Student-centeredness in the Writing Class After a Two-decade LMD System Reform

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Abstract

This paper is a descriptive-analytical investigation of the extent to which writing classes in the Algerian university are student-centered after twenty years of the adoption of the License-Master-Doctorat system which implies innovation and shifting to more critical pedagogies. A questionnaire was administered to 74 third year students in the department of English at the Frère Mentouri University, Constantine 1, to evaluate their attitudes towards their autonomy and towards the learner centeredness of the current learning and teaching practices in their writing classes. The results show that the dominant role of the teacher is still unchallenged and that students are struggling to improve their critical thinking and research skills which are the building blocks of learner autonomy, a concept at the heart of Student-centered Learning. Besides, Algerian universities still need to invest more profoundly in providing some learning and teaching sources at university, especially Internet access and adequate workspaces.

Keywords

Constructive learning;
Critical pedagogies;
Learner autonomy;
Pedagogical shift;
Student-Centered Learning.

التعلّم المتمحور حول الطالب في قسم تقنيات الكتابة بعد عشرين عاما من إصلاحات نظام ليسانس ـ ماستر ـ دكتوراه

ملخص

هذه الدراسة عبارة عن تحقيق وصفي تحليلي لمدى تمحور دروس تقنيات الكتابة في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة الجزائرية على دورالطالب في العملية التعليمية ومدى استقلاليته بعد عشرين عاما من اعتماد نظام الليسانس - الماجستير - الدكتوراه الذي ينطوي على الابتكار والتحول إلى طرق تدريس أكثر فعاليّة. تم توزيع استبيان على 74 طالبا في السنة الثالثة بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة الأخوة منتوري ، قسنطينة 1، لتقييم آرائهم حول التركيز على المتعلم وممارسات التعلم والتعليم في أقسامهم حاليا. تظهر النتائج أن الأستاذ لايزال مهيمنا على مجريات العملية التعليمية في القسم وأن الطلاب يعانون من أجل تحسين تفكيرهم النقدي ومهاراتهم البحثية التي تعد اللبنات الأساسية لاستقلالية المتعلم، وهو مفهوم في قلب التعلم المتمحور حول الطالب. إلى جانب ذلك، لا تزال الجامعات الجزائرية بحاجة إلى الاستثمار بشكل أعمق في توفير بعض مصادر التعلم والتعليم في الجامعات، خاصة تسهيل الإتصال بشبكة الإنترنت وتوفير مساحات عمل ملائمة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

تعلم بناء؛
طرق تدريس فعالة؛
استقلالية الطالب؛
تحول بيداغوجي؛
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I- Introduction

At the heart of the pedagogical part of the reform adopted gradually by the Algerian university since 2004, emerges the idea of training autonomous students who would become efficient actors in the economy of the country after their graduation; and to foster student autonomy, the whole educational approach had to change. This shift to "critical pedagogies" had already long been taking place in the western universities which are the number one source of inspiration for any reform adopted in Algeria. It is necessary, therefore, to review the international literature available about student-centered pedagogy to give the general picture of its background and definition; conditions, practical ways, and obstacles of implementation; the benefits of the reform as well as students' and teachers' attitudes towards it in different parts of the world. This review is a first step followed by an attempt to judge whether the Algerian university succeeded in creating a learning environment which would encourage student centeredness and autonomy after around twenty years of reform. These are the two aims of the present paper.

I.1. Background and Definition of Student-centered Learning (SCL)

Ideas about how learning happens and how knowledge is constructed which are traced back in the literature to Hayward (1905), Dewey (1956), Rogers (1980s), Piaget (1936)(developmental learning) and Knowles (1975)(self-directed learning) served as an inspiration for scholars and policy makers who were trying to answer the movements calling for pedagogical reforms in the European universities (ESU 2010, 4).

In the Communiqué of the Ministerial Meeting of the Bologna Process in Leuven in 2009, ministers agreed on a set of reforms to be brought to the European higher education and concluded that "Student-centered learning and mobility will help students develop the competences they need in a changing labor market and will empower them to become active and responsible citizens". It was here that they mentioned the term Student Centered Learning (SCL) for the first time. After the Bologna Process, the European Students' Union (ESU), along with various other actors, made colossal efforts to give a clear definition to the concept and to define its principles, elements, and conditions. They also investigated the challenges that lay in the way of implementing SCL pedagogy and proposed practical strategies to put the principles of a student-centered class into practice (ESU 2010). In a toolkit published as part of the project "Time for a New Paradigm in Education: Student-centered Learning" (t4scl, Time for SCL), ESU gave a clear definition of SCL:

> Student-Centered Learning represents both a mindset and a culture within a given higher education institution and is a learning approach which is broadly related to, and supported by, constructivist theories of learning. It is characterized by innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning in communication with teachers and other learners and which take students seriously as active participants in their own learning, fostering transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and reflective thinking (ESU 2010, 4-5).

Ang et al. (2015, 2) provided a similar definition of SCL which emphasizes the role of the learners as active participants in the learning process, and transferable skills and an autonomous attitude on the part of the learners instead of knowledge, as the outcomes expected to be achieved through this type of instruction. For Ang et al, SCL

> …refers specifically to those teaching and learning methodologies that will help our students develop the attitude, the resourcefulness, and the skills necessary for them to become lifelong, strategic, and motivated learners, eager and able to learn outside the classroom...with an ability for independent inquiry and a sense of responsibility for their own learning (Ang et al. 2015).

