Learner-Centered Instruction: A Critical Perspective

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Abstract

Student-centered instruction has some connections with the social constructivist view, which emphasizes activity and the importance of communities of practice in the learning process. While learner-centered instruction is well advocated in education, traditional teacher-centered education may still be dominant. This preference might result from the lack of interest on the part of teacher to share his/her power. The paper, having provided a philosophical basis of learner-centered instruction, studied the role of learner-centered instruction in achieving democratic ends. By drawing on the concept of power, authority and democracy, the authors had an attempt to make a distinction between various types of instruction, specifically learner-centered in which the teacher consciously or unconsciously tends to share his power, and letting students have a voice in the future of education will help learners construct their view of the world. Also, the authors elucidated the concept of cooperative learning as an inevitable grounding feature of learner-centered instruction. The author claimed that placing the control of class in the pupils' hands does not result in the absence of authority on the part of the teacher.

Keywords: power, constructivism, democracy, cooperative learning

I. INTRODUCTION

Ernst von Glasersfeld (1995), the so-called father of constructivism, believes that education has two main purposes: (1) to empower learners to think for themselves, and (2) to promote in the next generation ways of thinking and acting that are deemed important by the present generation (cited in Williams & Burden, 1997). To this end, the teacher has a vital role. The teacher cannot tell students what concepts to construct or how to construct them. Besides, as Salmon (1988, cited in Williams & Burden, 1997) maintains, teaching is not the passing on of a parcel of objective knowledge, but the attempt to share what you yourself find personally meaningful—an assertion that could be said to encapsulate the philosophy of constructivism. Concurrent interest in learning guided by a democratic perspective has led to a renewed interest in student-centered learning. Student-centered learning, as Jonasse (2000, cited in Pederson & Liu, 2003) maintains, requires students to set their goals for learning and determine resources and activities that will help them meet their goals. Because students pursue their own goals, all their activities are meaningful for them (Pederson & Liu, 2003). Furthermore, there is a global shift in the role of teacher from a mere disseminator to a facilitator. Students are not regarded as empty vessels that must be filled. Students themselves, of course with the help of the teacher, make their own view of the world. As Philip (2000) asserts knowledge is made not acquired (cited in Hassaskhah, 2005, p. 67). Ironically, in student-centered learning, knowledge is not considered as a property that belongs to the teacher who brings it out of his bundle and hands it out among students. Accordingly, constructivism prescribes a whole new level of student involvement with content. It makes content much more the means to knowledge than the end of it (Weimer, 2002). For the students to get involved in the process of learning, the power in the class must be shared between the teacher and students. In fact, power sharing is an element of democratic politics, and aspect to make a democracy powerful with representation and equal importance to all distinct people and groups. Another term that challenges a number of misconceptions is 'authority', the view that authority is synonymous with coercive power, something that teachers possess, enforceable through top-down sanctions, or equivalent to discipline. Both common-sense assumptions and academic suppositions

perpetuate conflicting views of authority as good, bad, coercive, nonexistent, stable, universal, and so forth. The paper is an attempt to remove the misconception that placing power in the hand of students will result in chaos and, at the same time, result in the absence of authority of the teacher.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Philosophical background

Teacher-learner philosophies are more authoritarian, more concerned with the past and training the mind, and less focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future. Two central philosophies, as Sharon (1994) claims, in the realm of teacher-centered education that help us make a distinction between learner-, teacher-, and learning-centered classrooms are: essentialism and Perennialism. As Sadker and Sadker (1994) hold essentialists believe that the role of education is to instill traditional values like the respect for authority, perseverance, fidelity to duty, consideration of others and practicality (cited in Sharon, 2008, p. 2). In essentialist philosophy, the role of a teacher is viewed as a model (Sharon, 2008). The movement "essentially" began with Bagley's (1905, cited in Sharon, 2008, p. 2) deeply held value that education should teach knowledge from the past, because if students were separated from past knowledge the future of democracy would be endangered. Based on this conclusion, it is assumed that students will possess basic skills and an extension body of knowledge, and disciplined pragmatic minds, ready to contribute to a democratic society. Contrarily, Perennialists whose works are based on the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and St Thomas Acquinas believe the purpose of the philosophy is to reconcile faith and reasons or philosophy and revelation (Sharon, 2008). Accordingly, Sharon (2008) holds that Perennialists advocate education as a means of constructing a common foundation of historical thought and reasons directed at transforming the students' paradigm or ways of thinking. Perennialist thinkers believe to ensure societal survival, all citizens must be exposed to and taught ways of thinking that will secure individual freedoms, human rights and responsibilities true to the nature of democracy (Sharon, 2008). Accordingly, a classroom constructed from this format espouses a traditional philosophy where a teacher answers questions and enquires from the students to gain an understanding. This helps learners to gain full range of rational powers. The goal of perennialist classroom is to promote opportunities for students to interpret questions and think in order to prosper their insights.

