



# **Contemporary Teaching-Learning Practices: Implementation and Challenges of Student-Centered Learning Approach in Higher Education of Ethiopia**

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## **Author's contribution**

*The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.*

## **Article Information**

DOI: 10.9734/JESBS/2019/v32i430181

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Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/46225>

**Short Research Article**

**Received 25 November 2018  
Accepted 31 January 2019  
Published 17 December 2019**

## **ABSTRACT**

Student-centered learning approach is a key factor which focuses on students' learning experiences and development, well-being and retention so that higher educational learning is delivered in ways that are demonstrably in the students' best interests. In the teacher-centered approach to teaching, most of the class time is spent with the teacher lecturing and the student watching, listening and taking notes. The present study aimed to explore students' and instructors' perception, practices and challenges in implementing SCL. The study employed descriptive survey design by combining quantitative and qualitative approach to collect, process, analyzes and presents the data. A total of 12 instructors and 66 students of the second and third year psychology students have participated in the study through availability and purposive sampling technique. The instruments were questionnaire, classroom observation and un-structured interviews were conducted. Accordingly, the findings indicated that the teaching practices in implementing student-centered learning approach were not as expected. The result also showed that instructors had positive attitude toward the SCL, regarding several aspects such as providing the benefits to both students and instructors, being effective for teaching, creating close relationship and establishing active classroom

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environment. In the end, instructors also agreed that student-centered instruction will improve the ability of the students to learn the courses. Due to different challenges, most of the students were less interested to learn by SCL, such as sense of fear, lack of interest and confidence. The study further found that the lack of classroom facilities and conditions, large class size, inadequate teachers training, tendency of focusing on teacher-centered approach and limited ability to implement were the challenges of implementing. Finally, it is recommended that responsible bodies rearrange the facilities and conditions necessary inputs for the effective implantation of SCL. To minimize the challenges, instructors should create different techniques to make students participants in teaching-learning process.

*Keywords: Challenges; higher education; student-centered learning approach; teacher-centered approach.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Education enables individuals and societies to become all round thinkers by providing knowledge, ability, skill and attitude, thereby it strengthen their problem solving ability; so as to achieve this, learners should be taught in a way that enables them to really engage themselves in the process. Generally, higher education reforms are responding to shift from teacher-centered teaching towards student centered learning approach ([1,2], McCabe & O'Connor, 2013). The traditional, unidirectional 20<sup>th</sup> century teacher-centered approach that have served old generations well are not adequate to facilitate the development of new generation in 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills [3]. A student-centered approach can be characterized by four fundamental features: students assume active responsibility for their learning; they pro-actively manage their learning experience; they construct knowledge independently; and teachers act as facilitators, designing relevant programmes [4,5]. At large, higher educational institutes are under increasing pressure across the globe to adopt more student-centered learning to better meet the needs of their various needs of students and to remain relevant within the society they help. For this study, pedagogy refers to repeated patterns or sets of teaching and learning practices that shape the interaction between teachers and learners. The goal of teaching is more than just the transfer of content from one person to another. The way that people are taught affects how and what students learn. Particular pedagogical approaches have been developed and refined to promote a variety of different kinds of learning: for example, learning of explicit content, learning of particular ways of doing things, or the learning of values and habits. This

variety increases the decisions that teachers must make.

Frequently, teachers make choices about their pedagogy not based on their own preference but according to a national curriculum structure. Many curricula now include “core competencies”, “transversal skills” or “general capabilities” which point towards certain kinds of pedagogy and provide alternative starting points for learning design [6]. Some curricula are constructed to be “competency-based”, with the idea that students should move through the development of different skills and knowledge levels at their own pace [7]. In traditional teaching-learning process, teachers play important roles in the learning process. Teachers are information providers or evaluator to monitor students to get the right answers, yet students are viewed as learners who passively receive information. In the teaching of psychology courses, the main focus is getting the students to perform well on tests rather than catering to students’ need [8]. The teachers have less motivation for innovation in teaching. According to Acat and Dönmez [9], in teacher-centered learning, teachers usually use particular reference books. In this situation students tend to be more competitive and individualistic because they have less opportunity to think aloud or interact. As teachers become the most dominant source of information, in teacher-centered learning, for example, all questions which are raised by students, if any, are answered directly by teachers without students’ involvement. In designing the class activities, teachers control every single learning experience. Several advantages of having teacher-centered learning are it is suitable for large classes, it takes shorter time to do the class activities, learning materials can be well prepared, teachers may feel less nervous, embarrassed or tongue-tied, teachers can manage the students because teachers can set

the criteria when students want to communicate in the class [10].

Many of the so-called student-centered learning approach call for curricula where students take an active role in managing their learning; they are expected to develop the habits of metacognition in terms of knowing what one knows and what one needs to understand better. A curriculum may be more or less specified, so teachers may then have different scope in the extent to which they or their students have choice about what knowledge to focus on. Student-centered involves providing opportunities for students to meaningfully talk and listen, write, read, and reflect on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of an academic subject. The SCL approach is diametrically opposed, in its ethos, to the philosophy underlying the teacher-centered approach of learning. By its very nature, SCL allows students to shape their own learning paths and places upon them the responsibility to actively participate in making their educational process a meaningful one.

