LEARNER-CENTERED VERSUS TEACHER–CENTERED APPROACHES: THE NEED FOR A COMPROMISE

Mahmoud Al-Maqtri

Head of English Department and *assistant professor of English,*
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibb, Ibb, Yemen, Email address: Mmaktri@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

It is taken for granted that lecturing is the normal mood of university style of teaching. This is true of many third world countries of which Yemen is one, and it is not peculiar to departments of English only, but to almost all other departments. That may justify why terms like 'lecture', 'lecturer' and 'lecture hall' are part of the university jargon. Lecturing is one form of traditional teacher-centered approaches; how this comes to be associated with college teaching methodology is uncertain, but what is certain is that it is there. Though lecturing may be required with certain subjects and with particular activities related to these subjects, yet, no one can confirm that this must be the principle. Learner-centered approaches [LCA], however, are meant to all situations where teaching/learning is involved and the learner is a component, whether the instructional institution is a school or a college. In Yemen, the culture of learner-centeredness {LC] is still in its infancy-luckily not a still-born one. One of the objectives of this paper is to contribute to establish a learner-centered culture in the field of ELT in the Yemeni universities. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to shed some light on the area of learner-centeredness. Among other things, the paper investigates the possible constraints that may impede implementing an ideal learner-centered approach to ELT in departments of English in the Yemeni universities. The new thing, this paper presents, is the compromise- the combination of some elements of both approaches in one that satisfies the local situation. For the researcher, this recommended compromise can best suit the Yemeni contexts for its different and salient features, which he lists at the end of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

The debate within different educational circles of who is central to the teaching-learning situation-the teacher or the learner- is quite old, and recent trends show that the pendulum is swinging towards the learner; ironically, this happens without the learner's knowledge. The learner seems to win the battle, without even knowing that he/she is involved. As a matter of fact, the battle is being fought for him. However, the other party-the teacher- still shows some resistance and many circumstances seem to aid him. As far as their applications of learner-centered approaches are concerned, teachers can be grouped as follows: some teachers just continue the traditions of their predecessors and pursue what seems to be a normal practice. This tradition of course is that where the teacher is the sole source of

information and is in full control of the classroom teaching – learning situations. For some others, learner-centered approaches just do not work and they may argue that it is not sensible that a teacher descends to that low position where the learner is doing the job, and the teacher is merely watching powerlessly. Still for others who may know but are unable to change, they prefer to keep silent, for learner-centeredness is too demanding. For those who still do not know of the wave of learner-centered approaches, they simply   have to be made aware, and the remainder is left to them whether to move with the current or just to shy away. Yet for others, the force of the current may drive them to think and do something one day. On the other hand, those who see learner-centered approaches as demanding are quite right, for these approaches can be too demanding, particularly in a situation like Yemen, which is increasingly deteriorating economically. This article attempts to discuss the possible constraints that may hinder the efforts of applying learner-center techniques in their ideal form and suggests a compromise, which, the researcher hopes will satisfy both teacher-centered and learner-centered advocates. This need for such a compromise is felt by Prasad when he says, "Looking at the social, academic and vocational needs of the Yemeni learners of English, it is necessary to evolve an integrated approach to teaching English…to assimilate the recent language-based, learner-centered, and activity-based approaches (2004: 14)." Whether we call that a 'compromise' or 'integrated approach' the name does not matter as far as the end is the same.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A lot of literature has been written about learner-centeredness, and it is not possible to cover all that in the little span of this of thus paper. However, we can briefly refer to that literature which mainly talks about learner-centeredness in connection with the Yemeni context. One of the major studies addressing learner-centered approaches is a thesis for the award of PhD degree in ELT, from University of Sindh, Pakistan, in the year 2002 by Al-Maqtri, and entitled *The Feasibility of Adopting a Learner-centered Approach to ELT in Secondary Schools in Yemen*. It is an experimental study, in which the researcher tries to find out if it is possible to adopt learner-centeredness and apply learner-centered techniques to ELT in secondary schools. The finding of the study shows that an ideal type of learner-centered approaches is difficult to apply at least at the present time. However, the study suggests a modified version of a learner-centered approach that can suit the Yemeni situation. It is a kind of compromise, which harmonizes with the one suggested in this present study.

