority of students make it clear that their role is passive. They think that teachers' role is to give knowledge in the form of lecture or note dictation and the purpose of this process is passing the examinations.

- Teachers confirm this view. They declare that their style of teaching is didactic and it is conducted into ways: lecturing and note dictation. They attribute that to the large number of students, lack of facilities and insufficient number of teachers.

- The exclusion of learners from participating in learning and considering them as empty vessels that receive knowledge without raising any questions have a negative washback

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effect on learners. One can imagine what will happen to those students who have long years of being non-participants and being obedient to teachers who set rules. Those students cannot think for themselves and are likely to spend the rest of their lives silent and follow their "masters" or "rulers" instructions.

- Teachers confirms the view that the teaching process is totally directed towards the examination process. This means that teaching is for preparing students to pass the examinations. Nobody can deny the importance of assessment in education. But since the researcher suggests the learner-centered education as a possible alternative, students should learn and practice the skills that enable them to collect, display, analyze and report data and information. Also, different methods of assessment should be used. Some methods assess students' ability to organize, retrieve and handle information. Other methods include writing an article, designing a survey, a group report of a set of linked experience, problem solving, using real case study, group project presentation, etc.

- The traditional type of education that is used in Libyan universities will lead to two results. The first is that students and citizens will find themselves locked in their own haven, separated and alienated from the rest of the world. The second is that they will live in a borderless competitive world where they have neither the skills nor the knowledge to achieve their goals.

Thus, the question arises as to what can be done. Here are some suggestions which might be important for higher education.

- Learner-centered education is recommended as an alternative to the traditional teaching approaches which are used in the university. It is also recommended that this change should be managed carefully and gradually. It should be preceded by seminars, debates and articles.

- Learning resources such as books, journals and internet facility should be provided and both teachers and students should have access to them. This step is vital for tomorrow's education system which will be different from the existing type of education. This implies the fact that technology holds the key to education.

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- Changing university regulations will change the general attitudes towards students and allow them to participate in change and in decision making. Students will not be considered as objects that should taught and disciplined.

- The assessment methods should be changed, replacing the traditional methods with the ones that encourage learning, assess students' ability to learn and to continue their lifelong learning.

- Issues such as democracy, freedom, human rights and life skills should be tackled as educational issues by both teachers and students.

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