This central goal of SCL necessitates a change in the roles of teachers and learners. Learning in a student-centered class is "a shared process" between teachers and learners. Teachers are required to negotiate some of their classical authorities with the students by coupling the lectures they used to deliver with activities which require more reflection and involvement from the part of the students. Lectures are to be followed by discussions, individual and group critical work and research outside the classroom to foster the research and critical thinking skills fundamental to lifelong learning. The learner is required to invest more time and effort in the learning process and discover new ways of learning other than classroom interaction with the teachers (Ang et al., 2015, 2-3).

I.2. Benefits of SCL

The concept of SCL has been extensively studied in the literature available from different perspectives and in different areas of the world where higher education is undergoing reforms. To start with, several studies focused on the benefits of SCL approaches. Prince (2004) made a very useful literature review in which he listed proof of the effectiveness of active learning methods in fostering learners' academic achievement, attitudes about learning, self-esteem, liking among students and perceptions of greater social support. Other studies proved also SCL's positive influence on general success rates (Gelisli 2009) and on greater student engagement during class time (Li and Sinn 2010).

SCL is viewed by Jackobs et al. (2016 xv-xvi) as a necessity because it "...reflects the reality of how students learn regardless of how we teach". They identified three main reasons why SCL approaches should be widely adopted in higher education institutions. Their claims are also supported by a good number of empirical studies. Long-term, deep learning, they say, does not happen when we simply pour knowledge to be learned by rote and digested by passive students; students must try to actively build their knowledge by themselves. More empirical studies available in the literature come to support their findings (Hannafin & Land 1997; and Ghobrini 2020).

In addition to promoting deep learning, SCL is credited for creating intrinsic motivation in learners to expand their horizons (Dane 2010; Chang & Chow 2004). Mclellan (2008) accentuated the significance of motivation and called for it to be considered as an integral part of any SCL approach. Hoidn and Reusser (2020) reviewed an important number of empirical studies which provide evidence of the effectiveness of SCL in increasing learning and motivation, encouraging deeper understanding and leading to more positive attitudes about the subjects being taught and learning in general.

SCL is also known for encouraging the development of the lifelong, transferable learning skills of critical thinking, problem solving, and other higher order thinking skills. These skills prepare students, not only to pass their exams, but to find a place in a modern life which challenges them daily with tasks loaded with information processing (Jackobs et al. 2016; Darling 1994; Wiggins 1989; Darling-Hammond 1994; Frenay et al. 1998; Piaget 1973 as cited in Sablonnière et al. 2009).

Another credit goes to SCL approaches for helping students acknowledge diversity and feel comfortable working in groups with students who are different from themselves (Jackobs et al. 2016; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth 2012). The benefits of cooperative and collaborative work in developing communication and teamwork skills are strongly stressed in the works of (Felder and Brent 2009; Prince & Felder 2006; Prince 2004; Felder 2007).

I.3. Classroom Implementation of SCL

The literature available suggests a myriad of strategies and techniques to help teachers introduce SCL in their classes whatever was the field they work in. ESU is one of the actors, on the European level, who made remarkable efforts to define SCL and suggested practical ways to implement it. For classroom practice they suggest 1) problem-based learning (PBL); 2) group project work; 3) student-centered active learning; 4) resource-based learning; 5) use of the case method; 6) role plays; 7) classroom workshops; 8) group presentations; 9) use of a web-conferencing environment, particularly in distance education; and 10) use of learning logs for students to record their educational experience (ESU 2010, 32).

In the same line, a more recent work by Kuok Ho (2023) suggested small-group discussions, project-based learning, problem-based learning PBL, argument-base curriculum, technology-aided learning, student-centered feedback, and adaptive teaching as possible ways to operationalize SCL and to practice it effectively in the classroom. PBL is also suggested by Guslyakova et al. (2021) and Tuyen &Tien (2021) as one of the best SCL methods to develop memory, thinking, imagination creativity and attention and their studies contain empirical evidence of the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing students' language, content knowledge, workplace-related skills, self-responsibility and motivation.

Similar work was done by Ang et al. (2015) who suggested practical ways to implement SCL and who tried to adjust their proposals to the fields of their studies. Other scholars suggested SCL strategies designed specifically to cope with the challenge of large classes in which the adoption of SCL is perceived as difficult or even impossible (Allen & Tanner 2005; Cooper & Robinson 2000). Some other techniques suggested for the implementation of SCL were empirically tested and proved to be effective (Sabbagh & Hamwyah 2010; ESU 2010; Felder & Brent 2009; Felder 2009; Prince & Felder 2006; and Prince 2004).

1.4. Conditions for the Application of SCL

Several studies investigated the conditions for the application of SCL. The first thing that needs to change is the participants' attitudes about how learning happens and what teaching is there for (Jackobs et al. 2001, 8; Baeten et al. 2010). This is strongly supported by the works of ESU who saw a change in teachers' and students' attitudes as one of the goals of any student-centered environment (ESU 2010). Second, SCL cannot be implemented without skillful, dedicated, and creative teachers who are ready to grasp the diversity present in their classes, to understand their new empowering role, and to achieve their goals by adjusting their teaching methods to the time and space provided, and to the curricula they are applying. Teacher training and recycling is cited by many actors as a crucial parameter of SCL without which change is deemed to failure (ESU 2010; Dane 2010; and Yeomans 1999). Clarke (2010) added to the above-mentioned conditions "a high degree of cultural sensitivity" in case of the western principles of SCL are adopted in countries with different cultural backgrounds. He also finds ongoing reflection on teaching practices to be indispensable for teachers to undertake their new role in the class and to sustain their work ethics.

