Lithuanian, Polish and Slovenian Case in Experience of Different Methods Using in a Student-Centred Process

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Anotation. This article intends to disclose Lithuanian, Polish and Slovenian experience of different methods using in a student-centred process. The research methodology includes a critical survey of contemporary literature on student-centred learning. The most frequent methods of student-centred learning are problem-based learning, project-led education, learning contracts, flexible learning, inquiry learning, just-in-time checking and personalized learning.

Keywords: student-centred learning, research, teachers, methods.

Introduction

The research finds that student-centred learning is introduced in different professional fields, different geographical areas and practiced also in big classes. Whilst teachers and students are acquainted with student-centred learning to a certain degree, they are in need of more guidance, knowledge and understanding regarding its application and practice.

Many researchers and practitioners have already begun to discuss the diversity of opinion regarding what constitutes an SC approach. Whilst there is a broad consistency in general opinion there are also growing concerns regarding the apparent misinterpretation of the “ingredients” of SCL and what SCL actually “looks” like in practice.
There is an ambiguity in the expression “empowering teachers for a student centred approach”. One interpretation is in the sense of preparing teachers to use a student centred (SC) approach addressing questions such as what the prerequisite conditions are, what strategies can be used, what the critical success factors might be, how is “success” measured and so on. Much of the available literature is based on issues of practice and on case studies and this has been included in the review.

Another interpretation of “empowering teachers for a student centred approach” is more abstract and descriptive, rather than concrete and prescriptive. Many writers have explored the underpinning theory or constructs and have provided models and commentaries in an attempt to suggest reasons why teachers should be empowered to provide a SC approach or have compared and contrasted SC learning with more traditional approaches or considered the advantages and disadvantages or the consequences. Other writers have been concerned with the broader picture in which SC learning is located in a culture or socio-economic and political context and some have examined SC learning as an approach which is part of – or reflects – wider pedagogic change looking at how SC learning both shapes and reflects those trends. These perspectives have also been included.

The aim of the paper is to disclose Lithuanian, Polish and Slovenian experience of different methods using in a student-centred process.

The object of the paper – Lithuanian, Polish and Slovenian experience of different methods using in a student-centred process.

The methods used in the paper are as follows: monographic method, the analysis and synthesis of scientific literature, the analysis of legal acts, descriptive method and comparative method, quantitative and qualitative research methods.

The research of the present paper applies a composite study design based on the consistency of the quantitative and qualitative research methods. The type of design is consistent and explanatory, characterized by the quantitative data collection and analysis, and followed by the compilation of the qualitative research and analysis. Priority is given to the quantitative data; both methods are integrated in the interpretation phase of research (Creswell et al., 2003). The aim of a coherent explanatory design is to use the results of the qualitative research, which facilitate the explanation and interpretation of the results of the quantitative research. The empirical study was divided into 2 parts:

1. Qualitative content analysis can be applied for the description of miscellaneous data (Burns, 2000). The latent qualitative content analysis was used for the data processing (Cormack, 2002).

2. The strategy of the quantitative research refers to the written survey of a closed-ended type questionnaire in order to specify the results. The factor analysis method applied for the data analysis made it possible to condense the number of initial indicators without losing any essential information and move to the examination of generalized types (Bryman, 2008).
1. Basic theoretical concepts

“A student-centred classroom isn’t a place where students decide what they want to learn and what they want to do. It’s a place where we consider the needs of the students, as group and as individuals, and encourage them to participate in the learning process all the time” (Jones, 2007). Lea et al. (2003) also found that different interpretation of SCL meant that “<…> many institutions or educators claim to be putting student-centred learning into practice, but in reality they are not”.