Student-centered learning (SCL) is based on the philosophy that the student is at the heart of the learning process [11]. This is a notion which underlies all attempts at applying the SCL approach. Whilst this means that the student is the focal point of the process, the role of the teacher remains paramount, particularly when one considers that students are not all the same. The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches the students in the skills they need to do so effectively. The SCL approach includes such techniques as substituting active learning experiences for lectures, assigning open-ended problems and problems requiring critical or creative thinking that cannot be solved by following text examples, involving students in simulations and role plays, and using self-paced and cooperative learning. Properly implemented SCL can lead to increase motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes towards the subject being taught. From this perspective, lessons should draw upon, connect and analyze their prior knowledge and experiences through self-discovery and interaction with other students and with the teacher. The primary rule is to engage students in inductive, hands-on activities, group work and integration of knowledge [12].

Researchers focusing on SCL become a pioneer of development of learning approach. In this approach, students' activities are important indicators in learning process and quality of learning product [8]. In teaching and learning, this approach links with flexible learning, experiential learning, and self-directed learning [9]. Therefore, a student-centered classroom is a place where teachers consider the needs of the students, as a group and as individuals, and encourage them to participate in the learning process all the time. The teachers' roles are more that of facilitators than instructors. The students are active member in the teaching-learning process, and teachers help to guide the students, manage their activities, and direct their learning.

In student-centered class, students may work alone, in pairs, or in groups [8]. When students are working alone, they can prepare ideas or make notes before class discussions, doing listening tasks, do short written assignments. When students compare and discuss their answers, or read and react to one another's written work and suggesting improvements. Students may work together in discussions or in role-plays, share ideas, opinions, and experiences. According to Nagaraju et al. [10], these activities bring some advantages to students such as when students are working together in psychology courses they talk more, share their ideas, learn from each other, feel more secure and less anxious, and use psychology in a meaningful way.

According to O'Sullivan [13], one of the many pitfalls with the implementation of SCL is the that many higher educational institutions and lecturers assert to put SCL into practice, but in reality they are not. They too adopted teaching methods that aimed to foster more active learning, often regarded as the cornerstone of SCL [14]. Thus, student presentations, quizzes and continuous assessment were used rather than the more conventional lecture and final examination. Although the transition to this approach was not without problems (such as increased workload for staff and a shortage of resources), the course was seen to increase student participation, motivation and grades.

In addition, in practice it is also described by a range of terms and this has led to confusion surrounding its implementation. The paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a more student-centered to education places the student in the

centre of the educational process. The lecturer-focused transmission of information formats, such as lecturing, have begun to be increasingly criticized and this has paved the way for a widespread growth of SCL as an alternative approach to education.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teaching and learning process is the most important activity for students and teachers in the school. It helps the learners to have mental development and behavioral change. Teaching and learning activities are carried out by teachers and students. Student-centered learning has emerged as an alternative and complementary form of lesson delivery and have been credited in a variety of ways such as, avoidance of boredom, durability of learned material and proper understanding of taught material [8]. Therefore, a thoughtful and scholarly approach to skillful teaching requires that teachers become knowledgeable about the many ways or strategies promoting student's student-centered learning and using problem solving abilities. Having these vision in mind, the Ethiopian MOE developed curricula which urge higher education instructors to employ SCL. With this in view, what are the practices and challenges of teaching-learning process in Ethiopian higher education institutes? A formal classroom atmosphere prevails, sometimes accompanied by a heavy-handed branded brand of discipline. With the constant focus on the right answer to an examination question, students commit large chunks of information to memory in the hope that it can be repeated on the day. The notion of discovering information is linked with the idea of teachers failing to their jobs properly or as evidences of the teacher's ignorance.

Unfortunately, personal observations show that teaching in Ethiopian universities is still under the influence of the traditional or the teacher-centered instruction despite its ineffectiveness to help students develop meaningful learning outcomes. As an instructor in one of the universities in Ethiopia, I observed a discrepancy between what the policy claims to be and the actual teaching practices in a university context. For instance, despite the call for a paradigm shift towards student-centered approach to teaching, instructors often rely mainly on the conventional lecture method or its substitute PowerPoint Presentation, which has currently become a fashion among instructors. Students also favor and rely on the lecture notes or handouts

provided by instructors more than making their own efforts in order to learn and understand the concepts taught. What is more, the teaching environment including the classroom conditions, availability of resources and instructors' views towards teaching in higher education in Ethiopia do not seem to be aligned with the innovative approaches to teaching.

The present researcher, as a psychology instructor of second and third year students and his personal observation, perceives that some instructors are facing various difficulties in their attempt to engage students in the SCL. The present study tried to investigate the practices and challenges in implementing SCL in third year psychology students.

Even though the student-centered learning approach is theoretically advanced, in practice the teacher-centered approach may predominate in the most cases. The term student-centered approach is one of the most misunderstood in the whole of higher education [3,15]. In addition, regarding teaching-learning process in higher education, (2000) indicates that, teaching in today's higher education is very much a matter of teachers talking and students listening. Classroom practices in higher education of Ethiopia are intense and more teacher-centered. Rather than student centered approach Students.

Therefore, based on the above practices and experiences of higher education institutes are less implement student centered approach, Further, the researcher is uncertainty in the following points: Teaching in higher education in Ethiopia may/ may not be a matter of teachers talking and students listening; classroom practices may/ may not be intense and more teacher-centered and their may/ may not be absence of qualified professional in implementing SCL, lack of pre and post training in implementation of SCL and absence of instructional facilities and the instruction process hinder the progress of student-centered learning approach.