I.5. Students' Attitudes Towards SCL

Numerous studies chose to investigate the applicability of SCL by studying students' attitudes towards classes which used more student-centered methods. Woods (1994) maintained that learners who were used to teacher-centered classes and who are obliged to assume responsibility over their learning go through stages of adaptation which range from shock and denial to resistance and withdrawal, to surrender; however, with effective application of SCL, they end up accepting reality and succeeding in the challenge. The results of a study conducted by Hughes and Daykin (2002) showed very positive views of SCL. Even the best students felt challenged and involved. Some commented that they felt doing "real college studies", and some said that language in the class "took life" because of students' participation. The work of Lea et.al. (2003) found teacher-centered methods to be less motivating to students, but some of them had strong concerns about the availability of all the conditions to implement the reform, about this latter being led only to fulfill certain political agenda, and about teachers presenting ill-structured content or inadequate support under the pretext of moving to SCL. Horrod (2023) emphasizes the positive attitudes fostered by SCL methods through reporting students' appreciation of the time spent in classes, of the theoretical and practical knowledge learnt, and of their engagement in the challenges of the practically oriented environment of the classes.

I.6. Academics' Attitudes Towards SCL

Teachers who participated in Felder and Brent's study (1996) held negative attitudes towards SCL and had numerous concerns related to the daily challenges they faced when they tried to apply this approach. They complained about students refusing to collaborate, about active learning being inadequate to the weak ones, and about themselves losing control in the classroom and not being able to cover the program. Felder and Brent (1996) emphasized the importance of "properly implemented" student-centered instructions; they say that teachers need to have patience and to be ready to accept students' initial refusal to cooperate which will soon be rewarded by deeper learning and more positive attitudes from their students. These arguments are supported by Dane (2010) who borrowed the words "less is more" of a famous architect called Ludwig Mies van der Rohe to say that less content and deeper long-lasting learning are preferred to more content and surface learning which is very likely to disappear once students pass their tests.

Harrods (2023) shows how teachers' negative attitudes towards SCL pedagogies persist even after decades of the attempts to reform higher education. In his study, the participant teachers report several difficulties they face to monitor and assess SCL tests, especially when it involves grouping students and dealing with companies outside universities. They also talked about the challenges some of the students face which needs extra facilitating efforts from the part of teachers. They also expressed their concerned that policy documents falsely underestimate the role of teachers in SCL pedagogies and overestimate that of students (Horrod 2023, pp. 162-163).

I.7. Challenges on the Strategies of Implementing SCL in African and Asian Countries Including Algeria

In the African and Asian developing and underdeveloped countries, in addition to the difficulties reported above about the application of SCL in European universities, there are additional challenges related mostly to limited access to resources like textbooks, worksheets, handouts, laboratories, and the Internet. In addition, universities in these countries have problems of large classes, scarcity of professional teachers and fierce resistance to change by most teachers (Sablonnière et al. 2009; Bekele & Melesse 2010).

In Algeria, Azzi (2012) talked about failure, rather than resistance, to adopt the LMD (License, Master, Doctorate) reforms which entail student-centeredness, and she explained this failure by the negative attitudes which academics hold towards the reforms. She suggested that the adoption of innovative teaching and evaluation practices be rewarded by higher education institutions instead of relying exclusively on teachers' efforts to produce academic papers. She also suggested more emphasis on the importance of change in pedagogies and programmes, the provision of necessary logistics, pre- and in-service teacher training, and the building of networks that would allow success stories to be shared so that teachers motivate each other.

Studies conducted in Algeria about SCL report a number of logistic and procedural obstacles related to teaching and assessment. Boudersa and Hamada (2015) underlined the difficulties created by the pressure to finish the heavy programmes which discourages teachers to go thoroughly through the procedures of project-based learning and to insist on the authenticity of assessment. Project assignment, supervision and assessment, they said, become an additional burden for the teacher who is already struggling with crowded classes, low performing students and heavy programmes. The challenge of lengthy and content-based programmes is also highlighted by Baghoussi (2021) and Baghoussi and El Ouchdi (2019), in addition to the problems of noise and discipline in classes in which the big numbers of students and the long, aligned rows in the classrooms are unsuitable for group work and which do not allow for much flexibility. Baghoussi (2021) and Baghoussi and El Ouchdi (2019) also mentioned the absence of clear guidelines about the best ways to implement SCL methods, of teacher training programmes which focus on pedagogical shift, and of adequate theoretical knowledge about SCL instruction.

II– Methods and Materials

The present study aims to assess the extent to which third year LMD classes at the English department at Frères Mentouri University, Constantine1, are student-centered after around twenty years of the implementation of the academic reforms adopted gradually by the Algerian universities since 2004. The study attempts to answer the following question:

- To what extent are the requirements of SCL available in the Algerian context?
- Are the attitudes of our students, their teachers' practices, and classroom and university environments adequate for the implementation of SCL?

The review of the literature allowed us to understand that SCL is a western concept which was found empirically to be effective in fostering permanent learning and that its adoption in non-western contexts necessitates the provision of some elementary conditions which start in students' attitudes and are consolidated by a favourable classroom and university environment. The present study seeks to evaluate how far these conditions are met in the Algerian context from a student perspective.

To achieve our research aim, a questionnaire was delivered to 74 third-year students in the department of English at the Frère Mentouri University, Constantine 1. This is the total number of students in two, out of ten, third-year groups which make the whole population. The questions are intended to gather quantitative and qualitative data about whether and to what extent the requirements of a student-centered class are met in the participants' attitudes, classes and university environment.