Student-centered philosophies are less authoritarian, less concerned with the past and training the mind, and more focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future. Progressivism, social Reconstructionism, and Existentialism place the learner at the center of the educational process (Sadker & Zittleman, 2006): students and teachers work together on determining what should be learned and how best to learn it. The teacher's role is shifted from a mere disseminator to an active facilitator. Metaphorically, students are not considered as mugs and teachers as having jar that pour information into the mugs. Along the same line, school is not seen as an institution that controls and directs youth, or works to preserve and transmit the core culture, but as an institution that works with youth to improve society or help students realize their individuality.

Progressivism, according to Sadker and Zittleman (2006) is the educational application of a philosophy called pragmatism. They hold, according to pragmatism: the way to determine if an idea has merit is simple: test it. If the idea works in the real world, then it has merit. Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition centered on the linking of practice and theory. It described a process where a theory is extracted from practice. In the same line, John Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, according to Flanagan (1994) stresses the priority of experience over theory. We learn to think and reason by thinking and reasoning, by tackling real problems which arise in our experience. When we think, we become conscious of a problem or obstacle to our development; we analyze the situation; we identify possible solutions; we compare the implications of the different solutions and select the best course of action; we implement this in practice.

Nunan and Lamb (2001) claim that philosophy of learner-centeredness has strong links with experiential learning, humanistic psychology and task-based language teaching. These links are evident in the following quote:

> A learner-centered curriculum will contain similar elements to those contained in
> traditional curriculum development, that is, planning (including needs analysis, goal

and objective setting), implementation (including methodology and materials development) and evaluation. However, the key difference between learner-centered and traditional curriculum development is that, in the former, the curriculum is a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding the content of the curriculum and how it is taught. This change in orientation has major practical implications for the entire curriculum process, since a negotiated curriculum cannot be introduced and managed in the same way as one which is prescribed by the teacher teaching institutions. In particular, it places the burden for all aspects of curriculum development on the teacher. (Nunan, 1988, cited in Nunan, 1999, p.12)

Progressvists organizes schools around the concerns, and real-world experiences of students. The progressive teacher facilitates learning by helping students formulate meaningful questions and devise strategies to answer those questions. Answers are not drawn from lists or even Great Books; they are discovered through real world experience. The main figure of progressivism, John Dewey holds that the school should prepare the child for active participation in the life of the community. He believed that education must break down, rather than reinforce, the gap between the experience of schooling and the needs of a truly participatory democracy (Flanagan, 1994). Accordingly, as John Dewey (1906, cited in Sadker & Zittleman, 2006) claimed since social learning had meaning, it endured. Book learning, on the other hand, was no substitute for actually doing things. Progressivists do not believe that the mind can be disciplined through reading Great Books, rather that the mind should be trained to analyze experience thoughtfully and draw conclusions objectively. (Sadker and Zittleman, 2006)

In a Progressive Classroom, you will not find a teacher standing at the front of the room talking to rows of seated students. Rather, you will likely see children working in small groups, moving about and talking freely. Some children might be discussing a science experiment, while another group works on a model volcano, and a third pre-pares for a presentation. Interest centers would be located throughout the room, filled with books, materials, software, and projects designed to attract student interest on a wide array of topics. Finally you notice the teacher, walking around the room, bending over to talk with individual students and small groups, asking questions and making suggestions. You sense that the last thing on her mind is the standardized state test scheduled for next week.

