

MONGOLIA HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM PROJECT
CURRICULUM, TEACHING AND LEARNING COMPONENT

STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING

AMARZAYA AMARTUVSHIN AND JEAN-GUY VIENNEAU, CONSULTANTS

1. Introduction

Student Learning has been and still is one of the major determinant in the student and institutional successes and achievements in Higher Education. If the student is learning and mastering the content of the courses, while achieving the learning outcomes, it should be considered as a successful educational journey.

Student Centered Learning (SCL) has been presented most simply as an approach to learning in which learners choose not only *what* to study but also *how* and *why* that topic might be of interest. The learning environment has learner responsibility and activity at its heart, in contrast to the emphasis on instructor control and the coverage of academic content found in much conventional, didactic teaching (Cannon, 2000)

SCL is broadly based on constructivism as a theory of learning, which is built on the idea that learners must construct and reconstruct knowledge in order to learn effectively. The hypothesis is that learning is most effective when, as part of an activity, the learner experiences constructing a meaningful product. It is empowering the learning to engage and to take charge of her or his learning.

2. Definition of Student Centered Learning

The following elements can be found as the principles behind a comprehensive definition of SCL:

- Flexibility and a degree of independence of the time and structure of learning;
- A clear understanding of students by teachers;

- A redefinition of the roles, responsibilities and relationship between the teacher and the student;
- A willingness on the part of the teacher to share his role and the control that he or she has over the learner;
- Student empowerment is greater and a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the student to develop autonomy in his or her learning;
- The emphasis is shifted on the learning and not only on the content to be taught and learned (although the ultimate objective is to focus the expected learning outcomes);
- It defines the renewed culture of learning in Higher Education where active learning, a high level of interactive communication, problem-solving, critical thinking are among the norms in the classroom.

3. Benefits of Student Centered Learning

In the creation of a new culture for learning in Higher Education Institutions, there are requirements and major benefits to adopt SCL.

3.1 Benefits for Learners

Here are some of the benefits for students as stated by the European Student Union Toolkit (2010):

- Student engagement and participation are enhanced in SCL:
 - Student learn to think and learn by themselves;
 - Participation is very high in SCL;
 - The faculty act as a facilitator.
- Student Motivation is high to learn:
 - Deeper learning is occurring;
 - Increased interest in the subject-matter;
 - Knowledge retention is higher when learners are engaged and involved in their learning (as shown in the following table):

Teaching Strategies	Average Student Retention Rate
Lecturing	10 %
Reading	10 %
Audiovisual	30 %
Demonstration	30 %
Discussion	50 %
Practical Activity	70 %
Teach others	90 %

Table 1. Average Student Retention Rates depending on Teaching/ Learning Strategies (National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine)

- Independence and Responsibility in learning:
 - Students are in control of their learning;
 - They gain additional skills and competencies, such as team skills, communication and presentation skills and cooperation.
- Consideration for student needs:
 - Diversification of student needs is more present as ever;
 - The SCL model establishes that learning is not limited to a given place and time in a way that traditional learning (based solely on lecturing) has been;
 - This approach takes into consideration the different styles of learning.

3.2 Benefits for Teachers

The role and functions of the faculty in SCL are also changing from the traditional roles that we know in HEI's. The following list outlines that benefits that teachers can gain from changing their approach to a learner or student centered model:

- A more interesting role for the faculty member:
 - The teacher becomes a facilitator and an enabler of learning;
 - Great opportunity to challenge the students.
- Solutions to a greater accessibility and diversity:

- Increased demands from students;
- Student needs are varied with a more diverse student population.
- Positive Impact on teaching load:
 - Provides opportunities for learning to take place in a different setting;
 - Improved working conditions since teaching is not always happening in a traditional classroom and lecturing as the main methodology.
- Continuous Self-Improvement:
 - Faculty can review their courses, teaching methods and strategies;
 - More variety in their teaching and approaches;
 - Relevant and positive feedback from engaged students.
 - Link research to teaching by involving students in it;
 - Fostering a lifelong learning culture at the institutional level.
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4. Student Centered Learning Checklist

Successful implementation of SCL has stringent requirements for the institution and the Faculty members. Some changes are required in the institutional culture in order to embrace this approach. As we know, changes are not always easy to implement, since some people are resistant to change and are very happy in doing what they have done traditionally.

The following table represents a checklist on various elements that need to be present in the institution in order to implement SLC in your department and institution (use a check to mark your answer):

1.	Consultation with Students /Learners	Yes	No
1.1	Are there transparent procedures in place for students to be able to give feedback on the quality of the education process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.2	Are students consulted in curriculum content?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.3	Are students consulted on the teaching and evaluation methods used?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