O’Sullivan (2002) says the concept of SCL can be credited to Hayward in as early as 1905 and, later, to Dewey’s work in 1956. In its many forms and incarnations, SCL, or facets of it, also occur in the work of Piaget and Vygotsky but any real paradigm shift towards SCL in its current form occurs in the latter decades of the 20th century. This shift from teaching to an emphasis on learning means that there has been a parallel shift in power away from the teacher to the student (Barr, 1995). Simon (1999) credits SCL in the school system as being heavily influenced by the work of Froebel and the idea that the teacher should not “<…> interfere with the process of maturation, but act as a guide”. Whilst SCL is acknowledged in most education systems of being generally worthy or beneficial, there are few examples where it has been adopted wholesale across all teaching sectors, subjects and teaching activities. Possible theories and explanations for this are given later in this review.

In contrast, Felder et al (1996) reported resistance from students: “Some students view the approach as a threat or as some kind of game, and a few may become sullen or hostile when they find they have no choice about playing”. They found that students in higher education that had always been spoon-fed in the learning environment could be particularly resistant due to the belief “<…> that they are paying tuition or their parents are paying taxes to be taught, not to teach themselves”. This may suggest that there is a significant obstacle to overcome when implementing SCL. By shifting the onus from the teacher to the student, a large portion of responsibility must also be transferred which may not be to the students’ liking.

In order for SCL to empower teachers they will require a clear understanding of what SCL is, what it “looks” like in practice and what the benefits are. They will also need to understand how they can assess their (and their students’) progress with the aid of clear and structured success criteria. Presenting them with successful case studies and empirical evidence would also be beneficial in encouraging them to implement SCL and would also act a guide to troubleshooting as they move away from their traditional teaching methods. Projects such as Time for a New Paradigm Shift in Education: Student-Centred Learning, Attard et al. (2010), have begun the process of standardising SCL planning, practice and assessment by creating SCL checklists and step-by-step diagnostic strategies for policy makers and practitioners. The work covers all aspects of implementation and advice to all stakeholders on creating and maintaining a consistent SCL environment.
2. Characteristics of the contemporary student-centred learning process

Zhu and Engels (2013) found that student-centred learning is the most important innovation on the micro level that can be placed beside the communication technologies and the use of collaborative learning approaches. The authors mention that innovations like student-centred learning are most typical in organisations that have integrative structures, emphasize diversity and that also place an emphasis on collaboration and teamwork.

The main characteristics of a student-centred approach are the considerations given to individual learners’ experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, capacities and needs (Harkema & Schout, 2008). Within this approach teachers mainly focus upon what students should learn and emphasize why (Bransford, Vye, & Bateman, 2002). Teachers take into account the existing knowledge of students (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Protheroe, 2007), provide different opportunities for students to learn, often change teaching methods, help students who have difficulties and consider their background. Teachers discuss with students which study activities lead to good results, expose students to looking for alternatives and trying to find their own solutions. Examination questions refer to real-life situation and do not lead to categorising students with regard to their scores or grades.

Harden and Laidlaw (2013) emphasise that teachers should provide feedback to the student, engage the student in active learning, individualise the learning to the personal needs of the student and make the learning relevant. Hattie and Timperley (2007 in Harden & Laidlaw) speak about giving the students constructive and enough specific feedback, an explanation and that the language used in doing so should be non-evaluative, given in time and frequently and should help learners to plan further studies. Harden and Laidlaw state that students have individual needs regarding personal capabilities, motivation and what drives their learning goals and career aspirations, achieving mastery of the course learning outcomes on entry to the course, learning styles and the place of learning – on campus or at a distance and the time of learning. Individualisation can be achieved in many ways: The teaching programme may be arranged so that students can choose to attend a lecture on a subject, view a podcast of the lecture, engage in collaborative problem-based learning with their peers or work independently using an online learning programme. Learning resources or learning opportunities can be adapted or prepared so that the students’ learning experience, as they work through the programme, is personalised to their individual needs. When learning experiences are scheduled in the programme, such as a session with a simulator, the time allotted for an individual student is not fixed, but is the length of time necessary for the student to master the required skills. Also the curriculum can be designed so that it helps students’ individual requirements e.g. by including experiences in the early year of the course, by
encouraging a problem-based approach, by the use of virtual problems related to the
subject, by communicating with the students about how their learning experiences will
contribute to their mastery of the learning outcomes, short realistic scenarios and the use
of new technologies such as simulators that provide a more realistic learning experience
(Harden & Laidlaw, 2013, 31).