Another philosophy which lends support to the epistemology of learner-centered instruction refers to social reconstructionism. Social reconstructionists encourage schools, teachers, and students to focus their studies and energies on alleviating pervasive social inequities, and as the name implies, reconstruct society into a new and more just social order (Sadker and Zittleman, 2006). Although social reconstructionists agree with progressivists that schools should concentrate on the needs of students, they split from progressivism in the 1920s after growing impatient with the slow pace of change in schools and in society (Sadker and Zittleman, 2006). A social reconstructionist teacher creates lessons that both intellectually inform and emotionally stir students about the inequities that surround them. The teacher's role would be as facilitator: assisting students in focusing their questions, developing a strategy, helping to organize visits, and ensuring that the data collected and analyzed meet standards of objectivity. Throughout, the teacher would be instructing students on research techniques, statistical evaluation, writing skills, and public communications.

Existentialism, the final student-centered philosophy we will discuss, places the highest degree of importance on student perceptions, decisions, and actions. As Sadker and Zittleman (2006) holds Existentialism rejects the existence of any source of objective, authoritative truth other than the individual. Individuals are responsible for determining for themselves what is true or false, right or wrong, beautiful or ugly. In short, it is up to the student to make all relevant educational decisions, and to evaluate those decisions.

The nature of reality for Existentialists is subjective, and lies within the individual. The physical world has no inherent meaning outside of human existence. Individual choice and individual standards rather than external standards are central. Existence comes before any definition of what we are. Accordingly, noted philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's classic formulation of existentialism is "existence precedes essence." What does this mean? One interpretation goes as follows: We did not ask to be born into this world; so we "exist" before we are anything. We also are powerless at the other end of the life cycle, when we die. In between those two uncontrollable events, we shape our essence.

Existentialists believe that each person needs to define life's meaning. To become an authentic individual, one who values and practices free choice, we must struggle free of the influences of our parents, teachers, schools, religion, and culture. Existentialists believe education should be about helping each of us answer the fundamental questions: Why am I here? What is my purpose?

Existentialism in the classroom is a powerful rejection of traditional, and particularly essentialist thinking. In the existentialist classroom, subject matter takes second place to helping the students understand and appreciate themselves as unique individuals. The teacher's role is to help students define their own essence by exposing them to various paths they may take in life and by creating an environment in which they can freely choose their way. Existentialism, more than other educational philosophies, affords students great latitude in their choice of subject matter and activity.

B. Learner-centered instruction

To understand learner-centered teaching, it is necessary to begin with the teacher-centered approach which is closely related to the behaviorist tradition. Teacher-centered instruction assumes that learners are passive and they become active by reacting to stimuli in the environment. Therefore, the teacher's role is to create an environment which stimulates the desired behavior and discourages those that are believed to be undesirable. This role makes the teacher the focus of attention. By contrast, the learner-centered approach assumes that learners are active and have unlimited potential for individual development. Weimer (2002) defines student-centered approaches by contrasting them with teacher-centered approaches. To him, five key differences can be traced:

1. *The goal of student activity.* In teacher-directed instruction, students work to meet the objectives set by the teacher. In contrast, in student-centered learning, students work to provide a response to a central question.

2. *The role of the teacher.* In teacher-directed instruction, the teacher sets learning objectives, and then plans a set of activities designed to help learners meet those objectives. In student-centered learning, in contrast, the teacher presents the central question, and then works as a facilitator as students determine the nature of the response they will develop, and then formulate and carry out a process to develop that response.

3. *Students' motivational orientation.* Teacher-directed approaches often depend, at least in part, on extrinsic motivators, such as grades, degrees, or other rewards, to motivate students' efforts to learn. In student-centered approaches, teachers attempt to present a question that is interesting enough to motivate students to take ownership of the process of developing a response. As a result, students' actions are driven by the goals they have set for themselves rather than external rewards promised by a teacher or institution.

4. *Assessment.* In teacher-directed instruction, teachers use objective assessments to determine grades, which in turn are used to motivate students and provide parents with information about their children's progress (Kohn, 1994, cited in Pederson, 2003, p. 59). However, in student-centered instruction, the assessment is open-ended that are designed to involve students in examining their own learning, focusing their attention on their learning needs and changing understanding rather than on a grade.

