Proficiency Perceptions of Teachers about Their Student-Centred Teaching Methods

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Abstract: Today's education systems refer to teaching and learning methods derived from student-centred cognitive theories. However, in which situations these student-centred teaching methods and techniques are more effective and productive and how they can be used more effectively are still discussed. This research reveals personal opinions of teachers about how functional their student-centred teaching methods and techniques are in students' learning. The sampling is composed of 211 classroom teachers working at primary school in the city centre of Kutahya determined through convenience method. In the research, the answers given to the questions of the questionnaire were assessed in such a way to reveal the perceptions of teachers about how proficient they consider themselves in terms of the methods they use. As a result, it was determined that the teachers know some of the student-centred techniques but cannot use them effectively.

Key words: Student-centeredness · Teaching techniques · Perceptions of proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Student-centred methods and techniques derived from cognitive theories form different application-oriented paradigms. Education systems are turning from being teacher-centred to student-centred, from memorizing to thinking and making sense of [1-4]. According to Confrey [5], teacher-centred teaching is such a technique based on direct transfer of knowledge that considers the teacher to be the authority in class and thus makes the student ineffective in the process. The contrary is activating the student in the learning/teaching process.

One of the theories that accept the student as active in the classroom and consider him/her as the primary builder of new information is a student-centred structure called constructivism. These structures have a rather different philosophical view from the subjective view about what knowledge is and what knowing something means. The base of these views is generally that knowledge or meaning doesn't exist independent of the individual and isn't transferred to the individual's brain passively but is, on the contrary, constructed mentally by the individual actively. In these approaches based on individual discovery, problem solving stands out and students are entirely motivated to the subject [6-10]. The common point shared by the philosophical views forming the base of such student-centred approaches as constructivism is to look for the complicated reality of existence in subjectivity. It is thought that during teaching/learning process, students' background knowledge and experience is such a rich resource that eases and strengthens learning. That is, students are by no means a receiver of the new information but rather effective producers of it. Student-centred learning explains the existing knowledge of the students as the interaction between social context and problem to be solved. Considering these, it can be argued that teaching in student-centred approaches is an interactive learning environment in which students can construct meanings cooperatively [11-15, 6]. Therefore, teaching design and targets should be in line with this motivation and the process is based on using techniques that activate the student's learning process rather than being a tool for reinforcement because this process is based on the idea that reinforcement makes the information in the student's mind stay unchanged and prevents its different dimensions and forms from looming large. Since the problems are generally multidimensional, student-centred approaches demand that students themselves discover their own solutions so as to form their own multidimensional ideas.

Accordingly, the role of a teacher in teaching becomes being an organizer of experience and facilitator of student's discovery rather than being someone who gives information. In other words, rather than realizing knowledge and teaching in a standard way, teachers should use such teaching techniques that will accelerate and facilitate the formation of new information in students [16-18].

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In such cases in which a teacher's teaching technique cannot achieve the desired cognitive structures, students won't be able to activate their own cognitive processes in line with the desired aim on the strength of their past experience and knowledge and thus will be forced to think passively on the dictated information. However, in the student-centred approach, learning is structuring the knowledge rather than acquiring it passively. In order to learn, student should be active physically and mentally. A student learns when she/he discovers her/his own answers and concepts and creates her/his own comments; thus, she/he builds knowledge structures. The common philosophy of student-centred approaches which have been applied in various ways is that they reject the teacher-centred classes which are managed and controlled by the teacher [19-22].

Therefore, the aim of the techniques used by teachers who have to apply a formal program determined in class environment is to contribute to the learning processes of students on the strength of their own learning experience. The preferred techniques and their efficient use are thus very important. The aim of the study is to determine how sufficient and functional the techniques of teachers are in the scope of student-centeredness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Survey method was used in the research and whether the participant teachers found their techniques adequate in terms of student-centred teaching was researched through a questionnaire with their reasons.

The sampling was composed of 211 primary school teachers working in the city centre of Kütahya during 2009-2010 academic year. The sampling is limited to the primary school teachers included through easy access. The data were gathered through a questionnaire (c.alpha:0,88) developed by the researcher to determine and measure the evaluation by the participant teachers of their teaching techniques in terms of student-centred approach and the problems they came up against in the application of these techniques.

The questionnaire was compiled through literature review and from the variables of teaching and learning processes in the general proficiency scale of MEB (Ministry of National Education) after a preliminary study during which teachers were asked about the application they consider themselves to be proficient or not proficient in terms of the techniques they used. At the beginning of the questionnaire, the meaning of student-centeredness and what it aimed in the light of cognitive techniques were explained and the student-centred techniques in the literature were given. In the light of data, the core of the study was composed of the efficiency, proficiency and success of the techniques in terms of student-centeredness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following are the research findings about whether the teachers in the sampling consider themselves proficient or not in terms of the student-centred techniques they use in the class.

