

## **THE IMPACT OF STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING APPROACH THROUGH WORKSHOPS CONDUCTION ON THE UAE UNIVERSITY FEMALE STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study is intended to investigate the impact of student-centered learning approach on United Arab Emirates University Female Students' confidence in their academic fields through the workshop conduction strategy. The study is qualitative which interviews are utilized. The researcher used qualitative research which ensures more in-depth data collection than typically needed in quantitative research (Gay, Miller & Airasian, 2011).*

**KEYWORDS:** Student-Centered learning, UAE University female students, Workshops, collaboration

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Based on the impact of the constructivist learning theory, which defined learning as a process in which learners construct organized knowledge (Mayer, 2004). This theory played a significant role in developing the student-centered approaches (Hannafin, Hill, & Land, 1997), which maintain students' accountability rather than the content and teaching process (Cannon & Newble, 2000). Different teaching strategies were developed after the student-centered approach such as students' behavioral activity during learning (Mayer, 2004), e.g. student-activating teaching methods (Struyven et al., 2006), powerful learning environments (DeCorte, 2000), minimal guidance approach (Kirschner, Sweller, & Clark, 2006), discovery learning (Mayer, 2004), collaborative/cooperative learning (Slavin, 1995), and project-based learning (Dekeyser & Baert, 1999). Student-centered teaching strategies features are students' independence, instructor's coaching role, and knowledge as a tool, not an aim (Dochy, Segers, Gijbels, & Van den Bossche, 2002).

Student-centered approach assists students to develop a "can- do" behavior, which motivates the students to do their tasks and enjoy their time. Throughout the learning process in student-centered approach, teachers consider their students' needs and interest as individuals and groups, and inspire them to contribute to the classroom activities. Planning, teaching and assessment procedures are based on students' needs, interests and abilities. Courses topics are outlined to be relevant to the students' needs, interests and lives, which encourage the students to engage collaboratively, understand, and construct knowledge. Student-centered learning alternates the traditional role of the teachers to the facilitation and coaching roles. The teachers are not the only source of knowledge. They assist the students to access and process information to construct knowledge (Attard, 2010). Teachers' do most the work outside the classroom to prepare for their classroom activities and evaluate students' work. Teachers do less work in the classroom because they guide their students to do their tasks by themselves or in collaboration with their classmates under their teachers' supervision (Napoli, 2004). Shifting from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness requires teachers to change their thinking from what they teach to how and why they teach, and

about their performance as teachers to thinking about the effectiveness of students' learning processes (Napoli, 2004).

The relationship between students' learning experiences and performance is important (Weiss & Pasley, 2004). The researchers concluded in their study that effective instruction includes different strategies to encourage students to interact purposefully with the content, and build on their former knowledge (Weiss & Pasley, 2004). Therefore, engagement influences achievement and performance (Fredricks, 2011; Marzano, 2013). Teachers were encouraged to emphasize on student-centered learning approach and students' independent inquiries of information to improve their academic performance (The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2009).

### **Statement of the problem**

How the student-centered approach affects in the improvement of UAE University female students' confidence in conducting academic workshops.

### **Significance of the Study**

The importance of this study is derived from the newness of the student-centered approach as it is not widely spread because of the instructors' fear of shifting. This study will encourage the instructors to think seriously about making gradual change for their students' sake. The study will pave the way for other studies to be conducted in different academic institutions. It will also be a good source for the researcher who wants to investigate in the same topic in relation to other educational skills in the other universities in the UAE and other countries.

#### **Purpose of the study**

This study intends to investigate the effect of implementing the student-centered learning on UAE University female students' confidence in their academic fields .

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

The study is an expletory research that focuses on the UAE University female students' perceptions of conducting workshops to their peers in collaboration with their instructor based on the student-centered approach. The instructor conducted this approach in four undergraduate courses which are "Classroom environment in Elementary School", "Family, Community, Culture and Early Childhood", "Assessment in Early Childhood" and "Students Teaching in Elementary School". Eight workshops were conducted in three months based on the planned research design. The participants are female students, who are enrolled in these four courses, are from Humanities and Social Sciences College, and College of Education in the UAE University. The students' major in different departments such as English, Arabic and Islamic Studies, Early Childhood, English Literature, Applied Linguistics, History, etc. To attain the main purpose of this study requires responding, the constituents of this inquiry are: What academic and social advantages do UAE University female students gain in conducting the Workshops? What academic and social challenges do UAE University female students face in conducting the Workshops? The study is qualitative that used interviewing the female students. Transcripts were analyzed. The data were coded into categories and then themes by the researcher. The present qualitative strategy provided an opportunity for the voices of UAE University female students to emerge. It gave a descriptive analysis of the students' academic experiences.