The questionnaire is made up of three parts. The first investigates the existence of a minimum of resources necessary for the establishment of a student-centered atmosphere in the participants' environment. The sources targeted are, first, motivation among students, then teacher explanations and handouts, textbooks/books, the Internet, adequate workspaces, classmates and friends who share the same interests, and teacher coaching and help outside the classroom. In the second part, the first section, the questions focus on the teaching approaches and methods the respondents were used to during the two years preceding the launch of this study. In the second section, the focus is on the learners' attitudes towards some classroom practices which determine whether the classes were student-centered; this is to assess their familiarity with student-centeredness and their readiness to engage in such a learning atmosphere. The third part focuses on the respondents' learning practices. There are questions about how they usually acquire knowledge, skills, and awareness about their own learning processes and roles. These three are the basic learning outcomes which constitute one of the most important pillars of any student-centered approach. Parts one and two seek to know whether the relationship between the participants and their teachers shifted from a "powerful teacher-dependent student" relationship to one of sharing and "mutual ownership of the learning process".

III- Results and Discussion

III.1. Results

Analysis of the questionnaire yielded quantitative data which are presented in graphs and tables as well as qualitative data which we grouped and ranked in ways that make their analysis meaningful.

III.1.1. Motivation and Learning Sources

Table 1

General Second-year License (L2) Averages and Annual Writing Module Averages

General L2 Average	12,21
Written Expression Annual Average	12.64

The participants´ general L2 level as indicated by the previous year's achievement is above average. Their writing performance during the same year is also above average. It is actually very close to their general L2 Average. It could be said that the participants are above average in writing and in their general L2 performances and that writing performance is a good indication of the participants´ general L2 level.

Table 2

Attitudes Towards Writing

11.5	%
I love writing.	31%
I am motivated and aware of the importance of writing.	38.5%
I write when I am obliged.	43.5%
I hate writing.	1.5%

The most common types of motivation to write among the participants come in this order: First, those who write when they are obliged (43.5%); second, those who are motivated and aware of the importance of the writing skill (38%); third, those who love writing (31%); and finally, those who hate writing (1.5%). The results yielded by the answers to this question are quite encouraging. Motivated students constitute a considerable percentage (69.5%), whether this motivation was intrinsic or stemmed from their awareness of the importance of the writing skill. The students who are not motivated still show in their majority willingness to write when they are obliged. This is an encouraging sign because motivation is an indispensable ingredient to the success of any student-centred class.

Table 3

Description of the Writing Skill

Statement	%
Writing is the most difficult language skill	74.5%
Being a good writer is my most important objective	90%
It is possible to be good at English without necessarily being good at writing	56.5%

Table 3 shows clearly that although more than half the participants think that they can have a good level in English without being necessarily good at writing (56,5%), and despite the difficulty of the writing skill for them (74.5%), the vast majority (90%) say that improving their writing skill is their most important objective. This clear readiness to improve their writing skill comes most probably from their awareness of the place writing has in their academic life, both in the learning process and in assessment. The significant majority who gauge writing as a difficult skill would probably perceive it differently if they were in a centered-learning environment.

Table 4

Availability of Learning Sources

	In class	At university	Outside university	unavailable
Teacher Explanations	90.5%	29%	2.5%	0%
Teacher Handouts	47.5%	61%	11.5%	4%
Writing Textbooks/Books	13%	29%	45%	11.5%
The Internet	4.5%	30%	74.5%	9.5%
An adequate working space	14%	47.5%	32%	15%
Classmates/friends with similar interests	56.5%	60%	32.5%	13%

Overall, the sources listed in Table 4 seem to be available to the participants with varying degrees inside and/or outside university. In classes, the sources available are teacher explanations,

classmates with similar interests and handouts. Teacher explanations are the dominating source (90.5%) in class. This could be taken as an indication that class time is based upon the content presented by the teacher rather than any work in which books, the Internet or group work which is a quite traditional image of learning/teaching. Outside classrooms, handouts and classmates with similar interests are available to around 60% of the students, in addition to an adequate working space, which is most probably the library. The Internet is available to 74.5% of the respondents outside university. At university, only 30% have internet access, and in the classroom, it is almost unavailable (4.5%), which probably means that students are not allowed to use it. So, in terms of logistics, the sources listed are available, but their distribution inside and outside classrooms and university favour the traditional image of learning/teaching which turns around the teacher inside the classroom, and books and the Internet outside it. The teacher's role outside university is

insignificant (29% at university and 2.5% outside university), and the conditions to carry out individual and group research inside the classroom (books 13%. The internet 4.5% and an adequate working space 14%) are inadequate.