Mclean and Gibbs (2010) claim that the students should be included at all levels of
curriculum design, implementation and evaluation. As “clients”, students need to be part
of the process of developing a learner-centred curriculum. A clear admission policy (with
appropriate support structures) should be developed. The school should support student
diversity and individual learning needs, the psychological and social aspects of student
diversity, develop students’ self-learning skills, allow time for independent learning and
pursing areas of interest, regularly review the core curriculum content, recognise that
their education continues beyond graduation, provide ample opportunity for student
professional development and not pay lip service to learner-centredness.

Ēubukēu (2012) lists the following characteristics of the student-centred teaching
programme (Unver & Demirel, 2004 in Ēubukēu, 2012), emphasising tasks that attract
students’ interests, organising content and activities around subjects that are meaningful
to the students, determining clear opportunities that let all students develop their own
learning, skills and progress to the next level of learning, organising activities that help
students understand and improve their own viewpoints, developing global, interdisci-
plinary, and complementary activities, supporting challenging learning activities even
if the learners find them difficult, and emphasising activities that encourage students to
work with other students in cooperation. In student-centered learning environments,
it is essential that students take responsibility for learning and that they are directly
involved in the discovery of knowledge, choosing the materials used so that they offer
them a chance to activate their background knowledge and ensuring that the planned
activities are based on problem solving. Various institutions and outside-class activities
are incorporated to support students’ learning (Cubukcu, 2012, 53). The time dimension
should be evaluated in psychological terms. It is important that the students have enough
time to construct the information cognitively and connect the new knowledge to real life.
The students should have enough time for communication, for learning, synthesising,
observing and applying new knowledge to social life, work, family and society. When
talking about “location” of student-centred learning we should include all the places
where students learn: school, library, museums, work place and home.

Lemos, Sandars, Alves and Costa (2014) claim that the Bologna Process emphasises the
importance of the student-centred approach. They point out that this system introduces
students to the idea of taking responsibility for their learning activities, increased reten-
tion of the content, improved student engagement and improved status of the learners.
Their study tried to investigate a new mixed-methods approach to evaluate the student
centredness of teaching and learning. The research results showed that, in particular,
teachers appreciated especially the following: the importance of engaging students in the learning process, that the class was a place for discussion, students were encouraged to be autonomous and that there was a shift in power relationships from teachers to students. Course objectives and assessment programme remained under teacher control. Teachers used content to capture student curiosity and increase motivation. Teachers considered themselves more as facilitators, they gave students high responsibility in classroom activities, and, crucially, they provided instant feedback.

According to the European Students’ Union (Student-centred learning, 2010) the student-centred learning is actually a synonym for quality higher education. Among other student-related issues they emphasise transparent procedures for students to be able to give feedback on the quality of the educational process, students are consulted on curriculum content, on the teaching and evaluation methods used, are involved in periodic programme quality reviews, are involved as full and equal members in committees, procedures for students to appeal decisions regarding their academic attainment or progression are provided, they are consulted when learning outcomes are designed, student needs and the diversity of the relevant student group are considered when designing learning outcomes, students are informed on the intended learning outcomes before they start a course or programme component, representatives of teachers and students are involved as full and equal members in the panels undertaking quality assurance reviews, institutional quality assurance reviews and guidelines take into account the overall elements of teaching and learning, prior learning (in non-formal learning environments) is recognised by the institution for the purpose of access into educational programmes, the process of recognition is easy, recognition of prior learning can be done without significant costs of bureaucracy, there are special support measures in place in order to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds, learning paths are flexible enough so as to permit combining work/family life and studies, group-work is used in the learning process, the goals of the learning process are agreed upon between teachers and students, peer and self-assessment are used as a method in the student assessment process, projects are used in the assessment of students, simulations of tasks and real life situations are used in the assessment of students, students have access to appropriate research and study facilities both on and off campus, the institution contributes to promoting a national/regional culture of student-centred learning, the programme uses a student-centred learning approach in providing training on the use of innovative teaching methods and student-centred curriculum development. Additionally, in the classroom, there is practical implementation of an SCL approach that includes a number of following components: problem-based learning, group project work, student-centred active learning, resource-based learning, use of the case method, role plays, classroom workshops, group presentations, use of a web-conferencing environment, particularly in distance education, use of learning logs for students to record their educational experience, small group work that enables students to learn how to work in a team, in the
process of which they identify and fill the gaps in their knowledge. They also stress the
timportance of involving students after the task is completed, making self-assessment
comments, making peer-assessment feedback comments, suggesting self-assessment
grades and negotiating self-assessment grades.