Therefore, in general, the dynamics of student-centered learning approach is derived from the interaction between instructors and students and the extent to which each is willing to relinquish their roles. As higher education in Arsi University, Ethiopia moves into a new approach, the position of student-centered learning advantage ongoing appraisal to ensure that students are equipped to

make meaningful contribution to their society and economy. Thus, it is very essential to conduct research in the higher education in Ethiopia, to assess utilization, practices and challenges of implementing student-centered learning approach because any problem and misunderstanding committed at higher education level affect the whole educational system. Based on the above purposes, this study is expected to find some possible solutions to the research questions.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to assess students' and teachers' perceptions, implementation and challenges of SCL approach in the teaching and learning of psychology courses in Arsi University, Ethiopia. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To establish students' and Instructors' perceptions of the SCL approach of teaching and learning psychology courses in Arsi University, Ethiopia.
- To determine the extent to which SCL approach was implemented in the teaching and learning of psychology courses in Arsi University, Ethiopia.
- To examine the challenges hinder in implementation of SCL approach in Arsi University, Ethiopia.

### 1.4 Research Questions

The study had the following research questions:

1. To what extent was SCL implemented in the teaching and learning of psychology courses in Arsi University, Ethiopia?
2. What were students' and teachers' perceptions of the SCL of teaching and learning psychology courses in Arsi University, Ethiopia?
3. What are the challenges hinder in implementation of SCL in Arsi University, Ethiopia?

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

It is proved that the SCL approach prepares student's active impact on learning and a student's involvement in the learning process, allowing students to focus on creating knowledge with an emphasis on such skills as analytical thinking, problem-solving and meta-cognitive

activities that develop students' thinking. Hence, based on this notion, assessing the status of implementation of SCL approach and identify the major challenges that hinder the implementation of it. Therefore, the result of this study has the following significances: It may help planners, educational officials, and policy makers to be aware of the challenges of implementation and thereby to seek solutions; it will enable the concerned educational officials and teachers to gain valuable information on the actual status of teaching-learning process and the implementation of SCL approach; as the study was expected to find out challenges that affect the implementation of SCL, it may indicate areas that need remedies, and may create awareness among teachers, educational officials and concerned bodies to take corrective action; it may initiate other interested researchers to carry out extensive studies in the areas; and it may encourage other interested bodies to be involved in strengthening implementation of the SCL approach to practical conditions.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1 The Design of the Study

The study employed descriptive survey designs to collect, process, analyze and present the data. Thus, descriptive survey design was employed by using mixed (combining quantitative and qualitative) approach of data collecting and describing in organized ways. The complementary use of qualitative and quantitative methods has long been recognized [16,17].

### 2.2 Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling

The target population of this study included psychology instructors of second and third year students from Arsi University were attending. Both instructor and student respondents were selected available and purposefully. The selections of respondents were based on the fact that they were all experienced instructors and students who implemented some form of SCL in their teaching/learning. Therefore, respondents were given their views about their experiences in implementing SCL in the classroom. Sixty-six second and third year psychology students and 12 instructors participated in the study aimed at exploring issues of learning and teaching within the higher education environment. The rationale

behind this purposive and availability sampling technique were because of the feasibility to the study and the familiarity to the researcher to have access of information and to achieve a range of instructors and student perceptions, implementation, challenges and experiences of SCL, and to attempt to reflect the diversity of the student body following the policy and practice of widening participation.

### **2.3 Data Collection**

In this study descriptive survey research design more focused in qualitative approach was employed. Because the major goal of this study was to describe the implementation and challenges of student centered approach, as it exists at present, it is also relevant to gather detailed information concerning current status of the implementation and challenges of SCL. Five instructors were selected by simple random technique for observation (three instructors from third year and the rests two from second year psychology students). The researcher was a non-participant observer who collected data without taking part in the teaching-learning process directly entering the classroom with observation checklists. In this study survey method was selected and used to collect quantitative data, while for the qualitative data interview was employed [16,17]. To this line, the quantitative approach was incorporated in the study to validate and triangulate the qualitative data. The questions were open-ended thus not limiting the respondents or interviewees choice of answers.

Thus, semi-structured interview items were prepared for the interviewees. Because, the semi-structured interview is flexible and allows new questions to be brought during the interview for clarification as a result of what the interviewee says [16,17]. To this end, interview sessions were conducted with students and instructors to secure information concerning their experience of implementation of SCL. The interview sessions was conducted in the local-Amharic language, and subsequently translated to English.

The research instruments were subjected to validation by three experts, two instructors who have well experiences in applying SCL and one professional in higher education institutes at the Arsi University of Ethiopia. The experts accessed

the face content validity to see whether the instruments measured what they appear to measure according to the researcher's judgments. The experts helped the researcher assess the extent to which the items are related to the study problem. Experts also judged the importance of the various parts of the instrument for measuring implementation and challenges of SCL approach. The questionnaire focused specifically upon SCL. A series of questions was designed to collect the participants' demographic details and their perceptions and experience of the definition(s), purpose and effects of SCL. The short-form of the Approaches to Studying Inventory [16] was used to assess participants' general approach to learning.