5. *Student Interaction.* In teacher-directed instruction, the interaction is frequently under teacher control; teacher determines group membership, the nature of the interactions between the members, and even the role each member of the group plays. Teachers intervene in the group process when there are difficulties, and hold the group accountable for individual learning. Instead, student-centered approaches, which also assume a great deal of student interaction, are keeping with *collaborative.*. Collaborative learning emphasizes students' self-governance of their interactions, allowing them to make decisions about with whom they work, and how. As students negotiate their relationships with each other, they must articulate their ideas, and engage in a disciplined social process of inquiry; these activities are in keeping with constructivist principles and the goals of student-centered. (pp. 58-59)

As it is implied, learner-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with learner needs, wants and situations such as communicative language teaching (CLT). These methods seek to

provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected and presequenced linguistic structures and communicative notions/functions through meaning-focused activities, assuming that preoccupations with form and functions will ultimately lead to target language mastery (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Learner-centered methods aim at making language learners grammatically accurate and communicatively fluent. In spite of strong arguments that emphasize the cyclical nature of communicative syllabus, it remains basically linear and additive. Learner-centered pedagogy benefited immensely from John Austin's (1962) work. He looked at language as a series of speech acts we perform rather than as a series of items we accumulate, and idea that is formed as the concept of *language as* communication (cited in Kumarvadivelu, 2006, 90). To Austin, we use language to perform a number of speech acts: to command, to describe, to agree,…The function of an act is best understood in relation with a communicative context. What is crucial here is the illocutionary force or the intended meaning of the utterance (cited in Kumaravadavilu, 2006, 90).

Nevertheless, the concept of learner-centered education has been controversial, mainly because it is susceptible to multiple interpretations. Some teachers react negatively to the concept because they feel that, implicit in the notion, is a devaluing of their own professional roles. Others believe that it involves handing over to the learner duties and responsibilities that rightly belong to the teacher. Nunan (1999) believes that both of these criticisms are misguided because of the following reasons:

> ➢ In order to understand the complex processes underlying students' attempts at learning, it is necessary to see things from their point of view. The teacher had to find what they felt they wanted to learn, and how they went about the task of learning.

> ➢ It is often a mistake to assume that learners come into the language classroom with a sophisticated knowledge of pedagogy, or with a natural ability to make informed choices about their own learning processes. In fact, there are relatively few learners who are naturally endowed wit the ability to make informed choices about what to learn from the moment that they first enter a learning arrangement. They have to go through a process and often lengthy process of learning how to learn, and they can usually do this with the assistance and guidance of the teacher. The role of teacher, thus, enhanced. (pp. 10-11)

As Nunan (1991) further adds, according to the advocates of learner-centered approach, learners should be fully informed about any course of study they are undertaking. Accordingly, he puts forth:

> Information can be provided in a number of forms. It can, for instance, be provided in the form of a specification of course content. One advantage of the provision of information in the form of performance objectives is that they are generally couched in terms to which the learner can relate. If asked why he is attending a language course, a learner is more likely to reply that he wants to be able to understand the news on television, or to obtain goods and services as a tourist in the target country than to master the distinction between the present perfect and the simple past' or to use the article system appropriately. (Nunan, 1988, p.66)

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) claimed that a truly learner-centered approach does not really exist at the current time. Indeed since most learning takes place within institutionalized systems, it is difficult to see how such an approach could be taken. The learner-centered approach is based on the principle that learning is totally determined by the learner. As teachers, we can influence what we teach, but what learners learn is determined by learners alone. Learning is seen as a process in which the learners use what knowledge or skills they have in order to make sense of the flow of new information. Learning, therefore, is an internal process, which is crucially dependent upon the knowledge the learners already have and their ability and motivation to use it. It is difficult to fault this view of learning, if we see learning simply in terms of the end product in the learner's mind. But learning can, and should, be seen in the context in which it takes place. Learning is not just a mental process, it is a process of negotiation between individuals and society. Society sets the target and the individuals must do their best to get as close to the target as is possible (or reject it). The learners will certainly determine their own route to the target and the speed at which they travel the route, but that does not make the target unimportant. The target still has a determining influence on the possible routes (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

C. language-centered instruction

Kumarvadivelu (2006) states, "Language-centered methods are those that are principally concerned with linguistic forms" (p. 90). He also adds these methods (such as audiolingual method) provide opportunities for learners to practice preselected, presequenced linguistic structures through form-focused exercises in class assuming that a preoccupation with form leads to target language mastery and that students can draw from this repertoire whenever they wish to communicate. Since it preplanned thus it is intentional type of learning rather than incidental. As Kumaravadivelu (2006) mentions the supporters of language-centered advocate explicit analysis and explanations of linguistic systems.