3. Results

The empirical research was performed with the intention to find out if university
teachers in Lithuania, Poland, Slovenia know and use different methods which are characteristic for student-centred learning.

The empirical research intended to find out how teachers in higher education use this pedagogical approach, how they try to personalise learning, and what are the main challenges faced by teachers.

The main findings of the theoretical research suggest that teachers should consider individual experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, interests, capacities and needs of students; provide different opportunities for students to learn and to cooperate, often change teaching methods, discuss which activities bring good results, adapt learning to students’ pace. The feedback to students should be constructive, specific, contain explanation, use non-evaluative language, in-time and frequent. The curriculum should include considering experiences, problem-based learning, and new technologies. The European Students’ Union emphasizes also students’ rights to decide about the curriculum, teaching and evaluation methods, rights to decide in the committees on the quality of their institution, about credits, and to practically implement SCL approach by including PBL, group-work, projects, case methods, role plays, classroom workshops, distance education, different forms of assessment, simulation, research, IT, collaboration of librarians with teachers, etc. On this ground it was decided to ask the teachers about their organization of the learning process, giving feedback to students, including students’ interests in the curriculum, considering students’ rights and about the attitude of their universities toward student-centred learning.

We did not investigate how many teachers use the student-centred approach because the Bologna system expects that all the teachers should have introduced the student-centred approach (at least many of its elements). The research also did not intend to solve questions concerning different definitions of SC learning. The research also did not deal with the question of the teachers’ work overload because this was out of the scope of our work.

Questionnaires were sent to a large number of teachers employed in the universities and/or faculties and some colleges in Slovenia, Poland and Lithuania. We received 634 answers that were filled in by:100 university teachers from 10 universities/faculties/colleges in Slovenia, 300 university teachers from 22 universities in Poland, and 234 university teachers from 10 Lithuanian universities.
Teachers in all three countries believe that increased motivation of students is the main advantage of student-centred learning. The teachers also think that an important advantage is partnership between teachers and students and that student-centred learning makes students more focused upon learning.

The empirical research showed, that Slovenian teachers include in their teaching process especially use these methods: in-class discussions (42 % very frequently and 37 % frequently: 79 %); solving practical problems (50 % very frequently and 26 % frequently: 76 %); individual or small group based activities (39 % very frequently and 36 % frequently: 75 %); problem – based learning (34 % very frequently and 32 % frequently: 66 %).

Polish teachers most commonly use the following methods: in-class discussions – 300 (100 %); group presentations – 300 (100 %), use of role plays – 300 (100 %), classroom workshops – 300 (100 %), projects – 279 very frequently and 21 frequently – 300 (100 %), problem-based learning – 276 very frequently and 24 frequently – 300 (100 %).

Lithuanian teachers use the following teaching methods: solving practical problems: very frequently 107 (45.7 %), frequently 83 (35.5 %): 190 (81.2 %); individual or small group based activities: very frequently 100 (42.7 %), frequently 79 (33.8 %): 179 (76.5 %); in-class discussions very frequently 99 (42.3 %), frequently 80 (34.2 %): 179 (76.5 %), problem-based learning (very frequently 49 (20.9 %), frequently 105 (44.9 %): 154 (65.8 %), use of the case method (very frequently 65 (27.8 %), frequently 87 (37.2 %): 43 (65 %), group presentations: very frequently 60 (25.6 %), frequently 88 (37.6 %): 148 (63.2 %).