### **2.4 Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 to organize the quantitative data collected from the participants into manageable information that was understood. The data analysis was based on the research questions. Both quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed. It is known that this study focused largely on qualitative data analysis method and most of the data was analyzed in relation to the principle of qualitative data analysis. Qualitative data was derived from open-ended questions in questionnaires and interview guides. The interviews data was transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative data analysis requires coding the responses, identifying categories or themes and explaining their meaning. By the same token, the data from the observations and interviews were first transcribed on a sheet of paper, coded, categorized and ordered into major and minor themes and finally explanations and interpretations were carried out in line with the objective of the study. Data on the questionnaires was edited by inspecting the data pieces before coding them. The process helped in identifying those items which were wrongly responded to, spelling mistakes and blank spaces left by the respondents. The data was presented in a narrative form and in themes in accordance with the research questions. The analysis of data was important because it brought out clearly the characteristics, interpretations to facilitate description, and the generalization from the study Creswell [16]. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages was used to summarize the data.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3. Results

##### 3.1.1 Students' and instructors' perceptions of the student-centered learning approach

Student and instructor respondents in this study viewed that the student-centered learning approach provided a great deal of benefits to both students and instructors. Therefore, this section reported the benefits, practices and challenges that the student-centered learning approach gave to students and instructors, based on those respondents' perceptions. Respondents were inquired to indicate their conformity or disconformity with a succession of items pertaining to various aspects of student-centered learning. These items were grouped in relation to the underlying concepts encompassed by: flexibility, individuality, responsibility, continuous feedback/ assessment, and preparation for the real world. A number of items for example, (1) what does student-centered learning mean to you? (2)How would you describe your main role in your teaching/learning? Why? (3) How would you describe students'/instructor's role in your teaching/learning? Why? (4) How would you describe your approaches to teaching-learning process in your classroom? Why? (5)How would you describe its implementation and the challenges you faced in SCL approach at your university? also reflected a cynical attitude; in other words, that student-centered learning was not fundamentally about providing an improved learning experience for students but was driven by some other agenda (e.g. a political slogan that means nothing). Table 1 indicates the percentage of respondents demonstrating some agreement with perception that encompasses these concepts.

**Table 1. Perceptions of instructors in implementing student-centered learning approach**

Items	% agree with
1. Flexibility	94.4
2. Individuality	91.4
3. Increased feedback/assessment	93.9
4. Responsibility	91.9
5. Prepares student for real world	64.0
6. Cynicism	40.1

The results in Table 1 are clearly indicated agreement with perceptions of SCL that encompass notions of flexibility, individuality, increased feedback/assessment, responsibility, and preparation for the real world. These findings were confirmed through a binomial test indicating significantly higher responses in the agree categories (test proportion 0.5;  $p < 0.05$ ). However, agreement with perceptions reflecting cynicism was not asymmetrically demonstrated, with around 40% of respondents agreeing with some cynical definitions (test proportion 0.5;  $p < 0.05$ ).

In this part, the researcher attempted to collect data from psychology instructors, who are teaching in Arsi University and students learning in the same department and university through unstructured interviews. The researcher interviewed psychology instructors and students about the practices and challenges in implementing student-centered learning approach in psychology classes.

Regarding qualitative data, the majority of focus group participants were unsure as to what the term student-centered learning (SCL) meant. This finding is somewhat surprising since the research was conducted at a university which has had SCL at the heart of its learning and teaching strategy. Despite being unfamiliar with the term, students came up with various ideas about what SCL approach might embody. All students thought that SCL could have positive implications for their learning experience. However, some student drew a distinction between what they hoped the term meant and what they thought it probably did mean. This distinction hinged on skepticism in relation to such initiatives for a couple of students. For example, one student said: *"I just had the impression that it was a political slogan almost."*(Male, year 3 student)

Concerning the first item, all of the respondents defined that student centered learning as an approach which helps students to engage actively in classroom performance and let instructors only direct / facilitate the students to perform the whole activities in classroom during the lesson. This was agreed by the instructor and student respondents. Two of the instructors pointed out:

*"...The students will have chance to learn themselves, give their sight and learn from each other in teaching-learning process".*  
(Instructor 1)

Second, instructor suggested that the learner-centered approach gave students a chance to work in group with other students, which they could depend or help each other in the process of their learning. For instance, she said that:

*Students can learn in group and discuss, and they are happy in learning. Therefore, they support a lot ...because we give them an opportunity to search, think, and create solidarity. (Instructor 2)*

Third, instructor stated that students could receive some score by doing the assigned task. He described that students could get score in two ways, which first one was from examination and second one from the accomplishment of the assigned work. He further stated that those students preferred the second method. As he commented:

*They like the approach because it is the method that is easy to get score by just doing the homework that I give. (Instructor3)*

Last, instructor confirmed that student could show their potentials among their classmates and instructors. Since the student-centered approach emphasized much on students' freedom of expressions, students could act accordingly. Bopha stated that:

*They like it, and they like answering what they know. They want to show their ability. (Instructor 7)*

Overall, instructors believed that their students were in favor of the student-centered approach because it provided their students with freedom of expression, team work learning, method easy to get score, and the opportunity to demonstrate the potentials.

*"SCL approach is good as students takes full accountability for their learning, take part actively in the teaching-learning process and comprehend what has been learned in a more meaningful way."(Instructor 4)*

*When they feel that, they would feel would be motivated to learn. You know ...get involved in the teach-learning process and share actively or...is an active student." (Instructor 8)*

The student respondents explained their understanding of student centered learning as

follows: their instructors use different methods in teaching-learning process like pair work and groups work. In addition, the instructors teach by lecturing. Moreover, the instructor teaches them based on course instruction. However, the other student respondents explained that their instructor used only lecture method. For example they explained that, it is already known that we have fixed group sitting in our classroom that was arranged by department head. It is called one to five (educational development army). This helps us discuss some issues in group. But, our instructors do not let us work in group. The only teaching method that the instructor used in classroom was lecture method. From the discussions held so far, it is possible to say that some instructors implement student centered learning in the classroom partially and some instructors did not usually.