The interviews were coded to categories and themes for analysis.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Advantages**

Moza commnetd;

New work trial without fear

It was a good experience to try to conduct the workshops and try new work. I think in the future, we can do and try new things without a fear. It is always a first time experience for every work we are doing, and that what encourage people to be more creative.

### **Communication skills Improvement**

Maryam commented;

*It is my first time to lead a workshop. Participating in conducting the workshop teaches me to be a good presenter. Also, it teaches me to communicate with others and how to deal with them.*

### **Students' collaboration is the key to success**

Maryam commented;

*When we worked in our group, I learned many things from my classmates' experiences. Each student has a skill, which she can teach us that skill. Our collaboration was important for our workshop to be successful. I learned new information from each one, and I knew how they were thinking. Really, I start to know how my classmates' think.*

### **Students' personality improvement**

Maryam commented;

*I am very happy to participate in this workshop and I hope to repeat this experience next time because it improves my personality, which is a new approach to learn from it. I hope all course in the college of Education require this approach as a task because it effective way to learn.*

### **Students' learning enjoyment**

Halimah commented;

*Conducting the workshop was interesting because I tried to deliver as much information which I learn through the years from my college to the students who attended the workshop. I felt that the students, who came to the workshop, were enjoying their time and paying attention to the information we are providing. The students were able to*

*inform us if they did not understand the information, so we can re-explain. The students enjoyed playing the educational games and comprehended the goals of the games.*

Amal commnetd;

*We noticed students' enthusiasm.*

### **Students'' active participation**

Amna commnted;

*We create some activities that make our workshop fun and enjoyable. I noticed students' active participation. The students were working together even they didn't know each other. When we were asking some questions, the students participated in the discussion and gave examples from their experiences*

### **Collaboration among students with Respect**

Amna commnted;

*The workshop was not that difficult as I expected and felt the first time heard of it. With our instructor and classmates, we worked together and did well, we shared our ideas and created creative activities and educational games, we used good strategies to deliver the ideas of our workshop to make it easy for students.*

Alyazya commented,

*We learned how to work in groups and how to overcome obstacles related to this issue. We learned how to respect each other.*

### **Gaining experiences**

Halimah commented;

*I think this is good experience for me, which will help me in my internship course in future.*

Amal commnetd;

*I gained experience in the process of creating the flowers game such as how can I create new thing to explain new information to students by using enjoying tool, not boring.*

### **The significance of feedback**

Alyazyah commnted;

*Through conducting our workshops in collaboration with our instructor, we provided a way to create an intensive educational experience in a short amount of time. We introduced a new concept of using educational games in classrooms, investigated this topic and encouraged the participants to practice actual methods. We discovered that feedback, from both the presenter and peers in the group, helps the participants understand what they can do to avoid failure in a real teaching situation.*

Maryam commented;

*Students' quick response to problems and readiness  
Conducting the workshops taught me how to work collaboratively with my classmates in the workshop, how to deal with problems which might face during the workshop. For instance, one of my team members forgot the USB, which had the workshop presentation. In that time, we went quickly to bring it before the beginning of the workshop.*

Doha commented;

*The explanation of my classmates was very clear and understandable. She used both Arabic and English languages.*

*Students together are in the same level of proficiency, which facilitates explaining to each other the main point of the topic and facilitates the students' learning process. Using bilingual education approach in the courses facilitate students' comprehension especially the focus of the course is to maintain the content of the course , not mastering the English language.*

### **Confidence level increase**

Doha commented;

*I like when we let the participants to speak, and gave them the opportunity to discuss and explain their opinion*

*The light spot of students' confidence feeling comes from the participants as Doha mentioned. More interaction with the participants means that the participants are enjoying the workshop and learning. Doha's level of confidence increases with more questions that come from the participants.*

### **Learning through educational games**

Doha commented;

*I like the creative way of delivering the information through games. It was amazing and cleaver idea to include the games, which our instructor recommended. The abstract information becomes more comprehended.*

*Learning through educational games attracts students' attention and increases their span of understanding, as Doha maintained in her comment.*

*Students' Motivation and incentives*

Doha commented;

*I love how we are motivated to conduct the workshop because we got gifts and certificates at the end of the workshop. It was great idea and it worked.*

*Providing incentives for students keeps up students' motivation to continue working on the workshop even though the challenges that the students had faced during the whole process. Students' feeling of ownership of the workshop and going through the whole process from planning to implementing the workshop in collaboration with their instructor, keeps up their energy to continue and succeed, which the students' felt and reflected at the end of the experience. The instructor' words as " I believe in you" sticks in the students' minds ,and finally leads them to great success, which all participants stamped on.*