Among the most frequently used methods are in-class discussions, individual or small group based activities and problem-based learning. Also group presentations, classroom workshops, projects and role plays are popular in all three countries (table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching methods</th>
<th>Slovenia</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Lithuania</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in-class discussions</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problem-based learning</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group presentations</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>494</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>projects</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role plays</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>classroom workshops</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solving practical problems</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual or small group based activities</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>527</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slovenian teachers try to involve students who do not seem to be interested in the student-centred learning primarily by: including contemporary cases that arouse interest of students (23 %); different ways of motivating students (22 %), discussions (15 %).

Polish teachers try to involve students who do not seem to be interested in the student-centred learning primarily by: allocation of topics for preparation: 248 (82.6 %),
presentation of finished task in the forum of group: 235 (78.3 %), work as project methods: 218 (72.6 %), recommending literature, news of the topic: 201 (67 %), individual allocation of task: 182 (61.3 %), stimulation of motivation: 183 (61 %), positive reinforcement: 177 (59 %), personal training: 173 (57.6 %).

Lithuanian teachers use: individual/practical tasks – 102 (43.5 %), teamwork – 74 (31.8 %), personal training – 54 (23.1 %).

Teachers of all three participating countries try to involve students who do not seem to be interested in the student-centred learning. The teachers try to motivate students and/or arouse their interest in different ways. In front of all they speak with students and give them different tasks. Polish students are given different topics, they present the tasks in the class, work on projects, they are recommended that they should read literature and get individual tasks. Lithuanian teachers try to involve students in teamwork or train students individually. Lithuanian teachers include also practical examples.

Slovenian teachers support student diversity and individual learning needs mainly by: taking some time to speak with a student who has troubles personally/trying to tell him/her how to achieve better results (96 %); offering students additional consultations/advice (94 %), and offering students individual examination terms (beside the terms which are defined by the University calendar) 75 %.

Polish teachers support student diversity in the following ways: offering students additional consultations/advice: 300 – 100 %; offering students individual examination terms: 300 – 100 %; taking some time to speak with a student who has troubles personally/trying to tell him/her how to achieve better results: 300 – 100 %, studying either on campus or at a distance: 300 – 100 %.

Lithuanian teachers: offering students additional consultations/advice – 231 (98.7 %); taking some time to speak with a student who has troubles personally/trying to tell him/her how to achieve better results – 225 (96.2 %); enabling students to prolong their studies (= to finish their studies in 2 years instead of 1 year) – 157 (67.1 %); helping foreign students who do not speak your national language – 154 (65.8 %); studying either on campus or at a distance – 145 (62 %); offering students individual examination terms (beside the terms which are defined by the University calendar) and using special support measures that help students from disadvantaged backgrounds – 143 (61.1 %).

Teachers in all three countries try to support student diversity and individual learning needs in rather similar ways (Fig. 1):
Teachers use also many other activities to support individual learning needs:
1. Teachers of all three countries help foreign students who do not speak the national language;
2. Slovenian, Polish and Lithuanian teachers offer support to students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
3. Slovenian and Lithuanian teachers enable acceleration of studies (but Polish do not);
4. Polish teachers emphasize also consultations by Internet and inviting students to science conferences.

The teachers in all three countries most often use the following evaluation methods (Fig. 2):
As expected, there is still a lot of summative evaluation but there is also criteria-referenced and flexible assessment. The teachers in all three countries use criteria referenced and flexible assessment but also other assessment methods. This question was not enough specific so we did not get enough good answers that could provide a more reliable and detailed information – e.g. what exactly a teacher means when he/she performs criteria-referenced or flexible evaluation. To get more reliable information we should make a much more detailed analysis of concrete examination papers.

