

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING (SCL) POLICY

THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN

Introduction

Student-Centred Learning (SCL) or personalized learning or learner-centred education as opposed to teacher-centered learning is designed to provide opportunity for the students to decide what material they learn and how they learn it. It focuses on student decision-making as a guide to the learning process consisting of Curriculum Development, Teaching, and Assessment. It recognizes the student voice as central to the learning experience, and accepts instructional methods that emphasize individual differences and mutual benefits among the students or learners. At the heart of the learning environment are learner's responsibility, choices and activity, in contrast to the emphasis on the lecturer's total control in the case of conventional teaching. Students will find the learning process more meaningful, rewarding and transforming when topics learnt are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests, and when they are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge.

The role of the lecturer in SCL model is to facilitate learner's deep learning and to encourage mutual learning among the students. The full engagement of students entails using deep learning approaches where students retain knowledge, and from making appropriate connections, apply it to create in new and different contexts. This policy focuses primarily and intentionally on deep learning. Given the emerging culture of innovation in teaching, this change seems inevitable. There has been increasing emphasis in recent years on moving away from conventional teaching toward SCL, where the student is accepted as a co-creator in the teaching and learning process. This change is driven by declining comparative outcomes especially relating to learner's empowerment and industry alignment. Efforts have been noticed of some lecturers experimenting with new ways to engage their students in deep learning and accommodating student-friendly methods. The university could and should do more to internalise these efforts. This is the justification for an SCL policy for the University of Benin.

The university is adopting SCL to enable the achievement of the vision of establishing a model institution of higher learning which ranks among the best in the world and responsive to the creative and innovative abilities of the Nigerian people. It is to achieve the mission of developing the human mind to be creative, innovative, competent in areas of specialization, knowledgeable in entrepreneurship and dedicated to service.

Policy Statements

1. Curriculum Development

Curriculum development will involve students as individuals and groups at every level from initiation to implementation. This collaborative environment is expected to foster students' thinking and problem-solving abilities by growing deeper engagement (deep learning), ensuring interdisciplinary learning, innovative outcomes, and ensuring that educational standards are comparable to global best practices relevant to industry and end users, and rewarding to the students. Subject-centred curriculum combined with activity-centred curriculum to define student-centred curriculum. The student-centred curriculum encourages students to find their passions in education and follow them. It will accommodate choices made by students that must be goal and achievement oriented. Curriculum is therefore expected to be more thematic, experiential, and inclusive of multiple perspectives.

2. Student-Centered Teaching

Students' deeper engagement will be the focus of teaching in a hybrid platform/blended learning (in-person, virtual/remote, and small groups). The role of lecturers is essential, as they are to foster positive outcomes for students in a superior learning environment. Lecturers are to communicate the University's SCL-focused approach to students, and guide the choice of courses and electives by students to align with goals of outcome-oriented learning environment. SCL environments will use pedagogy to facilitate student-empowered learning, as lecturers are to guide students to a rewarding and transforming engagement with materials chosen. Lecturers serve as facilitators and guides for student decision-making and skills building that can impact their environments. They should develop their critical-thinking and self-reflection skills, and advance the ability to think and work independently. They will be part of the decision on all components of learning, including the selection and development of courses materials and research topics, and selection of their supervisors. Relationships between the instructor and learners will be more collaborative and participatory, allowing for a broad range of learning preferences based on the students' strengths, interests, and experiences, and is participatory. The role of tutorials and other remedial programmes in identifying and helping slow learners will remain important. Students will have the opportunity to regularly assess all components of teaching.

3. Inclusive Assessment or Evaluation

The policy is to internalize a more formative assessment in which students participate in the evaluation of their learning. Students shall participate in the design and implementation of assessments methods (including assignments, practical, field and industry experience, tests and examinations), as well as the distribution of scores. Evaluation will consider multiple intelligences, authentic assessments, and self-reflection.

Policy Objectives

1. To place the University among the globally recognized student-centered learning institutions.
2. To ensure that students participate in the choices and implementation of SCL activities at every level in the University.
3. To sensitize staff and students to take responsibility for the implementation and sustenance of the SCL model at the University of Benin.
4. To ensure that all staff meet the vision of developing a culture of student-centred teaching to promote deep learning.
5. To ensure that the positive outcomes of SCL are sustained and demonstrated in achieving the vision and mission of the University.

Strategies

The general strategies include:

1. The policy document is available to all users and the global public by ensuring that it is on the University website.
2. Management is committed to driving the implementation of the policy.
3. Academic Planning Division coordinates policy implementation for sustainability.
4. Faculties, colleges and departments own the inclusive implementation.
5. Identifying and rewarding units that are most effective in implementing the policy.

Implementation Strategies: To ensure that the implementation of this policy is acceptable, successful and sustainable, students own the policy, Management is committed to drive it, Academic Planning Division is coordinating it, while faculties, colleges and departments own the processes.

- During the design of this policy, students were engaged through a representative group. This was followed by a University-wide stakeholders' conference driven by Academic Planning Division. Thereafter, to ensure commitment, the policy went through approval by Management and the University Senate.
- At various levels: departmental, faculty/college and the University levels, inclusive committees (that include students, lecturers, alumni, the industry, and the community) have been given the responsibility of continuous review of both policy and implementation to ensure sustainability.

Specific strategies:

Establishing the context of Student-Centred Learning

The learning environment supports positive interactions among learners along with individualisation. Individualization empowers the students to create their own activities and select rewarding courses and course materials, as well as accommodating team learning. Student-centred learning offers benefits to all, including the institution, students and staff involved, their organisations, and the society as a whole.