Nassiba commented;

*The workshop assisted us to be more interested in the information, which we have learned. The topic became clearer through activities.*

*Attracting students' interests to reach a teachable moment, and making the information easier for the students to understand is an end, which each educator is encouraged to plan for and achieve. Utilizing various educational activities that meet students' learning interests' and styles, is which Nassiba celebrated and enjoyed in the process of workshop conduction.*

*Nassiba commented;*

*Through the workshop process, we built a learning community among us through cooperation by assigning the work among us, in collaboration with our instructor. We respect each other. This experience was enjoyable.*

*Cooperation and respects are stones to build learning community as Nassiba mentioned. Building this culture is planned by the instructor, which communicated to the students and they start believing in this culture. The students' actions translated their belief of learning community culture in their communication during the workshop conduction process.*

*Instructor's support leads to success*

Jamila commented;

*It is my first time experience to prepare for workshop, but our instructor has many experiences, which helped us to succeed.*

*Jamila's first hectic experience of workshop conduction went smoothly as a result of her instructor's willingness to pass her experiences to the students and hold on their hands to reach confidence and glory.*

### **The benefits of creating interactive presentation**

Jamila commented;

*Learning from different workshops that we had attended, we tried our best to make the presentation more interesting and interactive, which helps us to attract students' attention. I noticed that participants enjoyed the presentation.*

Jamila commented;

*We have thought how we can make students more active without making any noise or speaking randomly. One of our classmates helped us to avoid these problems by creating hands from sticks. Our instructor also helped us by engaging the students in the discussion about their experiences, their ideas, and their stories that happened for them which attract students' attention.*

*Students started to think as teachers and felt the teaching experience. They started to think critically regarding strategies of classroom and students' behavior management, which evoked their creativity to design materials. The students assured discussion as a tool of students' engagement as Jamila commented.*

*Field experience and practice importance in students' learning*

Jamila commented;

*There are many advantages of conducting the workshop. For instance, conducting an effective and successful workshop, we need to put organized plan, prepare materials, and create activities. In planning process, we thought about the workshop's audience, the time, and our purpose and how we achieve it.*

*Students tried to apply what they have learned in their educational courses in conducting the workshop as planning process. Field experience and practice are significant in maintaining the students' learning.*

### **Cooperative learning improvement**

Jamila commented;

*I learned how to avoid any problems that might make the workshop insufficient. For example, a student said she cannot prepare for one of the activities because she cannot find materials. We helped her and we prepared the activity because we planned before about every detail. If we didn't achieve what we had planned, our workshop will not be successful.*

*Planning for the workshop and collaborating among classmates lead to success as Jamila said. Students' belief of cooperative learning maintained during the workshop conduction process, and students' academic and social ties are improved to build the learning community culture among them.*

### **Advantages of Cooperative learning**

Jamila said;

*I learned to work in a team and share ideas, is the best way to succeed because our classmates are from different majors and they have different experiences. I learned to listen to them and try to improve each other ideas. This is the best way to learn because we search about information, each of us read different articles and discuss as group which help us to prepare the workshop in quick and efficient way.*

*Cooperative learning experience shortens the time to effectively utilize the students' efforts and conduct the workshop in a mannerly time. Students' distribution of the reading task was a beneficial cooperative strategy to save time and learn the new information and understand as Jamila commented. Communication skills especially listening skills are improved during the workshop preparation process.*

Mahra said;

*I learned how to create better practical activities to teach the in collaboration of out instructor. Learning through practical activities such as educational games enabled the students to develop their literacy skills, which was the main objective of the workshop.*

*Connecting knowledge with practice facilitates students' comprehension and knowledge acquisition. The students recall the information easily when they need it to apply. Mahra's awareness of the educational games benefits in learning process, encouraged her to deepen her thinking to create such games.*

Mahra commented;

*After my workshop conduction experience, I felt that I am able to face the audience. The workshop experience enhances my face to face interactions.*

*The "ability" is the key objective of the workshop conduction experience as the instructor maintained. Students' feeling of confidence and trust on their abilities are the message to*



*be sent to one of the instructor's colleague's claim as the students are not qualified to conduct the workshop.*

Mahra said;

*I was able to develop my presentation skills and ideas, be more innovative and present effectively.*

*The feeling of gradual improvement of skill and creativity was expressed by Mahra, which ensures the success of the workshop conduction strategy to be implemented in universities.*

Mahra commented;

*I learned that it is important to be prepared well for a workshop for the students' benefits.*

*Preparation for conducting a workshop is significant based on Mahra's experience.*

### **Challenges :**

Brain storming ideas

Maitha commented;