III.1.2. Common Teaching Practices and Participants' Attitudes Towards Them

Table 5

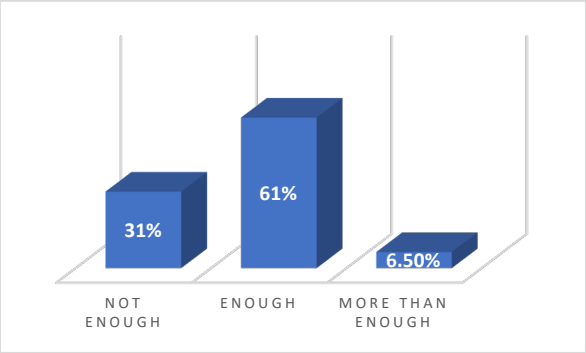
Participants' Description of the Writing Classes They Attended in their 1st and 2nd License Years L1 and L2

Statement	%
The teacher explained all the aspects that needed to be learned.	87%
The teacher gave handouts for revision.	74%
The teacher chose the topics to be developed in your essays.	75%
The teacher led the discussions about those topics.	73%
The teacher was the one who commented and marked students' papers.	93.5%
The teacher explained to you the goals of the learning process.	79.5%
The teacher explained the criteria he used to evaluate students' papers.	60.5%
You were asked to do research about the different aspects you needed to learn.	56.5%
You were allowed to use sources other than the ones provided by the teacher.	67%
You discussed what you learned from your research in class.	59.5%
The teacher accepted and praised the new ideas you brought to class.	67.5%
You were encouraged to use technology inside the classroom.	54%
You were encouraged to use technology outside the classroom.	83.5%
You worked in pairs/groups.	66%
You practiced peer assessment.	59.5%
You practiced self-assessment.	58.5%
You made writing projects.	50%

The statements next to which the respondents ticked more frequently in Table 5 are the ones which put the teacher at the centre of the learning/teaching experience. The "teacher-centered" statements are systematically ticked by more than 60% of the respondents. Once the statement mentions student-centered tasks like doing research, making projects, engaging in peer and self-assessment, or using technology in the classroom, the percentages drop to around 50%. Student-centered tasks are not completely ignored; however, the teacher's role in the learning/teaching and assessment processes prevail. The only student-centred task ticked by a very high percentage (83.5%) is using technology, but, again, outside, not inside the classroom.

Figure 1

Frequency of Teachers' Lecturing



As illustrated in Figure 1, 61% of the participants think that their teachers lectured enough, and 6.5% more than enough. This gives a total of 67.5% who are satisfied and are not asking for more lecturing. Based on answers to the current question and its previous ones, our classes seem to be more teacher-centered, but 31% of the participants still

think that their teachers are not lecturing enough. This shows a tendency to over rely on teachers and depicts how deeply rooted is the image of the teacher as a lecturer in the minds of students.

Table 6

Ranking Classroom Practices in Terms of Benefit

Statement	Ranks
Teacher lectures	1.28
Group work	2.40
Individual work	2.29

Table 7

Ranking Evaluation Sources in Terms of Reliability

Statement	Rank
The teacher's marks	2.125%
The teacher's comments	1.325%
Your classmates' comments	3.60%
Your own judgment of your papers	2.875%

Table 6 shows that the participants ranked the practices suggested as follows: teacher lectures first, individual work second, and group work third. Teachers are always the centre of teaching/learning activities for the participants. This central role is reemphasized in the ranking they gave in Table 7 to the four sources of evaluation proposed: teacher comments come first, teacher marks second, self-evaluation third, and peer-evaluation last. The respondents trust their teachers first, with the comments being more important than the marks, then their own judgement of their work, and peer-evaluation keeps its place as the "untrusted/inferior" source of knowledge and evaluation.

Figure 2

Satisfaction with Writing Performance

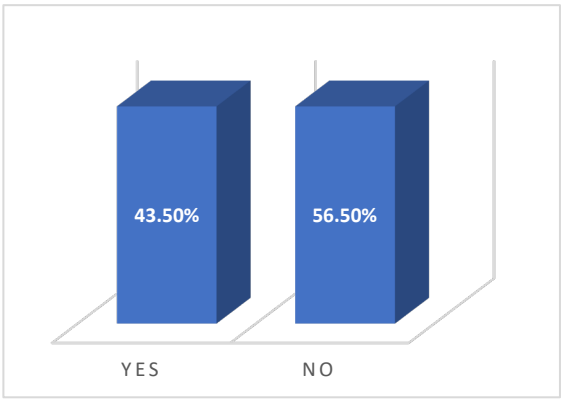


Figure 3

The Reliability of Teachers' Marks

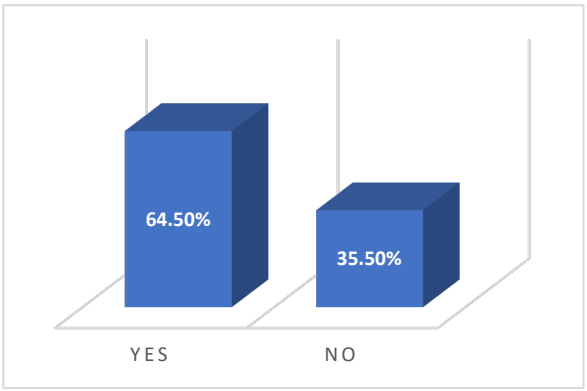


Figure 2 reveals that more than half the participants are not satisfied with their own performances in writing, and interestingly a higher percentage (64.5%), as demonstrated in Figure 3, are satisfied with the evaluation of their teachers. This means that the marks given by teachers are highly trusted, even by some of the students who are not satisfied with their own performance. This is going to be explained further in their answers to the next question.