Another feature of language-centered instruction worth a moment to place emphasis on is the concept of linearity. That "language learning is a linear, additive process" as Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 90) states, connotes language develops accumulatively. That is, a set of grammatical structure and lexical items are selected, graded and presented. In fact, the teacher's job is to introduce one discrete linguistic item at a time and provides learners with sufficient practice to internalize them.

D. Learning-centered instruction

Learning-centered pedagogies seek to fill what Long (1985) called a psycholinguistic vacuum (cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006). That is, they claim to derive insights from psycholinguistic research on language development in an attempt to incorporate them in language teaching methods. Learning-centered pedagogies assert that language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning. As Kumaravadavilu (2006) mentions in learning-centered approaches, four hypotheses facilitate learning: (1) the teacher follows meaning-focused activities; (2) the teacher provides comprehensible input; (3) the teacher integrates language skills; and (4) the teacher makes incidental correction.

A learning-centered classroom, in contrast to a learner-centered one, is designed to enable the learner to make critical pedagogical decisions by systematically training them the skills they need to make such decisions. A learning-centered classroom is constituted with complementary aims. While one set of aims is focused on language content, the other is focused on the learning process. Learners are therefore systematically educated in the skills and knowledge they will need in order to make informed choices about what they want to learn. Rather than assuming that the learner comes to the learning arrangement possessing critical learning skills, the sensitive teacher accepts that many learners will only begin to develop such skills in the course of instruction (Nunan 1999, pp. 11-12).

To better appreciate the concept of learning-centered method, let's refer to what Kumaravadivelu (2006) states:

> It is principally concerned with cognitive processes of language learning. A learning-centered method (such as the natural approach) seeks to provide opportunities for learners to participate meaningful interaction through problem-solving tasks in class, assuming that a preoccupation with meaning-making leads to language mastery and that learners can deploy the skill-developing interlanguage to achieve linguistic as well as pragmatic knowledge/ability. (p. 90)

E. Contrast between power and democracy in learner-centered approaches

John Dewey (as cited in Sadker & Zittleman, 2006) regarded democracy and freedom as far superior to the political ideas of earlier times. According to Dewey, traditional, autocratic, teacher-centered schools are regarded as the antithesis of democratic ideals. In fact, in his philosophy, progressive schools have a working model of democracy.

Rogers (1983), in his book 'Freedom to Learn for the 80s', describes the shift in power from the teacher to the learner, driven by a need for a change in the traditional environment where in this so-called *educational* atmosphere, students become passive, apathetic and bored. In the School system, the concept of child-centered education has been derived, in particular, from the idea that the teacher should not interfere with this process of maturation, but act as a guide (Simon 1999).

The use of student-centered learning appears to be reflective of today's society where choice and democracy are important concepts, however is it an effective approach to learning? Teachers are

obligated to create an environment in which students and teachers share responsibility for learning. About the role of teachers, Rogers (1983) identified the important precondition for student-centered learning as the need for: "... a leader or person who is perceived as an authority figure in the situation" (p. 188).

Learning involves changes and innovation. But as Weimer (2002) says learner-centered teaching is not about changing the curriculum structure. What is implied in Maryellen Weimer's statement is that the teacher and students can share power in the classroom. To Foster (2005), both the power sharing and advocating such an orientation are equally provocative. For the power to be shared, five changes, as Weimer puts, must be traced: (1) the balance of power; (2) the function of content; (3) the role of teacher; (4) the responsibility for learning; and (5) the purpose and process of education. The central question that the authors are concerned here is how power is shared between students and the teacher.