Another relevant study is a recent article, by Dr Rafeeq Shamiry (2005) entitled *Implementing a Learner-centered Curriculum at the Faculties of Arts for Yemeni Students of English*. This study is directed at the tertiary level of education, and aims at assessing the role of a learner-centered curriculum in language teaching in the development of learner autonomy. The article makes it clear that the curriculum in these faculties is old and built on the basis of traditional approaches and does not take into account the needs of the learner. In this article, the author

stresses the role of awareness among people concerned to make learner-centered curriculum possible in the faculties of arts in Yemen.

M. N. K. Bose in a book and in a number of other articles about ELT status in Yemen reiterates that the curriculum in the faculties of Arts in Yemen does not meet the needs of the learners [basic to learner-centeredness)] and thus needs to be reexamined. He is of the view that this curriculum does not look at the learner as a whole person; but lays much emphasis on the literary and linguistic aspects of learning and thus fails to equip him with those tools to cope with future life demands (Bose 2004: 23). Shamiry (2005: intro.) also holds the same belief.

LC /MANY CONSTRAINTS
The traditional view of the teacher as the controller of the classroom situation and as the only source of knowledge is getting old and is losing much of its color. The learner-centered philosophy is taking over the ground, for it is in harmony with modern trends in education, economy and politics i.e., democracy … etc, at the national and international levels and for its responsive nature to the rapid and continuous changes that are taking place globally. But this is never to claim that learner-centered approaches are readily fit for every context; they are not without their difficulties. The impracticality of expecting learners to adopt this new role of an initiator of learning immediately is referred to by Tudor (1996: 34 in Shamiry 2005: 34). And even in a very productive environment, they can be rather utopian at least in their ideal form. These constraints can be even more serious in a situation like Yemen (Al-Maqtri 2002: 45; Prasad op cit: 10). The following are the most salient ones:

LCA Needs an Ideal Environment
For a learner–centered approach to succeed it requires a fertile soil to grow and a welcoming environment. First of all, there should be availability of materials and different kinds of facilities including large well-equipped libraries with different computerized research centers and Internet sources. Sharyan (2003: 396) Shares with us the same view: "This [learner-centered teaching] needs a well-kept and up-to-date library." Prasad (2004: 17), talking about Yemeni universities reflects on the gravity of the problem when he says, "Lack of library facilities is one of stumbling constraints." All this is necessary for the learner to fully invest his potentials and thus work independent of the teacher. Second, the number of learners to take part in a learner-centered project must be small enough to be manageable and to enable the teacher to guide and help. Unfortunately, lecture halls at colleges, like school classes, are overcrowded (Prasad 2004: 10). Sharyan (2003) maintains that techniques of teaching like pair work, and group work discussions require a reasonable number of students in a class. Unluckily, not many universities can afford this. Private universities, however, are in a better position as far as the number of students per a class is concerned. Lack of halls can sometimes be a problem for the use of an ideal learner-centered technique because small groups' organization is necessary and this means more space is required.

LCA Requires Awareness

One major difficulty in the way of applying learner-centered techniques is a lack of awareness. The teacher, the learners, the administration, the parents and others concerned like librarians etc., have all to be aware of the nature and requirements of these learner-centered approaches. The teacher must accept the new role he is to play as a guide, a facilitator and a manager of the learning environment. He also has to accept, as inevitable, the new role to be assigned to the learner as an active participant, who is no less able than the teacher himself. He has to see that not as a bad sign but rather as a good thing for the benefit of the learner and the teaching/learning process as a whole. The new role should not mean that the teacher is relegated to an inferior position. He is only given a different role, and this new role is not to be understood as easy or inferior. Unfortunately most teachers and ELT teachers in particular, are still top-down (cf. Sharayn 2003: 399). "All too often teachers interfere with and so impede learners reading development by being too dominant and by talking too much (Williams 1986: 44)." The students themselves can be a serious constraint if they are not prepared to cope with demands of this approach. This is what Sharyan seems to say:

> *"However, the difficulty with teaching, literature [so do other subjects]*, using a student-centered approach is that some learners may not possess the richness and subtlety of vocabulary and structure in which to couch their response in the target language. This hinders the process of teaching that gives greater share to learners to participate (Sharyan 2003: 390)."*

There have to be self-awareness as language learners (Shamiry 2005: 47; Prasad 2004: 13). The students have to be ready to assume responsibility over their own learning taking into account that the teacher is no more the sole source of information. They have to be in the position to take decisions and decide the type and direction of their own learning. The 'why' and 'how' to play their role must be clear to them from the very beginning, or the whole thing will be a failure. All other parties should be ready to adapt to 'learner-centeredness' and be prepared to offer help and assistance when needed. Here comes the role of raising awareness among all these people and learners in particular (Al-Maqtri 2002: 115).

LCA Needs Ample Time

Unlike the teacher-fronted traditional activities, learner-centered ones demand longer time for the students to talk and do things on their own (Sharyan 2003: 399). In other words, they are time consuming, and this may cause panic to both learner-centered oriented teachers and students. Therefore, both parties must be aware that such seemingly wasted time is part of the process and is a necessary evil as a price for the benefits gained from using learner-centered techniques. In other words, they should not worry if time is spent in doing things that are not directly related to

---

*) My brackets

classes and lessons in the traditional sense. Many learner-centered activities require group work, which may require discussion, which means noises are inevitable; this may annoy both the teacher and the learners because they are not used to that.

Difficulties with Needs/Wants

Learner-centered approaches are essentially based on the analysis of the learners' needs. The learners' objective and subjective needs must be analyzed and incorporated in the curriculum. On this, Bose comments,

> "Curriculum should reflect the needs of students, their societal and economic needs…. The teaching method followed [he continues] should focus on the activities that enable learners to achieve these needs (Bose 2003:23). "

Nunan (1988: 22 in Al-Maqtri 2002: 135) also sees that there is no point in taking an approach, which is based on the principle of a learner involvement, and then ignoring the learner's wishes and views. Now, the task is not an easy one for a teacher to undertake. It becomes even heavier when the talk is about the students' subjective needs i.e., wishes, desires, wants, or what Sharyan (2003: 390) calls 'the felt needs'. Hence comes the role of a compromise, the theme of this article. Here it is not necessary that the teacher gives learners everything they want; some compromise is required and the principle of gradation [step by step] should be adopted. Al-Maqtri seems to support this view "If, at the beginning, this is found to impractical, then at least part of the course should be based on the trainees or students' needs' (2002: 154; 2004: 43).

Teachers Cannot Change Their Habits

Sometimes it is not a matter of a lack of awareness but rather of unwillingness. Some teachers are more teacher-centered oriented (Shamiry 2004: 37). Asking them to change this deeply rooted role is not easy even though they acknowledge the rationale behind learner-centeredness. "Many teachers find it difficult to abandon their customary center-stage role and become learning managers rather than teachers (Williams 1986)." This is also true of students; there are always some students who want to depend one someone else i.e., the teacher, and forcing them to change their skin can be painstaking. This is what our experience tells us. This means there should be a room for this type of learners and some kind of consideration of those teachers who may find it difficult to change.

These are some of major constrains which may pose a real challenge to any learner-centered application. But we must not shut our eyes to the fact that there is no better alternative. If we do not change in this direction and make use of the opportunities offered to us by these approaches then we may be out of time and will we lag behind. Learner-centered approaches can be difficult in our classes, but other alternatives are not any more fit to the requirements of the modern world. Therefore, there must be a way out of this conflict; a compromise seems to be the best solution.

This is what the writer of this article is suggesting as an appropriate compromise in which the basic techniques and the essential features of learner-centeredness are used with some modifications so that the traditional role of the teacher as the classroom dominant is not seriously affected. In other words, while the student has to play an active role in the different activities, the teacher still reserves some of his traditional role as a controller and a source of information which may be appropriate in certain contexts. Even the students who cannot rid themselves from depending on teachers will be accommodated.