Table 8

Correspondence between Marks and Level

Answers	Frequency of Mentions
Satisfied with the teacher's evaluation: My level is average and the mark I got is average too/ I have a low level and I got bad marks/ I have a good level and I got good marks/ I trust the evaluation of the teacher/ I have never been treated unfairly/ The marks evaluate how much you understood what you learnt/ I'm more interested in the comments	**46** (4, 6, 6, 26, 2, 1, 1)
Giving Excuses for Their Bad Marks: Sometimes we get bad marks because of small mistakes of spelling / I lose concentration / lack of time/ the topics are difficult/ are short of ideas/ we get ill in exams/ stress.	**10** (1, 1, 1, 2, 3, 1, 1)
Unsatisfied with the teacher's evaluation: Teachers are not always right in their marking/ My level changes each year, but the marks do not change/ Teachers expect us to write like professional writers/ Teachers do not always understand that writing is a personal task and that we do not always have to follow their instructions/ I deserve lower marks/ Sometimes teachers mark low because they disagree with our ideas.	**11** (4, 1, 3, 1, 1, 1)

Participants were asked to provide explanations to the previous question of whether they think the marks teachers gave them matched their level. Their answered are grouped into three categories in Table 8, and the categories appear

from the most to the least frequent. The answers confirm once again their satisfaction with their teachers' evaluation of their writing. Forty-five (45) answers expressed a matching between the marks given by their teachers and the idea they have of their own performance. Ten (10) more answers did not show clear unsatisfaction with teachers' evaluation; they rather gave excuses why the participants performed low like being ill, stressed, lacking concentration and so on. Only eleven answers expressed unsatisfaction with teachers' evaluation and complained that teachers kept giving low marks despite their efforts to improve, that they put very high standards, that they marked low when they disagreed with the students' points of view and that they wanted all students to write in the same way, ignoring their individual differences. whatever the reason of their dissatisfaction, however, their number remained considerably low compared to the satisfied respondents.

Figure 4

Participants' Knowledge of the Assessment Criteria Used by Teachers

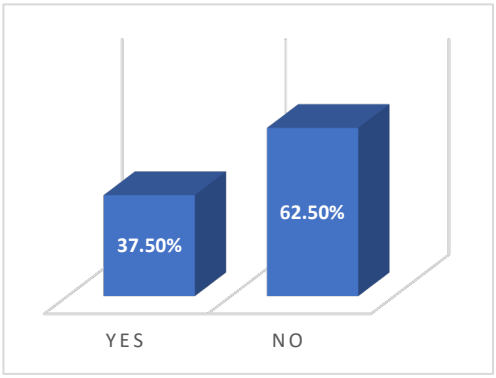


Figure 5

Views about Including Peer-Assessment as Part of Continuous Assessment

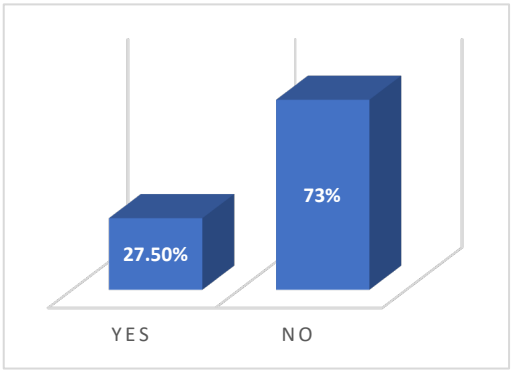


Figure 4 demonstrates that 62.5% of the participants report not having a clear idea of the criteria adopted by their teachers to evaluate their writing productions. This percentage is quite significant, and when we link it to the findings of the preceding question, it becomes even more telling of the central role of the teacher in evaluation. Even if the participants do not clearly understand the criteria of evaluation, the teacher remains a trusted source. On the other hand, as demonstrated in Figure 5, 73% reject the idea that peer-evaluation takes part in their continuous evaluation which confirms the low rank they gave previously in Table 7. The reasons why peer-evaluation is not trusted are further explained in the findings reported in Table 9 below.

Table 9

Justification of the Participants' Views about Peer Assessment

Answers	Frequency
Negative comments about their classmates' evaluation: Classmates are subjective/ Students use their emotions/ Students are subjective and give you compliments/ Students cannot know our mistakes better than the teacher/ They do not know the criteria of evaluation/ Classmates lack experience/I don't trust the level of my classmates/ I am responsible for my own learning, and I don't need any one's opinion/ Classmates' assessment is not serious/ Students have different ideas, and it is difficult to convince them with yours/ I'm not sure of their evaluation.	**45** (2, 4, 4, 2, 1, 7, 17, 4, 1, 1, 2)
Positive comments about their teachers' evaluation: teacher is the most important person in the classroom, and he is the only one who can evaluate our work. He has a higher level, and more experience/ The teacher always gives the final decision my classmates because he thinks theirs is not enough.	**16** (13, 3)
Positive comments about their classmates' evaluation: I trust the evaluation of classmates who have a better level than mine/ I learn a lot from my classmates' advice and judgements/ My classmates can see what is right or wrong in my writing and make good comments/ Classmates might draw our attention to mistakes we have not noticed/	**12** (1, 3, 4, 4)

Answers to Question 14 are classified into three categories and ranked from the most to the least frequent in Table 9. The most frequent (45) are negative comments which describe peer-review as unreliable, emotional, subjective, and even undesirable. Classmates are also described as lacking experience, ignorant of the criteria of evaluation, being difficult to convince, and not serious. Second in frequency (16) are the comments which express the respondents' preference for the evaluation of teachers because these latter have more knowledge and experience and know better the criteria of evaluation. Last are fewer comments (12) which give a favourable view about peer-evaluation, saying that classmates can

draw their attention to their mistakes and that some of them have the capacity to judge their writing and that they do learn sometimes from them. This positive attitude is the least common in the answers, and the trust the respondents expressed towards teacher evaluation is far more obvious.