The concept of power in education is inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1993). To him, education can be a vehicle for social change. Education's role is to challenge inequality and contradiction and empowers those who are oppressed to challenge oppression in their lives. The critical pedagogues counter that all forms of education are political and the teacher and students may or may not be aware of these processes. One manifestation of power sharing is that student in the class must be given a voice in the selection of the content, and the teacher must position himself alongside the learner and focus the learning process. Students must also develop the intellectual maturity, learning skills, and awareness necessary to function as autonomous learners. Sharing power also involves that students need to be told less and discover more (Weimer, 2002). Of course, some courses are prerequisite for others (Foster, 2005) and need more elaboration on the part of teachers; furthermore, the subject being taught may have an influence on the way students learn. There are subjects such as math, science that there are more right answers and much less disagreement about the status of knowledge. Foster (2005) in the rest of his review on Weiner's "Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice" states the purpose and process of evaluation is part of the answer to promoting intrinsic learner motivation. Teachers by means of evaluation can promote learning. As Weimer (2002) declares, "Evaluation is not just something used to generate grades" (p. 17).

When power is lateralized, democracy becomes absent. Students are deprived of opportunities to question what they are learning; they become the passive objects of education rather than participatory subjects in learning. Students hardly ever are given a voice in the class. In fact, cooperative learning which is the grounding stones of student-centered instruction decreases. Cooperative learning founded in constructivist epistemology sees that knowledge is discovered by students and transformed into concepts students can relate to (Hassaskhah, 2005). Then it is expanded and reconstructed through new learning. Giving students a sense of responsibility for their own learning is also an important feature of sharing power implemented in cooperative learning. Accordingly, Hassaskhah (2005) puts that two critical features of cooperative learning are: positive interdependence and individual accountability. She adds:

> Positive interdependence is essential to fostering significant achievement gains. Structures must be built into the learning environment to ensure that all members of a cooperative-learning team feel a sense of responsibility for their teammates. One way to promote this sense of responsibility is by providing materials that must be shared (material interdependence). Another way to foster group cohesion is assigning different members of each team a discrete amount of material to master and then share with teammates (task interdependence). Finally, a small part of each person's grade can depend on each member of the team improving his or her performers on exams (goal interdependence).

Democratic learning, also, helps students to criticize the prevailing social conditions, to appreciate the possibility of ongoing social reform, and to recognize the central importance of human agency to any meaningful democratic context (Margison & Graham, 2001). Based on this understanding, then, Margison and Graham (2001) contend that career education needs to embrace at least three fundamental democratic principles: (1) respect student rationality, that is, the capacity of students to critique curriculum content; (2) provide students with alternative viewpoints and perspectives on issues relevant to vocational experience; (3) not depict social reality as fixed or predetermined, but explicitly

recognize the legitimate right of students to transform economic, labor-market, and working conditions through informed political participation (p. 342).

F. Power and authority in learner-centered instruction

Authority is often associated with coercive power that works against the democratic ideal of freedom. Authority is also equated with trust and respect and is considered necessary for the stability of community life. These contradictory understandings make it imperative to revisit classic theories in order to provide definitions of authority that shed light on how it differs from, yet is related to, power. In doing so, we relate abstract social theory to everyday classroom life   (Pace & Hemmings, 2008).

Max Weber (1964) defined *authority* as the probability of a person gaining voluntary obedience from others. The right of that person to give commands depends in large part on others' belief in his or her legitimacy (cited in Pace & Hemmings, 2008 p. 2). Authority, in other words, is a relationship of command and consent based on the legitimacy of those who lead and the voluntary obedience of those who follow. According to Chester Barnard (1950, cited in Pace & Hemmings, 2008 p. 3) four simultaneous conditions necessary for consent to a particular message of authority: the subordinate (1) understands it, (2) sees it as not being inconsistent with organizational purposes, (3) believes it is compatible with his or her general self-interest, and (4) is mentally and physically able to fulfill it (pp. 3-4).

The concepts of authority

Weber's (1964) delineated three ideal types of authority rooted in different sources of legitimacy. In any case, the framework has been applied to analyses of authority relations in schools:

1. Traditional authority is based on longstanding traditions that grant legitimacy to certain people with superior status. Teachers exercising traditional authority act in loco parentis and expect to be obeyed simply because they occupy the role of teacher.

2. Charismatic authority occurs when heroic or exemplary individuals with exceptional qualities garner unusually high prestige. Charismatic teachers evoke emotional attachment from students. Their legitimacy lasts as long as they satisfy students' needs and inspire commitments.