1.4	Are students involved in periodic program quality reviews?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.5	Are students involved as members of committees where issues relating to the student experience are discussed at all levels (department, unit, university, etc.)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1.6	Are procedures in place for students to appeal decision regarding their academic attainment or progression?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2.	Credit Transfer and Learning Outcomes	Yes	No
2.1	Are students consulted when learning outcomes are designed?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.2	Do you assess prior learning of students?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.3	Are student needs and the diversity of the relevant student group considered when designing learning outcomes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.4	Are credits transferable between courses and institutions?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.5	Are credits measured based on student workload, independent of contact hours?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.6	Are students awarded credits for activities and work that help them attain learning outcomes if conducted outside the institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2.7	Does your institution refer its qualifications to a Qualifications Framework?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3.	Quality Assurance	Yes	No
3.1	Are both faculty and students consulted during the institutional quality assurance process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3.2	Are teachers and students involved as members in the panels (committees) undertaking institutional assurance reviews?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.3	Do institutional quality assurance reviews and guidelines take into account the overall elements of teaching and learning?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.4	Do programs quality reviews take into account the use of learning outcomes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.5	Do programs quality reviews take into account the assessment methods used?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3.5	Do external quality assurance evaluations refer to teaching and learning process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4.	Mobility, Recognition and Prior Learning	Yes	No
4.1	Are study periods conducted by students in other institutions within various mobility programs recognized by your institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.2	Are examples of good practices in teaching and learning that faculty involved in mobility program come into contact with discussed and disseminated at the institutional level?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.3	Is prior learning in non-formal environments recognized by your institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4.4	Is the process of recognition for prior learning easy and non-bureaucratic?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5.	Teaching and Learning Methods	Yes	No
5.1	Does your institution use peer learning assessment and peer learning?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.2	Does you institution have programs that use activity-based learning?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5.3	Is group-work used in the learning process within your institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.4	Are extra-curricular activities of students accepted and recognized as an essential part of the learning experience?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.5	Is the development of transversal skills and competencies by students one of the objectives of the learning process in your institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6.	Student Assessment	Yes	No
6.1	Are the goals of the learning process agreed upon between teachers and students?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.2	Are peer and self-assessment used as a method in the student assessment process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.3	Are projects used in the assessment of the students?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.4	Are simulations of tasks and “real life” situations used in the assessment of students?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7.	Learning Environment	Yes	No
7.1	Do students have access to leaning materials to complement their attendance in class?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.2	Is information technology used within the learning process?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.3	Does your institution contribute to promoting a culture of Student-Centered Learning?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.4	Does your faculty members discuss and exchange on strategies and ideas on how to improve the learning environment at your institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8.	Professional Development	Yes	No
8.1	Does your institution have guidelines on teaching and learning?	○	○
8.2	Does your institution have a regular professional development program for teaching staff?	○	○
8.3	Does the PD program include a constructive discussion and exchanges on the application of teaching methods and learning strategies?	○	○
8.4	Does your institution use a Student Centered Learning approach in providing training on the use of innovative teaching methods and student centered curriculum development?	○	○

5. Process to Adopt a SCL approach

As in many other situations in Higher Education Institutions, changes and innovative practises in teaching and learning are difficult to implement. People have a tendency to resist since they are comfortable in their ways.

In order to bring about teaching and learning, especially Student-Centered Learning, there are various steps and sequences that need to be followed: Let us examine some of these steps:

1. Analysis of the present situation

First, examine the preceding section of this document and answer the following questions:

- 1.1 How many of the checklist-items mentioned above are present in your institution (those that you answered yes)?
- 1.2 How do you define Student Centered Learning?
- 1.3 How your higher education environment is student-centered or not student-centred?
- 1.4 Which competences and resources are needed to make the needed changes?

2. Develop an institutional strategy for change

- 2.1 Discuss the advantages, benefits and requirements of change;
- 2.2 Engage faculty members in the process;
- 2.3 Make students more active in acquiring knowledge and skills (different learning strategies, active learning approaches, etc.);
- 2.4 Make students more aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it;
- 2.5 Focusing on interaction, such as tutorial, discussion and groups work;
- 2.6 Focusing on transferable competencies.

3. Examples of student-centered learning activities:

Within the classroom, practical implementation of an SCL approach can include a number of components. The following are a few examples of these:

Problem-based learning.

Group project work (strategies for effective group work);

Inversed classroom (students teaching each other);

Resource-based learning;

Use of the case method;

Role plays;

Group presentations;

Use of learning logs or portfolios for students to record their educational experiences.

4. Support Faculty members and students in the change to Student Centered Learning

Before completing and implementing changes while developing a culture for innovative practises in teaching and learning, the institution need to commit to support faculty members. Here and eight suggestions for the institution and its faculty members:

- 4.1 *Addressing Teachers' Concerns in Implementing Educational Innovation:* The institution need to invest time and resources in professional development programs which help teachers understand and apply ideas, skills and attitudes about innovative teaching methods;
- 4.2 *Stimulating Good Practice in Teaching Activities:* Recognize the efforts of teachers who steer the SCL approach forward;
- 4.3 *Building Learning Communities:* Engage the departments and the institution and other stakeholders in the process while building a community of learners;
- 4.4 *Informing Students more about the Ideas underlying SCL:* Giving students initial training in SCL skills (e.g. working in groups, chairing a meeting, giving feedback, giving a presentation) aimed at helping students to understand the “why” of this approach to education;

- 4.5 *Helping Students more extensively to become Self-Directed Learners:* By equipping teachers and students with a clear conceptual framework to guide them to ensure that the goals of self-directed and independent learning are understood and interpreted in a more consistent way, thus helping to achieve the goals that SCL intends to achieve;
- 4.6 *Offering Students more Variety in Educational Formats within the Context of an SCL Environment:* Offering students an array of teaching methods, thus giving them various opportunities to enhance their competences and learning skills in various collaborative environments and by allowing them to experience different self-directed learning activities;
- 4.7 *Adopting New Forms of Assessment:* By adopting innovative forms of assessment which move away from simple paper-and-pencil tests to more stimulating forms such as portfolios, peer- and self-assessment, and assessment of performance skills in a tutorial group;
- 4.8 *Adopting and Improving Processes of Program Quality Review:* Whereby student evaluation is a key component and program teams produce a self-evaluation report which address program management, quality assurance, desired learning outcomes, content, learning activities, student assessment and professional development of teachers, with related statements expected to be backed by evidence.

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