COMPROMISE: SOME TECHNIQUES

When I started to implement learner-centered techniques, I was confronted with a host of difficulties of the same nature of the constraints just referred to above; however, it was lack of students' awareness that was a major block; so raising their awareness of the nature and rationale of these approaches was my first task.

Awareness Questionnaire

This was done through a simple questionnaire given to level I students of English Department. Questionnaires are said to be appropriate tools to get to know about learners needs [Shamiry 2005: 47]. The students were asked a number of questions; the first question was "Why do you study English?" The second question was "What is the best way to achieve this end?" Irrespective of the quality of the received answers, the idea is to sensitize them to their role as learners. I found that the students did not have a clear notion of why they studied English. They gave vague answers to the first question; for example one, of the most recurred answers was: "I study English because I like it." This answer can mean any thing. You may like a subject because you get good grades in that subject, which can be very unreliable. To the second question, the answer was no more informative. Many students thought that they learnt a language by learning the grammar and vocabulary of that language. If the teacher's explanation of these two elements was clear, then this might guarantee better learning. These answers and other similar ones show the students' strong belief in traditional notions of language and language learning and of the roles of the teacher and of themselves i.e., sender-receiver or giver-taker. For them it is the teacher who is the sole and safe source of knowledge and the mastering of grammar and vocabulary is the assured way to have a command over the target language. Therefore, such awareness questionnaires were fond to be very relevant because the learners started to think seriously of how and why they wanted to learn English. Knowing why you are doing something is essential to success in doing it. This led to some sort of argument in the classroom in which the students were told to be clear and specific in their statements. Do they want to be teachers? Or they need the language because they want to travel abroad, or to work in a company where English is required and so on.

Constant Reminding

The next point I had to do was to remind them of their role as learners in language learning; they were informed to leave behind the traditional concepts of the teacher as the only source of information and the learner as a receiver. I had to repeat

this again and again so that the idea became clear to them that they had to take responsibility of their learning and to seek independence and to contribute to the class. Doing this was found helpful, because the students simply were not aware of these new notions and change of roles. So creating awareness had to be repeated many times, for old habits were so deeply rooted and getting rid of them needs effort and time. And this was what actually happened.

Whole Class Involvement

Terrell (1983 in Shamiry 2005: 49) points out, " What really counts, therefore, in the development of second language skills is the process of engaging learners in interesting and meaningful classroom experiences." On the basis of this meaningful classroom experiences, I had to involve the students in the various activities in the classroom. The students in the different levels (university levels: I-IV) were involved in the different stages of a lesson. The idea of lecturing was no more valid. Instead, whole class interaction became the rule (cf Shamiry 2005: 52). The students, for example, were to talk about a text: a poem, an article, or an essay from different perspectives. The teacher only raised points and asked questions, and they had to continue and direct the discussion, which took the form of 'student-teacher'. This technique is found the most convenient in large classes. The different stages of the lesson were followed but this time the students did the job: they, for example, had to discuss the title and predict the text content from the title and the given illustrations if available; they had to give or guess the meaning of the new words. Together with the teacher they tackled the surface and deep meanings of the text in such an interactive and cooperative atmosphere. Then they moved beyond the actual lesson and related that to the real life situations wherever and whenever possible. They had to be critical and to agree or disagree with writer of the given text and the teacher. They can also evaluate the text if it is difficult, irrelevant, or boring, and so on. During this process it may happen that they come across some points, which they have to refer to the teacher; here they might ask questions, to which my answer is 'I do not know for sure'; 'you can investigate the matter and tell me your finding next class.' This was surprising and difficult to swallow for a number of students for sometime. But with time, this attitude would have been overcome as they get used to it. The students had to go beyond the actual text and contribute their own ideas from their experience and enrich the activity to a degree that the whole thing turned to a joint and joyful experience. In addition, they had to start reading beyond the prescribed materials so that they brought new ideas to the class for discussion. I had to remind them, time and again, to bring in to the class materials of their own interest from wherever resources to be included in the handout. Some students started to bring useful materials, which, to be honest, helped me a lot. One has also to mention that in some occasions, group work and pair work activities were used in spite of the difficulty of implementing them in large classes like the ones we have.