Table 10

Suggestions that Would Make Writing Classes More Interesting and Beneficial

	Frequency
More teacher-student interaction / Interesting teachers / Good teaching methods / Good explanations/ More instructions from the teacher / More feedback from teachers / Teachers' control of our ideas and opinions / encouragement from teachers	**46** (12, 1, 1, 7, 9, 11, 1, 4)
Reading novels, short stories, books…etc. / Reading and analysing model essays/ searching for information about the topics we write about	**24** (9, 9, 6)
More practice	14
I like class discussion. It is motivating and makes me know different points of view / Exchanging real stories, experiences, and examples	**8** (5, 3)
The use of technology in class	7
Group work	6
That we choose the topics / New vocabulary / More feedback from classmates	4, 4, 4
Learning more connectors / Learning to outline before writing / Not having limitations on how much we can write / Being creative / Using dictionaries / Accepting that we are different and have different opinions / Playing writing games like collaborating to write one essay / Asking questions / More adequate environment inside the class	1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 2

Answers to Question 15 are grouped into eight (8) categories and ranked from the most to the least frequently mentioned in Table 10. Participants' suggestions concerning what they think would make classes more interesting and beneficial. They give a see-through idea about how much dependent on their teachers the respondents are. Teachers are mentioned 46 times in the answers, either asking for more explanations, clearer instructions, more interaction with, more feedback or more encouragement from them, and this comes first in rank among the suggestions and far above any other answer which does not directly involve the teacher. This is a very strong indication that, in the participants' conceptions of what an "interesting" and "beneficial" class should be like, the teacher is still at the centre.

In the second rank, comes the role of reading (24 mentions). Reading is accorded an important role by the respondents, and it is suggested in the form of free reading of books and novels, reading and analysing model essays, or searching for information about the topics they are going to write about; however, despite the participants' awareness of the crucial role of reading in the development of their writing skills, they still consider it below whatever explanation or instruction that may come from the teacher. The same could be said about writing practice which comes in the third rank (14 mentions).

Fewer respondents suggested exchange and classroom discussions (8 mentions), the use of technology in the classroom (7 mentions), and group work (6 mentions). Peer feedback is only mentioned by four respondents (4 mentions) while a triple this number asked for more teacher feedback above (12 mentions). So, discussions, exchange, and feedback in which their classmates are involved seems not to be trusted much by the participants. After this comes a list of more specific suggestions like using dictionaries, learning to write outlines, learning connectors and others which are only mentioned once or twice.

III.1.3. Participants' Learning Practices and Awareness of Their Own Learning Processes

Table 11

Participants' Ways to Get Necessary Information about Writing

Statement	**%**
listen to the teacher explaining everything,	86.5%
read your notes or any handouts provided by the teacher,	68%
or look for the information and learn it by yourself.	42%

Answers to Question 16 come to reemphasize the findings of the preceding question. Participants say that to learn about writing, they rely more on teacher explanations (86%) and the notes they take from the lectures and from teacher's

handouts (68%) than on any research they do themselves (42%). This is yet another indication of students' dependence on teachers in the learning process. They do depend on them in their actual learning, and they think that more interest and benefit would come from counting on them even more heavily.

Table 12

Participants' Ways to Develop Their Writing Skill

Statement	%
do the tasks given by your teacher,	52%
or do the tasks given by your teacher and develop other topics of your choice when you feel that you still need to practice.	61.5 %

To practice writing, the participants say they only perform the tasks demanded by the teachers, and only 9.5% more say they write on topics of their choice when they feel they need more practice.

Table 13

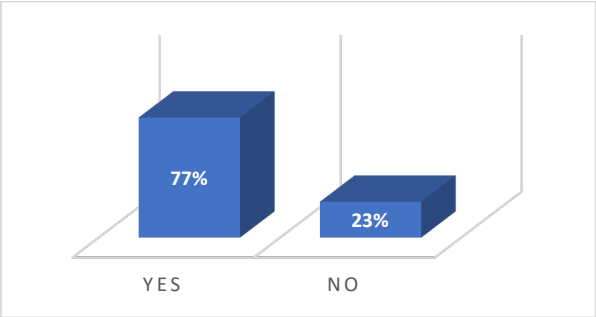
Tasks Participants Think They Can Perform Without Teachers' Help

Statement	%
Choose interesting topics to be developed in your essays	77%
Identify the aspects of the writing skill which you need to work on more	27%
Set learning goals for yourself	47.5%
Find relevant and reliable sources to work with	38.5%
Use the sources you found critically	19%
Put a work plan for yourself and follow it	53.5%
Assess your progress in relation to the plan you put	28.5%
Evaluate the quality of your written work	52.5%

As reported in Table 13, the only task which a high percentage of the respondents (77%) say they can do on their own is to choose interesting topics to develop in their essays. Only around half the participants say they can put a work plan for themselves and follow it (53.5%) and evaluate the quality of their written work (52.5%). the percentages are considerably low concerning assessing their progress (28.5%), identifying aspects they need to work on (27%), finding reliable sources (38.5%) and reading them critically (19%). These four last skills are very critical to develop autonomy and to do research individually and in groups, but the participants seem to be struggling with them.

Figure 6

Participants' Perceptions of Their Capacity to Improve Their Writing Skills Autonomously



Surprisingly, and against the findings of the previous questions, 77% of the participants say that they can improve their skills on their own. This contradictory finding could be read in at least two different ways. One of them is that they lack awareness, and that they are not able to generate an accurate evaluation of what they are capable of and of what it entails. The second explanation is that they are aware that they can improve on their own but are not willing to do it as long as the teachers continue to offer all sorts of support and to perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, the teacher-centred culture which has always existed in our classrooms.