From the response of the instructor and student respondents one can understand that both instructors and students had positive perception towards SCL. When instructors have such kind of perception, there is a belief that it is easy to implement any modern teaching approach or methodology in psychology classes. In sum, one can suggest from the above responses that psychology instructors had totally good perception about SCL approach. Thus, SCL approach is a type of strategy that should be given full attention in teaching-learning process at higher education institutes.

*From the response of the respondents one can understand that instructors and students had positive perception towards SCL. When instructors have such kind of perception, there is a belief that it is easy to implement SCL approach in classes. In sum, one can suggest from the above responses that university instructors and students had totally good perception about SCL. Thus, SCL is a type of approach that should be given full attention in teaching –learning process.*

*"What I look forward to it is because I distinguish that university having to behave more like a business and having personnel teaching small groups of students just isn't a fiscal possibility." (Female, year 2 Students)*

Even though the degree of students' achievement was not the same, the gap of the achievement between one individual to another was so narrow. The instructors guaranteed this great accomplishment by doing the assessment



shortly after their instruction. As one of instructor stated:

*When the student-centered learning approach is used, students learned a lot; we can achieve our objectives... it makes students succeed when the lesson ends. (Instructor4)*

*“Well, if every student is coming at something from a different angle and calling the instructor about it and material, they’ll probably never get their research done.” (Female, year 3 Student)*

*“I ask them to find out information by given that a number of questions. Students will then in groups find the answers from the internet. Other students can ask each group questions based on their findings of the topic.” (Instructor 5)*

The teacher-centered end would be overly prescriptive, while the SCL end would be overly open, causing the student feelings of anxiety and insecurity. In addition to the idea of a continuum, students raised what could be conceived of as various ‘elements’ of a SCL. Indeed, given these students’ purported lack of familiarity with the notion, they came up with an astonishing range of such elements, perhaps reflecting their reflexivity in terms of what works or does not work in their own learning experience. A couple of students asserted that the concept of SCL involves “a fundamental paradigm shift “and is not “just about students going out and learning on their own”

*“For me it would be ... giving us the instruments to be able to go out and find out for ourselves. I find the thought of that really quite interesting and motivating rather than learning things, you know, script by script.” (Female, year 2 student)*

From the responses one can conclude that the respondent had an attempt to apply his/her attempt to implement SCL in the classroom. Similarly, one instructor responded that “most of the time that I use group discussion among SCL approach” and other instructor responded that “Based on the lesson that I am going to present in the classroom I use different SCL approach in classroom during the lesson. For example, I use group discussion, pair work, and oral presentation based on the lesson that he

*conducted in the Classroom”. “I just think it gets people more motivated and more into the course, and you get positive feedback, and you feel better about yourself, and then you do more work. It’s like a vicious cycle once you get into it.” (Male, year 3 student)*

From the above response, we understand that almost all the respondents witnessed that they attempted to employ SCL in their classes. This implied that university instructors and students had interest to implement SCL in their classrooms. However, during his observation, the researcher observed that there were situations where SCL approach were given less importance even ignored. This variation in response could be observed may be because of the mismatch between theoretical orientations the instructors have and their actual classroom performances.

*“I’d hope that SCL would be a recognition and awareness that that’s the way that universities are going to shift towards and that the university will accommodate in terms of timetabling, so that students can fit in outside work commitments and have increased library opening hours and increased computing facilities and an increased flexibility from the university as a whole.” (Male, year 2 student)*

### **3.1.2 The implementation of student-centered learning approach in the teaching and learning**

In a similar approach respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with a number of statements reflecting the perception and purposes of SCL approach. These items were grouped in relation to the underlying concepts encompassed by the perception expressed: individuality, skills development, increased depth of learning, increased motivation, and increased efficiency of learning. Again, a cynical outlook on the purpose of SCL was included using statements such as ‘SCL benefits staff rather than students’. Table 2 indicates the percentage of respondents demonstrating some agreement with statements that encompass these concepts.

The results clearly indicated agreement with all statements of the purpose of SCL. These findings were confirmed through a binomial test indicating significantly higher responses in the agree categories (test proportion 0.5;  $p < 0.05$ ). Here, the number of respondents in agreement

with cynical statements is low, with significantly greater numbers of respondents in disagreement (test proportion 0.5;  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2. Percentage of respondents in agreement with implementation of student-centered learning**

Items	%
1. Individuality	82.7
2. Jobs/skills	79.2
3. Depth of learning	83.8
4. Motivation	83.8
5. Efficiency of learning	62.4
6. Cynical	24.4

From the response one instructor had an attempt to play his role encouraging the students and let students participate in group discussion. In the same way other instructor explained that: *“My role in implementing SCL is facilitating students to apply SCL approach in the classroom during the lesson. In addition, I encourage them to go with SCL process.”* However, as the researcher observed his Classroom during the observation session, the instructor did not usually implement SCL in the classroom during the lesson. From these responses, it is possible to conclude that telling one’s role orally is easy but difficult to take part in practical application. From the above response, it is possible to conclude that university instructors were of the understanding their role in implementing SCL in the classroom, however, they lack the attempt to put it into practical. The other item which was raised by the researcher was concerning about the opportunities of SCL approach. All respondents were of the advantages of SCL; however, their attempts were less in implementing it in the classroom. From the responses it is possible to deduce that all the respondents familiar with the advantages of SCL though they face difficulties in implementing it in the classroom.