It is inconvenient, here, to talk about every thing that took place in classroom. What one can say is that this type of activities has been a daily practice with different levels of learners from level I to level IV. The students have been very pleased with the teacher and with this type of learning. I myself have learnt a lot from such

practices and from the students. This is what Breen and Candlin refer to as the role of a teacher as a learner (in Shamiry 2005: 50).

With level II, the performance of the students was no less successful. The subject was "Analysis of Literary Texts"; unlike my traditional way of teaching, I had first, to present the mechanics and tools of analyzing a text in English. [At this stage, most of the talk was mine because the students needed basics for doing the analysis]. Then I gave them a model of how the mechanics were used to analyze a text. Till now I was the major source of knowledge, but this should never imply that the students were passive; they contributed ideas and examples and they asked and answered questions. As this was done, they took the responsibility to carry out text analysis, which they did satisfactorily. This time there was a shift of role; the students had become the chief actors who undertook the analysis process. My role was only to direct the discussion by asking different types of questions including open-ended ones. This kind of activities continued till the end of the semester. They had been so informative, critical, and creative to a degree that they often surprised me by their performance.

This procedure has been followed with the different subjects I teach and with the different levels of students. With level I, where the subject is writing skills, the students were invited to respond to the questions at early stages; later, they had to tackle an analysis of a model of material written by one of them which I wrote on the board. They were required to analyze it from different perspectives including mechanics, content, and organization. But the role of the teacher was still significant here because he had to lead the discussion to the right direction through the questions he put forwards to the students. This was in the classroom, but the students had to do quite lengthy assignments by themselves at home. They had to choose a topic of their interest and write an essay following the six stages they had just learnt in the class. "This", according to Sharyan, "is one of the ways in which we can *train*" students to take responsibility for their own learning, and help them develop confidence in their own ideas and in their ability to work independently (2003: 391)." The incentive for them was telling them that this could be a part of their evaluation; but more important than that they were told that this can advance their writing skills both in English and Arabic. This was a part of self-study or a kind of activity the students had to do by themselves, which is typical of learner-centered techniques for it prepares the learner to take responsibility of his learning (Al-Maqtri 2002: 81-82).

WHERE IS THE LEARNER IN ALL THIS?

In the examples of the techniques used, the following have been observed:

Both the teacher and the students played active roles in the classroom. In the beginning the teacher was to present the lesson or the topic, so he seemed to have a greater control, but gradually he withdrew from the scene, and smoothly, the students took over. By the end of each activity most of the students are found to have taken some part. Some students kept silent but this never meant that they were passive. It was noticed that some of those who seemed to be silent came after class to me

express their own views, impressions or interpretations of certain points or ask for clarification of some thing. The following features are more or less learner-centered:

1. The students shared their knowledge with the rest of the class. New ideas were expressed and sometimes very thought-provoking points were presented. There was a role for the teacher and that is in Sharyan's words, "The teacher creates situations and prepares questions for discussion where students feel interested to speak about and express their feelings and thought directly and indirectly (2004: 391)." The students were trained to listen to each other, even though they happened to disagree with the other's points of view (Shah 1995: 178). I have shown them a model of myself in which they can disagree with me or I with them. Now, they have the courage to say 'No, Dr, I disagree with you on this point…'

2. The students were not only given responsibility, they started to take over responsibility for their own learning; for example, they began to ask for relevant references, give their own definitions and so on. The idea of taking responsibility has been the result of continuous insisting by the teacher of the positive role of taking responsibility in effective learning and in leading a successful life. Shamiry shares with us the same belief that by training learners to learn how to learn we develop in them the feel to take responsibility for their own learning to become independent learners, which is an important requirement of university education in particular. (Shamiry 2005:50).