In Poland it is quite clear that there are procedures for students to appeal decisions regarding their academic attainment or progression. The percentage of positive answers in Slovenia and Lithuania is a bit lower than in Poland. In many universities there are appropriate rules to appeal but it is possible that they are not used in practice (Fig. 3).

In Slovenia (8 %) and in Lithuania (5.6 %) just a couple of teachers tried to introduce student-generated examination questions and they say that it functioned well. In Poland this is a usual practice (300 %) and obviously brings good results.

A number of Slovenian (45 %), Polish (83.3 %) and Lithuanian (57.5 %) teachers claim that students can suggest curriculum contents. Brief explanations show that there are different ways how students are consulted: formal via Senate or Faculty Council, at meetings and individual discussions. The answers show that Slovenian students have less word about the curriculum content than Polish.

Slovenian (54 %) and Lithuanian (59 %) students can express their opinion on the teaching methods that are included in the curriculum. Polish students are much less involved in consultation of teaching methods and ways of evaluating learning outcomes (263 – 87.6 %) (Fig. 4).
Some Slovenian and Lithuanian students are consulted when learning outcomes in the curriculum are designed (Slovenia 33 %, Lithuania 34 %) but there is no such thing in Poland. However, the results are rather low also in Slovenia and Lithuania. We expected such answers because design of learning outcomes requires a lot of knowledge.

A number of Slovenian teachers (65 %) think that student-centred learning encourages deep learning and academic engagement. Also a large percent of Lithuanian teachers think so (79.9 %). Polish answers are not quite clear.

Slovenian teachers (76 %) believe that student-centred learning means a link that will improve relationships between students and teachers. Rather similar are also answers given by Polish (83.3 %) and Lithuanian teachers (83.1 %). The answers to this question are not always clear although the question was simple. Perhaps we could get better answers if we could motivate teachers to answer with some more sentences.

Conclusions

This comparison shows that university teachers from Slovenia, Poland and Lithuania think and work similarly in many points. They all believe that the main advantages of student-centred learning are increased motivation, partnership between teachers and students and that student-centred learning makes students more focused upon learning.

Among the most frequently used methods are in-class discussions, individual or small group based activities and problem-based learning. Also group presentations, classroom workshops, projects and role plays are popular in all three countries.

The teachers of all three countries try to support student diversity and individual learning needs by taking time to speak with students who have troubles, offering students additional consultations/advice, individual examination terms and support studies at campus or by distance.
This research intended to empower teachers for student-centred learning therefore it
does not try to solve some important problems, namely that SCL needs a more consist-
ent and solid identity and teachers need a generally agreed model of SCL that is better
defined, based on a combination of theory, practice and evidence, utilises technologies
to their best advantage and is underpinned by effective assessment strategies.

The teachers in all three countries provide for study materials in the form of additional
literature, textbooks and additional slides. Teachers from all three countries include a lot
of cases from the work places of the students (the highest percentage in Poland, the lowest
in Lithuania). Teachers from all three countries show that they value students especially by
praising students (high percentage is seen especially in Poland, less in Slovenia and Lithua-
nia), speaking with and listening to students and by different forms of respectful behaviour.

The main method to provide for students’ word in the assessment is students’ asking
for explanation of the marks. There are also some cases of negotiations for grades and
self-assessment.

Teachers try to reduce students’ anxiety before examinations mainly by speaking with
students and trying to relax them, giving them questions that help to repeat the topic,
and telling students to think logically.

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**Į studentą orientuoto mokymo(si) taikant įvairius metodus proceso analizė: Lietuvos, Lenkijos ir Slovėnijos atvejis**

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**Santrauka**

Tyrimas parodė, kad universitetų dėstytojai iš Slovėnijos, Lenkijos bei Lietuvos galvoja ir dirba panašiai. Jie visi mano, kad pagrindiniai į studentą orientuoto mokymosi privalumai padidino