III.2. Discussion

The findings brought forth through the questionnaire analysis can be summarized in a few points which could be considered as the most significant:

- The participants have an above average level in the writing subject and in their general achievement in all the subjects, and they are mostly motivated to write either because they love writing or because they are aware of its place in the academic life. The majority have the development of their writing skill as one of the most important objectives which is a positive sign, as motivation is considered one of the pillars of SCL.
- The writing classroom as described by the participants is still highly teacher centered. Lecturing is still the most common practice and the most available learning source in the classroom. Other sources like handouts, books, textbooks, an adequate working space, and internet access are also available, but outside the classroom and outside university. The lack of such sources does not give teachers options to make any pedagogy shift.
- The teacher is the most important source of knowledge for the participants and the only trusted source of evaluation. They rank teacher-evaluation first, self-evaluation second, and peer-evaluation last. They see that the teacher has more knowledge and experience and knows the criteria of evaluation better than their classmates. Participants who are not satisfied with their own level are satisfied with the marks the teacher gives even when they do not understand the criteria of evaluation which could be understood as a sign of dependence on the teacher who is still seen as a higher source of knowledge and expertise.
- Practices like collaborative work, projects, information searching, and peer-assessment are present in our classrooms but only timidly. These student-centered practices seem to be not very popular among students and they are not considered a priority by teachers.
- The participants say they are struggling with some elementary literacy skills like finding sources and reading them critically, and with study and self-directing skills like identifying areas they need to work on and assessing their progress in relation to any pre-set objectives. These skills are inherent to student autonomy, and building a student-centered classroom is unconceivable in their absence.
- Despite their heavy dependence on teachers, the participants think that they can improve their skills on their own which could be seen as a gap between how students perceive their own abilities, and what those abilities truly are in practice.

The findings of the study confirm that in Algeria, like in other African and Asian countries reported in the literature (Sablonnière et al. 2009; Bekele & Melesse 2010; Azzi 2012; Boudersa & Hamada (2015); Baghoussi 2021; Baghoussi & El Ouchdi 2019), has perceptible issues with logistics; some material conditions like books, textbooks, handouts, internet access and adequate working spaces need to be provided inside universities to give students and teachers more options to explore.

The teacher in our classes is still the center of the learning/teaching and evaluation activities, even if he does not seem to be making any efforts to innovate in pedagogy. Students consider him the main source of knowledge and the most reliable source of evaluation even in case he does not explain the evaluation criteria for his students, which is supposed to be one of their basic rights. This central role of the teacher seems to be a deeply rooted cultural heritage, and to hope for any adoption of the western SCL pedagogy, frequent reflections and discussions which highlight the benefits of a pedagogy shift are needed at all levels of the Algerian educational system. The importance of background theoretical and practical knowledge about SCL and of the clarification of the aims of any reforms are highlighted in several studies mentioned in the literature (Clarke 2010; Baghoussi 2021; Baghoussi and El Ouchdi 2019).

Concerning students, the same respondents who revealed how heavily they rely on teacher explanations, assignments, and feedback; and the ones who call for more intervention from the teacher; are the ones who strongly claim being able to develop their writing skills on their own. Students, in addition to their culturally loaded attitude of looking forward for teachers' guidance, seem to be lacking the reading, study and time management skills. These skills are characteristic of the idea of student autonomy which is critical to any attempt to build a student-centred classroom. Similar challenges were reported by teachers in the study of Horrod (2023) who consider students' lack of skills which empower them and make them autonomous is one of the factors which make the scaffolding job of the "teacher-facilitator" more difficult in an SCL environment, and not easier as policy documents seem to depict it.

After twenty years of adopting the LMD system, this study comes to confirm the "failure" reported by Azzi (2012) to make the pedagogical shift supposed to come with the 2004 reforms. There seems to exist no pressure on students and teachers in this respect. Things continue to happen in the classroom in a rather traditional way, and this is not likely to change without a firm decision to support innovation in pedagogy through deliberate planning, logistic provision, awareness raising campaigns, teachers training programmes focusing on pedagogy, and incentives that would encourage both students and teachers to embrace the reforms.

IV- Conclusion

The whole world is making unremitting efforts to improve the outcomes of teaching, and one of the approaches most supported by research is SCL pedagogies to which universities around the world are shifting at varying speeds. Algeria cannot stay isolated from the world and should work hard to improve the quality of instruction in its universities. The evaluation made in this study to students' attitudes towards teaching and learning practices revealed ongoing dependence on the teacher as the center of the writing class and highlights the lack of indispensable learning sources like the Internet, adequate workplaces. It also seems that there is no pressure on students and teachers to adopt the aspired reform.

Innovation in pedagogy happens only with firm decisions, careful planning, provision of sources, and incentives to the main actors in the teaching/learning equation. Whether the Algerian university decides to keep the LMD system or to abandon it in favour of a different one, focus on pedagogy should be at the heart of the efforts of all the reform actors. Decisions and plans for enhancing the quality and visibility of the Algerian university should not foreground research at the expense of pedagogy. The concentrated efforts demanded from teachers in an SCL environment should be objectively evaluated and rewarded, and modern literacy, study and self-direction skills need to be given more attention and fostered by being introduced early to students as modules in their first year at university or through the establishment of special study skill centers which provide remedial work for the students struggling with these essential skills which are prerequisites for their autonomy and active involvement in learning.

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