3. Effective learning needs a democratic atmosphere and democracy is something that can be learnt by training, and this is the function of the various educational institutions including universities. (Al-Maqtri 2005: 4). Perkins states that a university has got a number of missions; among these is that it prepares its students to create an ideal democratic community (1998 in Al-Maqtri 2002:136). Dewey believes that if the people are secure and maintain democratic way of life, they must have opportunity to learn what that way of life means and how it might be led (1916: 8). This is a part and parcel of learner-centered approaches, and this is what I have been trying to do with my students. The students have the chance to agree or disagree with the teacher or with other students; they may vote for or against certain suggestions, issues or arguments. For example, they can vote to continue a lesson, to include a text in the exam, or to opt for one view and so on. They have also to respect others' views and differences. All these are considered modest democratic acts but necessary for a more genuine democratic behavior in real life situations in future.

4. Students are thinking; most of the activities have the nature of problem-solving: a question to be answered, a word to be explained, or a puzzling situation to be clarified. Wright (1987: 86) says:

> *"This problem solving is a relatively recent innovation in language teaching that aims at encouraging learners to think critically about the world in which they live and at the same time acquire language to solve their day to day problems."*

In all these and many others contexts, the students are required to think. Tudor (1993 in Shamiry 2005: 53) suggests "… the teacher has to encourage students to think critically about their learning experiences and about themselves as learners." This type of thinking -required activities is found quite interesting and enjoyable, and students find pleasure in doing it. The teacher has only to raise the problem and the students have to think and find the answer (See Shah 1995: 182). There is a kind of challenge to the students' intelligence to progress (Krashen 1981, in Prasad 2004: 2), but not to the point of frustration, for, as Al-Sohbani puts it, this "…may have negative effects on motivation (2000: 184)." Krashen (In Prasad 2004: 2) has the same view that if challenge is too big or too small or non-existent, the learners do not progress.

5. Learning is being personalized (Al-Maqtri 2002: 85); the traditional outdated methods of learning things not connected to the learner and to his field of interest are no more valid. The lessons are personalized in that the learner makes a certain theme or topic a part of his own world of experience. Without personalization, learning is at best superficial and destined for immediate and certain oblivion" (Stanislawaczyk 1967; in Al-Maqtri 2002: 85). The text 'I have a dream' by Martin Luther King, which is included in the course of *text analysis* is an example; the students have not only to look at the text critically but also to go beyond that, to say what their own personal dreams are. This part has been one of the most involving, thought-provoking and a source of insightful discussions that directly addresses the students' interest and concern. Personalization activities are indispensable to learner-centered teaching.

6.   One of the disadvantages of traditional teacher-centered approaches is that the students' main concern is the exams and the type of questions they expect to see in the exam paper. This exaggerated concern over the exam indicates that students pay little attention to what they can gain from the process of instruction because they only look for the final product, the exam, and how well they will perform in the exam. If they are told what questions will be in the paper, they will be happy, and they will not feel offended. This is a very dangerous indication. It is my duty to stop at this point and do something to clear up this misunderstanding and make it clear to the students that they have to learn to understand not only do well in the exam. In other words, I have to raise their awareness of how and why they are supposed to learn. Al-Maqtri is very scrupulous as regard to the role of awareness when he says: "In order to apply the new program of a learner-centered approach…an awareness course has to be developed." (2002: 115). So the students are told not to worry about exams as long as they attend classes regularly and take active part in the various activities, and as long as they do or say something and try to be convincing. This makes the students somewhat relaxed and they perform well during classes and in the exam. This success is perhaps due to the awareness raising strategy just mentioned. What has been done here is that the students are driven away from concern over form and misleading product i.e., exam, to the content and actual process i.e., learning.

7. In all the activities conducted, we had the teaching handout as the core of the course, but this never prevented us from enriching the discussion and activities from many other sources of which students brought to the class. In other words, students had a chance to take part in the development of their curriculum, which is a learner-centered feature (Shamiry 2004: 45).

8. The students were trained to learn how to learn; this is a very important aspect of learner-centered approaches, which is an indication of the space of autonomy they have enjoyed. This concept of learning how to learn is discussed by Shamiry (2005: intro.), "Learner-centered curriculum not only helps learners to increase their competence in the use of the language but also allows them to develop some strategies for 'learning how to learn'…" This means we have only to show them the way, and they have to pursue the journey by themselves. Some students who are teacher-centered oriented show some reluctance to this (giving them something to do by themselves). They want a lesson to be explained in detail by the teacher. But I had to sit with them and tell them the benefits of doing such a type of activity, which seemed to have helped to bring some change in their attitudes.