3. Legal-rational authority (bureaucratic authority) stems from rules and regulations based on legal procedures and policy. A person in authority occupies an office and has the right to issue and enforce commands that support an established order. The teacher's role is that of a boss, and students are workers. This type of authority depends on power. (cited in pace & Hemmings, 2008)

Other sociologists have identified professional authority as a fourth type distinguished by the use of individuals' expertise to achieve consensual aims (Blau, 1974). In the role of professional expert, teachers' command of subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills are their most important claim of legitimacy (cited in Pace & Hemmings, 2008. p. 3). Emile Durkheim (1961) also emphasized the importance of moral authority. He understood such authority "as that influence which imposes upon us all the moral power that we acknowledge as superior to us. Because of this influence we act in prescribed ways (p. 29). Accordingly, moral authority depends on teachers who express genuine confidence in their own ability to inspire students' respect.

G. Critical remark

Student-centered learning, despite its popularity, is not without its critics. The main critique of student-centered learning is its focus on the individual learner (Simon, 1999). Simon (1999) also describes that student-centered learning, in the School system, can be in danger of focusing completely on the individual learner and taken to its extreme does not take into account the needs of the whole class. Simon highlights the point that '*if each child is unique, and each requires a specific pedagogical approach appropriate to him or her and to no other, the construction of an all embracing pedagogy or general principles of teaching become an impossibility*' (Simon 1999, p. 42).

Accordingly, if each student in the class is unique, and each requires a specific pedagogical approach, the construction of an all embracing pedagogy is an impossibility. Another danger that

threatens student-centered instruction is when a person is empowered, there is a danger of a person's physical isolation from other learners (O'Neil & McMahon, 2005). A further criticism often leveled against is the belief that students hold in relation to their learning. Students who value or have experienced more teacher-focused approaches, may reject the student-centered approach as frightening or indeed not within their remit. And the denial doubles if their familiarity with the term is poor. Accordingly, Lea et al. (2003) conducted a study on 48 psychology students in the University of Plymouth on students' attitudes to student-centered learning. They found that, despite a University student-centered policy, 60% of the students had not heard of the term. O'Sullivan (2003, sited in O'Neil & McMahon, 2005) described student-centred learning as a Western approach to learning and may not necessarily transfer to the developing countries, such as Namibia, where there are limited resources and different learning cultures. It can be equally hard at times to see how the approach can be economical in the large classes associated with many current University undergraduate courses.

A teacher who follows a teacher-centered approach holds that students should accommodate information rather than developing and changing their conceptions and understanding. Moving from a relativist to a dualist perspective to language teaching lends support to the development of a democratic perspective. Simon (1999) also warns that student-centered learning, in the School system, can be in danger of focusing completely on the individual learner and taken to its extreme does not take into account the needs of the whole class

III. CONCLUSION

Student-centered learning is based on the idea that learning is meaningful when topics are relevant to the students' needs and when the students themselves are actively engaged in constructing their own knowledge, the idea that students have a choice in what to study, and how to study. To fulfill this aim, students are suggested to be given voice and are included in the classroom decision-making. For learning to take place, students should be enabled to acquire basic democratic experience so that they can express what they think, desire and want. From one side, learning must be democratic, and learners must have power to decide on the future of his/her lives, needs, desires and so on. From a constructivist perspective, learning involves making one's view of the world. And the teacher must be aware of the concept of individuality as a threat to student-centered instruction that will lead to disempowerment on the part of learners. The danger of individuality will form this thought in our mind to conceive learners as empty receptacles to be filled The teacher is seen as having a "jug" of knowledge which he pours into the learners' "mugs." This is what Pauolo Freire describes as the "banking" concept of education, where learners are like bank accounts where deposits are made and drawn upon. Thus several conclusions can be drawn: (1) starting from an early stages, students should therefore be empowered to understand and respect democratic principles (such as "equality") and human rights; (2) classroom authority in its truest form depends on teachers' legitimacy, students' consent, and a moral order consisting of shared purposes, values, and norms; and (3) Authority is multiple in its forms and types and the ways in which it is interpreted.

Along the same line, social reconstructionists, from a democratic perspective, believe that school is the ideal place to begin ameliorating social problems. The teacher's role is to explore social problems, suggest alternate perspectives, and facilitate student analysis of these problems. A social reconstructionist teacher must model democratic principles. Students and teachers are expected to live and learn in a democratic culture; the students themselves must select educational objectives and social priorities.

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