Benefits for Students: The benefits of SCL include involving the student as an integral part of the academic community, increased motivation to learn, enhanced independence and responsibility in learning, accommodating students' needs especially ensuring a flexible learning environment through the use of part-time study, distance learning and e-learning.

Benefits for Lecturers: They include a more rewarding role as facilitator with the onus to learn on the students, resolving massification and diversity, positive impact on working conditions and professional development, continuous self-improvement through feedbacks, increased learner motivation and engagement with higher level of student participation.

The expected roles and responsibilities in the student-centred classroom.

Students are to actively participate in their own learning, make decisions about what and how they will learn, construct new knowledge and skills based on current knowledge and skills, encouraged to use self-assessment measures to monitor their own learning, work in collaboration with other learners, and create work that demonstrates authentic, deep and transformative learning.

Lecturers are to accommodate different learning modalities, facilitate structure in a flexible platform, encourage and facilitate learners' shared decision-making, and help students work through difficulties in a flexible manner.

Instructional strategies will be employed to manage time in flexible ways to match the needs of students, share responsibility with learners, stimulate learners' thinking beyond memorization to internalising critical thinking skills, using peer learning and peer teaching as part of the instructional method, and creating a student-centred classroom that can build self-confidence and learning skills.

Students will be encouraged to adopt deep approaches to learning by:

- retaining knowledge and applying it in new and different contexts,
- connecting new and prior knowledge in experiential learning,
- engaging in independent and critical thinking,
- adopting self-regulation,
- relying on intrinsic motivation to drive learning, and
- engaging in active group and integrative learning.

1. Student-Centred Socio-emotional Learning

Emotional Intelligence (EI or EQ) is a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to recognize and understand your own and other's emotions as lecturer and student, and use the information to manage relationships more effectively and promote intellectual growth. EI has four basic components: self-awareness, motivation, empathy and social skills. EI creates a "relationship-centred" (student-centred) approach to education. It has the potential to be considerably more motivating for students. To stimulate EI skills in the students, lecturers encourage them to communicate more, show empathy, demonstrate self-awareness, self-motivation, and self-control. They are expected to be more confident in decision making and problem solving, and demonstrate perseverance. EI Educational Practices include student-centred discipline, responsibility and choice, warmth and support (teacher and peer), cooperative learning, classroom discussions, self-reflection and self-assessment, balanced (varied) instruction, realistic academic expectations, and feedback.

Educational Techniques include Ice breakers, warmups, varied learning activities, brainstorming, role-playing, group, feedback-use of continuous assessments, managing expectations, and paper writing. Responsibility should be emphasized, activity and creativity encouraged, and use of classroom meetings.

2. Student-Centred Teaching Strategy

For SCL, innovative student-centred teaching practices are important. Innovative teaching practices are employed to make teaching more effective or to deal with an instructional problem. For the University, innovative practices are not the primary focus but they are seen as means to the desired outcome of enabling more effective teaching and deeper student learning. The principles of effective teaching that should guide the system include:

- encouraging interactions between students and the university,
- improving the relationship between students,
- encouraging active learning and decision-making,
- allowing feedbacks,
- emphasizing time of tasks and scheduling,
- communicating high expectations,
- openly rewarding excellent performance, and
- accommodating diverse talents and ways of learning.

Effective lecturers should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Have excellent knowledge of their disciplines, research and development;
- Have techniques for communicating fundamental principles and applications;
- Their teaching skills are transformational due to committed efforts and learning;
- They expect the best from their students, and motivate performance;
- They create a learning environment that enhances problem-solving skills by generating intriguing problems and authentic tasks;

- They trust their students, and believe that the students want to learn; and
- They regularly assess their own teaching and make appropriate changes.

In conclusion, effective teachers create environments where effective learning is very likely to happen.

3. Student-Centred Assessment Strategy

Assessment is an integral part of course design. It should integrate grading, learning, and motivation for the students. Carefully planned assessment questions and methods are crucial to the success of evaluation. In planning assessment, the following guides may be considered:

- The expected learning outcomes should be effectively communicated to the students. Rubrics should be clear to the students.
- Assignments and tests that measure the knowledge and skills desired of the students should be selected.
- Assessment methods that are interesting and challenging to the students should be preferred.
- The lecturer should refrain from being micro-corrective.
- An assessment scheme that relates assignments and tests to goals are then outlined.
- As a SCL model, the lectures should collaborate with the students to set and achieve learning goals.
- Finally select assessment methods that align well with set learning goals.

Expected Good Practices: Formative Assessment that emphasizes feedbacks as opposed to summative assessment should be internalised. **Criterion-Referenced Assessment** is another good practice. It measures students against the learning criteria, unlike norm-based assessment that measures students against other students. Examples of objective assessment methods include: Take-home essay, open-book examination, assignments, oral communication and term papers. Defined stages that will lead to the required vision of developing a culture of SCL to promote deep learning include:

Stage 1: Demonstrate a robust commitment to SCL by Management of the University.

Stage 2: Communicate a University-wide statement promoting SCL.

Stage 3: Enhance the support of faculties and schools.

Stage 4: Expand support and training at department levels.

Stage 5: Establish implementation agencies at every level within a strong coordinating framework of Academic Planning Division.

Stage 6: Improve internal and external communications about effective SCL, deep learning and innovative teaching.

Stage 7: Engage lecturers in a University-wide teaching workshop, and celebrate performance.

Stage 8: Promote the strategic and sustained adoption of SCL-based intensive teaching development activities.

Stage 9: Subject the policy and implementation strategies to continuous reviews and a five-year cycle of evaluation.