9. The students were treated as human beings with their own feelings, interests, motivations, differences, pitfalls and likes, and dislikes were respected. They were treated not as empty vessels but as people who know and have the potentials to know. They were dealt with as capable human beings who are responsible for their destiny (Stevick 1982: 121 in Al-Maqtri op cit: 380). Their answers and views were taken as informative and correct. Even if I do not agree with an opinion or idea made by a student, this is never to mean that he/she is wrong. This is what the students have learnt and practiced, which is at the heart of learner-centeredness.

10. Students' needs and wants were gradually integrated and incorporated in the different activities to a reasonable and acceptable degree taking into account the different constraints.

11. There was a happy, stress-free and positive atmosphere among the different members of the class. There was less tension. Good rapport with the teacher was established; the teacher for them was more than a teacher who was an information giver. He was a father; a friend, and only after that he was a teacher…etc. Cooperation among the different parties was apparent. This healthy atmosphere was very absent in the beginning.

12. There was a place for both accuracy and fluency. However, accuracy was not emphasized to the degree where it hinders communication; Fluency was the rule. "If fluency is to be encouraged, then correction must be minimized because it creates obstacles to the learners and thus hinders real communication (Al-Maqtri 2002: 124)."

13. There was an ample space for freedom (Shah 1995: 148); it is the space, which encouraged cooperative and positive learning and never goes beyond the limits of decent behavior. Respect for the teacher and for each other was always observed. The students could express their agreement/disagreement to some point of view or item of learning and so on, and this happens in a respectful manner. It is worthwhile to mention here that in a culture like ours with certain sectors of society, it can be very possible that freedom is misunderstood as the inability of the teacher to maintain order and discipline. But the students here were already instructed of the rationale behind all that was going on.

14. The psychological barrier between the students and the teacher was removed so they could ask him personal questions: Sometimes the teacher asked them questions, which he either did not know or pretended that he did not know, for the purpose of training them to see that if the teacher happens not to know a particular point, this can be very normal. It has been found that at this early stage it is appropriate to show as wrong the misconception that the teacher is flawless and never errs. This was meant to bridge the gap between them and their teacher and to encourage them to involve actively in the various activities without the fear of making mistakes.

15. Research plays a central role in the academic work at universities (Prasad 2004: 13). This is what has been going on in our classes; the students were motivated and encouraged to do research using any resources available to them including the Internet, which is the most frequent source of data available, after the teacher, for this type of learners in this university. It is recommended that teachers should encourage students to read outside the syllabus by reminding them that what they read in the classroom, i.e., lectures and handouts, are not enough and they are not to be taken as adequate materials for reading (Al-Maqtri, forthcoming). A considerable number of students started using it and began to bring useful materials to the class some of which were used in the same class with the same group and with other groups as well.

16. In all these activities, the student was viewed as a whole person: not only his linguistic and cognitive domains were engaged but also the affective as well as the social, intellectual and moral aspects [see (Prasad 2004: 2; Shah 1995: 185)]. This is a characteristic of learner-centered approaches. Of course this should not be understood that every thing these aspects mean is incorporated. What I mean here is that these different domains are not overlooked. So there were times when student's emotions were touched upon and other times when his intellect was challenged and so on.

17. Encouragement is basic to learner-centeredness; whenever a student has performed well or tried to achieve some thing he was praised by the teacher; this has an immediate positive effect on the student concerned. (Shah 1995: 186). ✒

CONCLUSION

To conclude, all these features and many others have been involved in one way or another in the various activities, and clearly all involve in one way or another learner-centeredness. The learner is treated to some extent as a whole person with many of his aspects are given some balanced emphasis; he is looked at as a mature human being who is capable of thinking, taking decisions, and shouldering responsibility over his learning. His subjective needs are given some attention, though not enough, yet far much better than not addressed at all. In short, if we are not able to fully immerse the learner in an ideal learner-centered environment, we have at least tried to sensitize him to it. What has been done here is a kind of compromise between the ideal learner-centered approaches and the traditional teacher-fronted ones. Or if you want, it is, as Carter and Long call it, a kind of "…integrated approach to teaching literature [or any subject] would foster activity-oriented, student-centered and language-sensitive approach" (in Prasad 2004: 5). So different features of the two extremes have been brought together and we can say that we do not have to feel guilty because we tried our best to cope with constraints that are so discouraging in our situation.