Table 1: Gender of the subjects

		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std dev.
Valid	female	105	49.8	1.50	0.50
	male	106	50.2		
	Total	211	100.0		

50.2% of the teachers who participated in the research were male while 49.8% were female

Table 2: Professional seniority of the subjects

		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. dev.
V alid	1-5years	15	7.1	3.31	1.11
	6-10years	26	12.3		
	11-15years	86	40.8		
	16-21years	46	21.8		
	21years and more	38	18.0		
	Total	211	100.0		

40.8% of the teachers who participated in the research had 11-15 years of professional seniority

Table 3: Whether the subjects knew all the student-centred techniques or not

		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. dev.
Valid	yes	43	20.4	1.79	0.40
	no	168	79.6		
	Total	211	100.0		

79.6% of the teachers who participated in the research knew all the student-centred techniques

Table 4: Whether the subjects applied all the student-centred techniques or not

		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. dev.
Valid	yes	29	13.7	1.86	0.34
	no	182	86.3		
	Total	211	100.0		

86.3% of the teachers who participated in the research applied all the student-centred techniques

Table 5: Whether the subjects applied all the student-centred techniques efficiently or not

		Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. dev.
Valid	yes	21	10.0	1.90	0.30
	no	190	90.0		
	Total	211	100.0		

%90.0 of the teachers who participated in the research applied all the student-centred techniques efficiently

Table 6: Differentiation of the subjects in terms of professional seniority

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
I make sure full participation in the technique I apply					
	1-5years	15	3.1333	1.35576	0.35006
	6-10years	26	3.9615	1.14824	0.22519
	11-15years	86	3.8605	1.26642	0.13656
	16-21years	46	3.6087	1.30773	0.19281
	21years and more	38	2.2895	1.03735	0.16828
	Total	211	3.4834	1.35698	0.09342
I adapt the technique to each class					
	1-5years	15	2.6667	1.44749	0.37374
	6-10years	26	2.9231	1.52113	0.29832
	11-15years	86	2.3372	1.29806	0.13997
	16-21years	46	2.1522	1.28179	0.18899
	21years and more	38	1.8947	.95265	0.15454
	Total	211	2.3128	1.30449	0.08980
	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.	
I make sure full participation in the technique I apply	3.360	4	206	0.011	
I adapt the technique to each class	4.278	4	206	0.002	
*	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I make sure full participation in the technique I apply					
	Between Groups	74.899	4	18.725	12.371	0.000**
	Within Groups	311.793	206	1.514		
	Total	386.692	210			
I adapt the technique to each class	Between Groups	19.441	4	4.860	2.963	0.021*
	Within Groups	337.914	206	1.640		
	Total	357.355	210			

*p<0.05, ** p<0.01

Table 7: Differentiation among the subjects in terms of their proficiency in using the student-centred techniques efficiently

	Finding self proficient	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
I have full command of the philosophy of student-centeredness	yes	21	1.9048	0.76842	0.16768
	no	190	2.4526	1.19318	0.08656
I learned the application of student-centred techniques during my pre-service training	yes	21	2.6190	1.28360	0.28010
	no	190	3.3579	1.24650	0.09043
I can apply student-centred techniques in my class easily	yes	21	2.3333	1.35401	0.29547
	no	190	3.4474	1.31530	0.09542
Student-centred techniques don't take much time	yes	21	2.4762	1.36452	0.29776
	no	190	3.6526	1.32352	0.09602
I don't apply student-centred techniques every lesson	yes	21	2.9048	1.26114	0.27520
	no	190	3.7316	1.30386	0.09459
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I have full command of the philosophy of student-centeredness	Equal variances assumed	14.130	0.000	-2.055	209	0.041*
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.110	25.988	0.045
I learned the application of student-centred techniques during my pre-service training	Equal variances assumed	0.018	0.895	-2.570	209	0.011*
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.510	24.359	0.019
I can apply student-centred techniques in my class easily	Equal variances assumed	0.110	0.741	-3.673	209	0.000**
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.588	24.361	0.001
Student-centred techniques don't take much time	Equal variances assumed	0.119	0.731	-3.854	209	0.000**
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.760	24.348	0.001
I don't apply student-centred techniques every lesson	Equal variances assumed	0.070	0.792	-2.766	209	0.006**
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.841	24.968	0.009

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01

According to the research findings, it was determined that, in terms of seniority, teachers who achieved full participation in his technique and adapted the technique to each class were those with 6-10 years of professional seniority. It can be argued that those with 6-10 years of seniority differentiated at this point might be due to the fact that they were experiencing the most productive period of their profession.

According to the research findings, it was found that teachers who didn't consider themselves proficient enough to use student-centred techniques efficiently didn't have full command of philosophy of student-centeredness, hadn't learned the application of student-centred techniques very well, couldn't use these techniques in their classes and didn't use these techniques in class because they took too much of their time.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this research, which tried to determine the proficiency perceptions of teachers about student-centred techniques they used, no significant difference was determined according to gender, whether they knew and applied all the student-centred techniques. Besides, it was also found that, in terms of professional seniority, teachers with 6-10 years of seniority could achieve full participation in their technique and adapted their technique to their classes more than teachers of the other seniority groups. Moreover, it was seen that the philosophical backgrounds of the teachers about student-centred teaching weren't sufficient and they didn't find themselves proficient in the theory and application of student-centred techniques.

One of the most important factors affecting students' learning in educational applications is the teacher's quality and his/her performance in class [23]. A teacher's background, experiences and his/her pre-service training have a crucial place in forming an effective teaching-learning environment in class. Therefore, students of education faculties should be informed about and exposed to student-centred techniques and apply them in micro teaching opportunities. On the other hand, when students participate actively in the learning process, more durable and meaningful learning takes place. Primary and secondary school programs in Turkish National Education are designed mainly according to constructivism approach. Teachers who will apply these programs should be equipped in their pre-service training with the way how such student-centred approaches

are applied. The main features of constructivism are designing the subjects upon main concepts, questioning the student and enabling students to achieve learning in groups through student-centred techniques which are applied efficiently [24]. As a result, teachers should learn student-centred techniques theoretically and by applying during their pre-service in-service training. At the same time, the quality and scope of these techniques should be improved insitu and teachers should be equipped extensively with student-centred techniques philosophically and academically.

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