### 3.1.3 The challenges of implementing student-centered approach

Although students and teachers had experienced SCL, they strongly criticized much of their education. The main reason for the criticism was their incompetent educators. Other specific challenge associated with SCL included the following: limited class time, the density of the curriculum, the potential difficulty of using active learning in large classes, the lack of materials, equipment or resources, and the conservative attitudes of fellow students who did not like

taking part in active learning methods. Qualitative study showed that the six main categories of students’ and teachers’ experiences with challenges to SCL are incompetent teacher educators; overcrowded classrooms; lack of time and time pressure in the studies ;Lack of necessary materials, equipment or funds ;Student teachers’ own passivity; and Examination system (still based on memorizing). As one student said: *“Talking to fellow students makes it easier because people say that if you can explain it to someone else, then you’re going to learn it better.”* (Male, year 3 student) Other issues that were seen to facilitate learning were good resources, enough time available to put into learning and helpful support staff.

The last item that was raised by the researcher was: regarding the challenges that they faced while implementing student-centered learning in the classroom during the lesson, all of the respondents were of the challenges that they faced while implementing student-centered learning. When one further investigates the above responses, some students might be demotivated because they expected that everything should be done by the instructor. In addition, the university administrators did not support the instructors to apply it in the classroom and did not support the instructors with creating conducive environment. The other challenges that the instructor raised were, the classroom condition such as, the chairs are not easily moved from place to place and the windows could not let fresh air from outside.

Moreover, the classrooms were not organized with different facilities which help the teaching-learning process. As it is seen from the above investigation, instructors faced a lot of challenges that hinder them implementing student-centered learning. For instance, lack of students interest, lack of cooperation of the university administrators with instructors, lack of classroom organization, poor English language background of the students due to their mother tongue influence etc. Thus, identifying factors that affects the implementation of student-centered learning is better to go towards the solution.

In summary, despite students’ claims not to have heard of or to be familiar with the concept of student-centered learning, they provided a very rich description of what they thought it might be and how it differed from more traditional approaches. On the whole, the students were excited by the idea of such an approach as

formulated above. However, many voiced concerns about how SCL higher education should become. The main concern was that students might be told to “*just go away and find out without sufficient guidance, or before we have the necessary skills under our belt*” (female, year 3).

## 4. DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Students’ and Teachers’ Perceptions of the SCL of Teaching-Learning

This study sought to investigate instructors and students perceptions, implementation and challenges of SCL in the higher education institute emphases in Arsi University.

The use of student centered learning approach to be reflective of modern society where choice and democracy are important concepts. Several studies on student centered learning found that overall it is an effective approach. Students having the impact of student centered approach on them felt there was more respect for the student in this approach. It was more interesting, exciting, and it boosted their confidence. This student centered learning approach does not put students aside with doing nothing but allows them to participate actively in the process of teaching-learning. It does not mean that instructors are automatically out of the process instead they facilitate and guide the students to the target teaching-learning process. This student centered learning assumes that the students play active role in the teaching-learning process rather than being passive. The student is actively involved so that there can be more connections with the previous learning and between new concepts [5].

Schweisfurth [18] maintained that there were three dimensions of SCL, namely, active engagement in learning (but not necessarily on a physical level), experiential learning and cognitive engagement exhibited through choice and direction of learning [19]. Instructors should try where possible to help students use their own actual experiences [20]. It can be concluded that students felt active when they directly participated in the learning process in which they preferred a perception of SCL that implicitly acknowledged the behavioral, cognitive and social dimensions. Thus, the findings of this study correspond to Eyob [21] definitions and general characteristics commonly associated

with the use of strategies promoting SCL in the classroom: students are involved in more than listening; less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing students’ skills; students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis and evaluation); students engage in activities and greater emphasis is placed on students’ exploration of their own attitudes and values.

Student-centered approach reinforces the involvement of students in class more than studying alone. Teachers perceive that SCL will improve the ability of the students to learn the content. It will increase the opportunities to demonstrate mastery of course content so they will be more focused on mastering their learning rather than only improving their grades and passing the exams. Both the instructors and students will have to prepare differently for the class. Students will have to prepare differently for the exams and will have a less stressful learning environment and less pressure in the exams. Instructors also perceived that, course rules and objectives will be transparent and supporting to students learning in student centered instruction. Although most of the instructors perceived that there will be threat to lose the control over the student and their learning in a SCL approach, they preferred to teach courses which use SCL approach rather than teaching using teacher-centered approach. As confirmed by Molungo (2013)’s research findings, SCL can stimulate learning because students are involved in the class activities. Thus, if students perceive that the learning-teaching context demands a SCL approach to learning in order to achieve success, then it is a SCL approach that they will adopt [8].

### 4.2 The Extent of SCL Implementation in the Teaching-learning Process

Instructors were asked to describe how they implement the student-centered learning approach in their teaching. They mentioned that they strictly followed the step of their lesson plan, motivated students in be involved, had preparation, had competence on subject matter, and used the technology. This finding indicates that it is vital to use SCL approach that allows students to work in groups. Instructors in this study believed that the student-centered learning approach gave success to both students and instructors. For students, the respondents identified that the approach helped students from all walks of life perform better in their learning.