REFERENCES

Al-Maqtri, M.A. 2002. *The* feasibility of adopting a learner-centered approach to ELT in secondary schools in Yemen: Unpublished doctoral dissertation in English. University of Sindh. Hyderabad, Pakistan.

_____ . 2004. Is it language or literature? , *University Researcher: Journal,* 7, pp.42-51.

_____ . 2005. Students who do extensive reading are better writers: A study based on action research and a descriptive survey. University Researcher: Journal, 9, pp.49-64.
_____ . 2007. Promoting democratic values among university students of English. *University Researcher: Journal,* 11, pp.17-33.

_____ . (Forthcoming, b). An attempt to help students write better and teachers worry less. *University Researcher: Journal.*

Al-Sohbani, Y. 2000. Teaching listening skill with limited resources. *University Researcher: Journal,* 1,PP.168-188.

Bose, M .N.K.. 2004. The curriculum of the four-year English course offered in the faculties of arts in Yemeni universities: Need for re-thinking. *University Researcher: Journal,* 6, pp.23-32.

Carter, R. and M.N. Long.1991. In Prasad, A. K. 2004. English literature teaching in Yemen: Problems and prospects. *University Researcher*: Journal, 6, pp.1-22.

Dewey, J. 1916. *Democracy and education.* Translated by Dr. Nudhmi Loqa (1978) Cairo: The Anglo Library of Egypt.

Candlin, C.N. 1984. Syllabus design as a critical process. *Language Learning and Communication*, 3,2, pp.

Krashen, S. 1981. *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Nunan, D. 1988. *The learner-centered curriculum*. C.U.P.

Perkins, J. 1998. In Al-Maqtri,M. A. 2002. The feasibility of adopting a learner-centered approach to ELT in secondary schools in Yemen. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Sindh University, Hyderabad, Pakistan.

Prasad, A. K. 2004. English literature teaching in Yemen: Problems and prospects. *University Researcher :Journal,* 6, pp-1-22.

Shah, A. R. 1995. *Education and teacher Education in Pakistan*. Hyderabad: Pakistan Study Academy.

Shamiry R. 2004. Contrastive analysis and English language teaching. *University Researcher*: Journal, 7, pp. 26-41.

Shamiry, R. 2005. Implementing a Learner-centered curriculum at the faculties of arts for Yemeni students of Englis*h*. *University Researcher: Journal, 8*, pp. 44-55.

Sharyan, A. 2003. Literature and language teaching. *University Researcher*: Journal, 5,pp.384-402.

Stanislawaczyk 1967.In Al-Maqtri, M.A. 2002. The feasibility of adopting a learner-centered approach to ELT in secondary schools in Yemen. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Sindh University, Hyderabad, Pakistan.

Stevick, E. 1982. Humanism in ELT. *Document.* The British Council.

Terrell, T. 1983. In Shamiry, R. 2005. Implementing a learner-centered curriculum at the faculties of arts for Yemeni students of Englis*h*. *University Researcher* Journal,.8, 44-55.

Tudor, I.1993. Teacher role in the learner-centered curriculum. *ELT Journal* vol 47/1 January 1993.

_____. 1996. *Learner-centeredness as language education*. Cambridge: C. U. P. In Shamiry, R. 2005. Implementing a Learner-centered curriculum at the faculties of arts for Yemeni students of Englis*h*. *University Researcher Journal*, 8, PP.44-55.

Williams, R. 1986.Top ten principles for teaching reading. *ELT Journal* [CD-ROM] 40/1 January 1986.

Wright, T.1987. *Roles of teachers and learners*. Oxford: O.U.P.