*Brain storming the ideas about the workshop's title and the activities was challenging*

*Educational games design*

*Maryam commented;*

*Creating creative educational games to expand students' attention in the workshop was challenging for us.*

### **Organization and duties distribution**

Maitha commented;

*Organizing the workshop and dividing the duties among our classmates were difficult.*

Doha commented;

*The cooperation in my team was not sufficient during the workshop. I faced some hidden problems such as the presentation time for each member was not balanced. The day before our workshop, my presentation part was given to one of my classmate.*

*Even the instructor gave the detailed instruction of the cooperative work policies to the students, which was contracted among the instructor and students to learn mutually from the workshop conduction process, naturally communication challenges appear among*

*the students. These challenges intimidate students' identity, confidence and trust, which concuss the classmates' relationship that supposed to be built during the semester to ensure the learning community.*

Jamila commented;

*Actually, I hate to work in groups because I learned that not all students will work as a team. Therefore, I tried to work with the students and divide the work. Not all students have the ability to achieve their ideas. Some of them only talk without doing anything, which made me and other students to do extra work in order to avoid any problems. Jamila expressed her feeling regard the insufficient group works strongly by describing her feeling by hate. Her insufficient past experiences of the group work as she stated that the workloads that thrown on her shoulder and she was forced to carry was heavy. Jamila in return to her past experiences, avoids group work, which could impact her communication skills in university and success in her future profession.*

### **Lack of students' Enthusiasm**

Jamila mentioned;

*I faced a challenge when we started to prepare for the workshop. We started to prepare for the workshop individually. Then, we tried to work as group, but that experience initially, was not that successful because some of the students did not have enthusiasm to work.*

*Applying new ideas initially might be unacceptable. Feeling of fear and worry could kill the new born idea, if it is not adopted and enriched. Generally, it is natural at the beginning of implementing any new idea, to face challenges and feel struggled as Jamila expressed. The lack of enthusiasm and motivation to conduct a workshop could slow down the process of applying the workshop and gaining immediate benefits from it. That seems happened to Jamila in her first experience of workshop conduction.*

*First time experience*

Maitha commented;

*We suffer a lot because this was our first time to conduct a workshop*

Moza commnted;

*The experience was challenging initially. I was very nerves to explain to the student and I was afraid that I will make mistakes when I talk. But thank God, the nervousness gone when I started talking.*

Aman commented;

*When I heard about the workshop, I felt it will be difficult because I didn't conduct any workshop before.*

Mahra commented;

*It was my first time to conduct a workshop. I did not know how to develop a workshop. I was worried about presenting effectively to the participants. I asked my classmates who have experience with workshop conduction. I searched online for more information about organizing workshops. One of the biggest challenges that I was thinking of is the delivering strategies of the main idea of the workshop. I felt confused about the presentation method.*

*The first experience of workshop conduction is critical, which most students expressed their fear and worry about. That struggle evoked the need of knowledge, experience and planning, which were approached differently through internet, classmates and others.*

*Time management*

Maitha commented;

*Time management was a challenge for us. We wanted our workshop to be unique and different than other workshops in UAE University. We had many ideas and the time was obstacle for us to do many activities in short time.*

Amal added;

*We thought that we need short time for some educational games. However, our activities needed more time to finish during the workshop.*

*“Are you qualified?” A story to be told to each educator who does not believe in his/her students because it means that you “are not believing” in yourself as leader. This question keeps me awake for night and nights, thinking of the hours I have spent with my students to build their confidence, and to train them to be the teachers of our children.*

## DISCUSSIONS

Workshop conduction is grounded from the instructor belief of building learning community among the students to be the initial stone to build the learning. Managing the culture of learning communities take time and is uneasy to explain to some students the meaning of the learning community especially students who believe in individualism and competitiveness.

Collaboration among the instructor and students is the secret for the workshops success.

Building students ‘confidence that they “can do it” was the main goal of conducting the workshop. Giving the students’ the first experience to live even though its struggles, gave them at the end the satisfaction and success feeling which they deserve because learning is *تجربة*

Which other students could not get as a result of their financial or political issues. Learning should be fun and enjoyable, not boring and killing the students’ innovation and creativity. Learning

should encourage students to express their voices to be heard and discuss among their instructors and peers.

### Creating educational games is a challenge

Jamila commented;

*The activities of the workshop were very interesting and at the same time it is related to our topic. Initially, I felt it is a big challenge to create games that are interesting and at the same time beneficial.*

*Giving the students the opportunity to experience creating the educational games and feel relieved. The experience is the key of learning and building self-esteem and confidence of their abilities. Students' reflections that they "can do it" even they struggled is the take out success story of this experience to be documented.*

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