Instructors revealed that in order to implement the student-centered learning approach, they had to follow five steps in their teaching. The respondents reported that the five steps required to be accomplished included (1) doing the warm-up, (2) reviewing the lesson, (3) starting new lesson, (4) strengthening knowledge, and (5) recommendation. This finding was consistent with study undertaken by Nith, Wright, Hor, Bredenburg & Singh [22]. Nith et al. [22] mentioned that these five steps were the steps of the lesson plan, which was designed with teacher-centered tendency. Therefore, if instructors were able to complete all the steps, it was clear that they successfully followed the lesson plan in their teaching. However, for them, they presumed that they were successful in implementing the student-centered learning approach. Those instructors even confirmed it was difficult for them to complete all the five steps, but they tried to finish them by dividing time to use clearly from one step to another. According to Moeller and Reitzes [23], the more instructors adhered to the lesson plan format, the less learner centeredness they had in their practice.

Most instructor and student respondents did not feel too great a distance from the SCL approach practices, as they found that SCL was of positive value for their construction of knowledge, even though some of them struggled to learn independently how to use this approach. The majority of respondents perceived the organisation of the course as exciting, which increased their intrinsic motivation. Several research studies confirm that SCL combined with modern technology is an enjoyable way to learn. The studies revealed that, on the whole, instructors and students held a positive view of SCL.

To enhance the learning competence of the students, it is better to let students forward their ideas, opinions and comments freely but the instructors didn't do this. The whole class time was used for explanation. Generally, the instructors' implemented teacher-centered approach in the class room rather than SCL. Both instructors and students in this research pointed out, a failure to focus upon what the student does may potentially lead to a division within the class, between those who are able to rise to the challenge of a more 'SCL' and those who are not. Perhaps the most thoughtful example of just such an experience is that of Geelan cited in Thanh [24], whose attempts to

adopt a SCL left some students deeply threatened and somewhat disillusioned. Students in this study were prepared to accept greater responsibility for their own learning, possibly influenced by their subject interests.

During classroom observation the researcher also tried to explore those activities found in the lesson to what extent corresponds with the guidelines of SCL. This implies, the idea that students are passive recipients of knowledge and that instructors are the transmitters of that knowledge is giving way to the notion that students learn better when they are involved in the process of creating knowledge for themselves. It is also seen that discussion during the lesson as the instructors' attention was in correcting the previous day's homework. Thirdly, the instructors did not record students' errors and explained the correct form to the whole class by the end of the period. Fourthly, the instructors did not explain anything about ways of giving opinions or types of expressions used when opinions are given during his/her input session. A central facet of student involvement in the learning process is their perception and practices of that process and their anticipation of what it might produce. In this regard, Heise and Himes [25] note that students' approach their studies in relation to their perceptions of that context, and that approach is related to the quality of the student's learning outcome. The judgment of the quality of that outcome incorporates its utility at that point in the students' life plan.

#### **4.3 The Challenges Hinder in Implementation of SCL Approach**

The research question that was raised by the researcher was: regarding the challenges that they faced while implementing SCL in the classroom during the lesson. Instructors also mentioned some common challenges in applying the student-centered approach despite the benefits. These challenges were mainly identified related to students, instructors, resources and the curriculum by the respondent instructors. From the perceptions of instructors the barriers students might face are lack of learning skills and abilities and misperception of students regarding student-centered instruction. They also mentioned students' lack of willingness and lack of motivation as threat. Barriers related to teachers were mainly related to the lack of instructors' training and experience and also the biggest threat to lose control over the students. According to the instructors' lack of resources

such as proper libraries, laboratories and classrooms can create challenges to student-centered approach. The system of education in Ethiopia is centralized and rigid; which could also be a challenge to the implementation of student-centered approach.

The result of the study indicated that there were some challenges in implementation of the student-centered approach. The finding was consistent with a number of previous studies [26,27,22,28]. The challenges that teachers reported included the shortage of teaching materials, their limited knowledge of teaching materials, and their limited ability to do the experiment. Instructor and student respondents perceived conventional didactic models of teaching to be less motivating and less effective than more SCL. However, they expressed anxiety about an approach that lacked structure, guidance and support in the name of being SCL. These findings are in line with studies which have found that SCL may improve student motivation and academic success [10].

However, SCL is potentially problematic for instructors because it appears to put them in a teaching role that is more at the side-lines and not at the centre that they are accustomed to occupying. Although they are central to negotiating and enacting SCL spaces, educators no longer hold centre stage. This shift in roles is recognised as increasing the challenge for instructors because they are expected to demonstrate expertise in their roles as 'motivator, diagnostician, guide, innovator, experimenter, researcher, modeller, mentor, and collaborator' ([19], 2011:13). However, O'Neill and McMahon [27] found this concept too alien for instructors who continue to view themselves as the main agents of teaching and the primary transmitters of knowledge in the classroom.

Further, one of challenge reported by respondents is the university administrators did not support the instructors to apply it in the classroom and did not support the instructors with creating conducive environment. The other challenges that the instructors raised were, the classroom condition such as, the students are not interest to moved chairs; shortage and limited knowledge of resources/ teaching materials, their limited ability to do the experiment, un updated curriculum and the lack of instructors' training [1,21,18]. Furthermore, students needed a lot of guidance and extra face-to-face meetings, as they had little experience in how to handle

implementation of student centered learning approach.

