

## Views on student-centered learning

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### **Rezumat**

*Acest articol reflectă diferite puncte de vedere ale experimentelor făcute de diferiți cercetători și universități din Europa și America. Conține analize scurte, concluzii și recomandări. Grupurile de studenți sunt de diferite nivele, specialități și locuri geografice.*

*De asemenea sunt incluse concluzii personale, opinii axate pe practica personală în grupele de la universitate (UPS „Ion Creangă”).*

Is student-centred learning (SCL) an effective approach to learning or not? Several studies on (SCL) done by universities and some researchers [3] found that it is an effective approach. For example, a six-year study in Helsinki, compared traditional and activating instruction and found that the activating group *developed better study skills and understanding, but were slower in their study initially.*[4] Equally, found that students *had increased participation, motivation and grades in a first year information technology course.* [2] In addition, 94% of the students would recommend it to others. Students in a UK University concluded that (SCL) student-centred learning gives more respect for the student, that it was more interesting, exciting, and it helped them gain their confidence [3]

A comprehensive study was conducted in 2004, by the [University of Glasgow](#), on the use of (SCL) student-centred learning with full-time undergraduate students. In this study they found that student-centred learning was more prevalent in the later years of the student degrees, and this, they believe, is often down to class sizes. [O’Sullivan](#) described SCL student-centred learning as a *Western* approach to learning and may not necessarily transfer to the developing countries, and I should say and Moldova is not very far from it, 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 University undergraduate courses [5].

SCL, despite its popularity, is not without its drawbacks. The main drawback of student-centred learning is its focus on the individual learner. In addition, there are some difficulties in its implementation, i.e. the resources needed to implement it, the belief system of the students and staff, and students’ lack of familiarity with the term. [Edwards](#) highlights the dangers associated with (SCL) in adult education where in empowering an individual there is a potential danger of ‘a person’s physical isolation from other learners’ [1]. The concept of being an independent learner may in fact lead to some of the sociability out of the learning process. In relation to this individuality, [3] Lea’s study on psychology students highlighted their concern over being abandoned or isolated from other supports in a SCL approach.

[Prosser and Trigwell](#)’s work in higher education emphasizes the different belief systems held by staff and students [7]. They found that lecturers with a teacher-centred approach to teaching held views that students should accommodate information rather than developing and changing their conceptions and understanding. The reverse was true for those with more student-centred approaches to their teaching. Perry’s work on the development of University students highlights how students move from a dualistic view that knowledge is right or wrong to a relativist view that all answers are equally valid [6]. This study highlights that even during the University years, students can change their view on SCL and as they move throughout the years their general views may change, too.

In support of Perry’s work, who highlighted that 1<sup>st</sup> year medical students were suspicious of the value of SCL method [9], I would say that the 1<sup>st</sup> year of studying a foreign language is

difficult to be studied through SCL; firstly - because they are, very often, beginners, that supposes lack of any knowledge of the language, to say nothing of the skills in this subject. Secondly, much of the material is supposed to be learnt through imitation. Of course we can speak about some components in the tasks, especially, home.

Another concern regarding SCL is the belief, that students hold in relation to their learning. Students who value or have experienced more teacher-focused approaches, may reject the SCL approach as frightening or indeed not within their remit [8]. Such example is at our university, where students (not all the students and not all the groups) do not dare to take responsibility of learning and conducting/teaching other students in analyzing a text, for example. Or, better should be said, it is very convenient “to push all the responsibility on teachers’ shoulders. It is time to wake up many of the students and inculcate them the sense of responsibility for their learning.

Student centered learning is not without some criticism but in general it has been seen to be a positive experience, for example, [Edwards](#) emphasizes the value of student-centred learning: ‘Placing learners at the heart of the learning process and meeting their needs, is taken to a progressive step in which learner-centred approaches mean that students are able to learn what is relevant for them in ways that are appropriate. Waste in human and educational resources is reduced as learners no longer have to learn what they already know or can do, nor what they are uninterested in’ [1]. Of which, by the way, students at our university should have claimed. Students say they do not feel European approaches to learning but feel European requirements at the examination sessions.

Finally, students’ familiarity with the term can be poor. Lea conducted a study on 48 psychology students in the University of Plymouth on students’ attitudes to SCL. They found that, despite a University student-centred policy is being put to practice, 60% of the students had not heard of the term [3].

Conclusion: The interpretation of the term ‘student-centred learning’ appears to vary; some define it as ‘active learning’, while others take a more comprehensive definition including: active learning, choice in learning, and the shift of power in the teacher-student relationship. It is used very commonly in the education literature and in University reports and projects, but this does not necessarily mean it has been transferred into practice. Nevertheless, this approach does penetrate into modern methodology and prospers. The new generations will like it and take it as the main “tool” in teaching and learning.

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