In this study having a large class has been found as another challenge by students and instructors. Altinyelken [14] reported that instructors of such classes tend to adopt low-level teaching strategies, such as lecturing, because as they think that they would not have enough time to monitor and guide all students if they engaged in SCL. Also, most students complained that the theoretical and practical courses were completely separated from each other, that SCL approach was implemented only in a few courses and that in the theoretical lessons, innovative teaching approach had not been used. At higher education, the ideal way to innovate teaching-learning and to meet learner's needs is by promoting SCL. Because of its effectiveness, Ethiopian higher education context instructors have to use student-centered approach appropriately. Nagaraju et al. [10] strengthens that no single teaching method that can possibly 'cure', which means that various teaching methods should be used by instructor to meet all of students' needs.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### 5.1 Conclusion

To answer the main research questions, a qualitative and quantitative research approach was used. Data was gathered from instructors and students of Arsi University by using questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The major findings of this study could be summarized as the following:

The finding of the research question on how Arsi university instructors and students defined the student-centered learning approach was that those respondents had partial understanding of the approach based on many definitions and psychological principles provided by various authors in this study. Both respondents showed a little evidence of understanding the student-centered learning approach when they were asked to give the definition of the approach.

The finding of the study had revealed that on what those instructors' and students' perceptions on the student-centered learning approach were was that instructors had positive attitude toward the learner-centered approach based on five

aspects. First, instructors perceived that the student-centered learning provided a number of benefits to students and instructors. Second instructors perceived that their students also reacted positively toward the student-centered learning. Third, instructors perceived that the student-centered learning was an effective approach for their teaching. Fourth, instructors perceived that the student-centered learning helped create a close and supportive relationship between instructors and students. Last, instructors perceived that the student-centered learning made the classroom so active.

Instructors need to introduce student-centered learning approach for strengthening students' motivation; promoting peer/self evaluation; reducing distracting behavior; building students instructor relationships; promoting active and interactive learning and responsibility for one's own learning. Based on the results and the findings of this study, it is clear that the instructors are willing to implement student-centered learning approach in their teaching-learning process. However, there are several challenges noted from the answers of the participants.

The finding of the Arsi University instructors and students implemented the student-centered learning approach was that instructor respondents followed five steps of lesson plan in their teaching, motivated their students to be involved with learning, had prior arrangement, and developed their competence on the courses. However, the five steps of the lesson plan were designed with teacher-centered tendency. By looking the instructors' limited understanding of the student-centered learning, the five steps of lesson plan they followed, and the challenges they encountered, it could be concluded that the implementation of the student-centered learning was constrained and lost its potential even though respondents had positive attitude toward the student-centered learning approach.

The finding of the Arsi University instructor and student respondents on what challenges they faced when implementing the student-centered learning approach was that respondents described the lack of learning skills and abilities and misperception of student-centered learning, shortage and limited knowledge of resources/teaching materials, their limited ability to do the experiment, an updated curriculum and the lack of instructors' training as the challenges in implementing the student-centered learning. It

should be noticed that the shortage of teaching materials still remained the repeated problem when applying the student-centered learning in Arsi University. While many other challenges found by previous studies were not highlighted, three new factors such as teachers' limited knowledge of teaching materials, teachers' limited ability to do the experiment, and an updated curriculum became the barriers of implementation the student centered learning in this study.

In university, SCL is a tool that can be used by instructors to reshape their own applications in addition to supporting the progress of in/pre-service instructors. SCL helps instructors modify their traditional roles and encourages them to conduct more SCL applications. If a program is grounded in, or moving toward, a constructivist paradigm, SCL could be valuable tools for helping educators construct knowledge about teaching and learning.

## 5.2 Recommendation

In order to implement student-centered approach in higher education in Ethiopia, the researcher forwarded the following recommendations:

- To minimize the challenges, instructors should create different techniques to make students participants and encourage in teaching and learning process. Further, instructors and students need to be trained properly to understand the concept of student centered learning approach and they should be informed about their roles and responsibilities.
- Instructors and students must have proper skills on centered learning approach and they should express their own interest in order to take active part in SCL activities.
- Instructors should be motivated to apply student-centered learning approach.
- Instructors should be encouraged to share their experiences in order to manage their time and the workload. Administrations should consider revising the workload of the instructors.
- The college and department head need to have better understanding about the implementation of SCL as this helps to urge instructors and students to implement it effectively. So, the ministry of education, university, regional education bureaus should look for mechanisms through which

the college, department head and instructors get refreshment training by creating affiliation with nearby colleges and universities.

## 6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher strongly agrees that the inclusion of a larger part of the Ethiopian higher education institutes and large sample size in the study could help to get more relevant and broader information. Hence, the study was limited to selected higher education institutes in Arsi University-Ethiopia, making it difficult to generalize its findings. However, because of time, financial and other resources constraints the researcher could not able to conduct the study in depth. The researcher also believes the importance of including content analysis on the study is more reliable and stronger in its evidences but due to time and other resources constraints the study data has been limited on questionnaires, interviews and classroom observation.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

To make the research process professional, ethical consideration were made. The researcher informed the respondents about the purpose of the study that is purely for academic; the purpose of the study was also introduced in the introduction part of the questionnaires and interview guide to the respondents and confirm that subject's confidentiality was protected. In addition to this, they were informed that their participation in the study was based on their consent. The research has not personalized any of the respondent's response during data presentations analysis and interpretation. Furthermore, all the materials used for this research have been acknowledged.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply indebted to sincerely thank to all course instructors and students of the psychology department. I am thankful to all professional who provided me with a great deal of meaningful and constructive comments for consulting and helped me improve my research skill considerably.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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