

A Phenomenographic Study of Libyan Secondary School EFL Teachers' Conceptions and Misconceptions of the Learner-Centred Approach in the Context of Curriculum Reform

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Received 18 /01 /2026 | Accepted 23 /03/2026 | Available online 01 / 04 /2026 | DOI: 10.26629/uzfaj.2026.22

Abstract

This phylogeographical study explores how Libyan EFL secondary school teachers conceptualise the learner-centred approach (LCA) within the context of ongoing curriculum reform. Through semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected teachers, the analysis identified six qualitatively distinct conceptions: four accurate yet partial understandings student-centred learning, facilitation, active learning, and cooperative learning and two misconceptions, namely interpreting the LCA as free, unstructured learning and as a reduction of teacher authority. The findings reveal that teachers' conceptions are shaped by theoretical knowledge, personal beliefs, prior training, and contextual constraints such as centralised curricula, exam-driven assessment, and large classes. While teachers show positive orientations towards LCA principles, their interpretations are often inconsistent or idealised. The study highlights the need for concept-focused professional development, context-sensitive implementation strategies, and improved school support systems to align pedagogical intentions with classroom realities and enhance effective realisation of learner-centred reform.

Keywords: Learner-centred approach, teacher cognition, phenomenography, EFL teachers, curriculum reform.

دراسة فينوميولوجرافية لتصورات ومفاهيم خاطئة لدى معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بالمرحلة الثانوية في ليبيا حول المدخل المتمركز حول المتعلم في سياق إصلاح المناهج الدراسية

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تاريخ النشر: 2026/04/01

تاريخ القبول: 2026/03/23

تاريخ الاستلام: 2026/01/18

ملخص البحث

تستكشف هذه الدراسة الظاهرية الكيفية التي يُصوّر بها معلّمو اللغة الإنجليزية لغةً أجنبيةً (EFL) في المدارس الثانوية الليبية منهج التعلّم المرتكز على المتعلّم (LCA)، في سياق إصلاح منهجي قائم. من خلال مقابلات شبه منظّمة مع عشرة معلّمين تم اختيارهم قصدياً، حدّد التحليل ستّ تصوّرات نوعية مميزة: أربع تصوّرات صحيحة لكنها جزئية — التعلّم المتمركز حول الطالب، التيسير، التعلّم النشط، والتعلّم التعاوني — وتصوران خاطئان، هما تفسير LCA كتعلّم حرّ غير منظم، والنظر إليه باعتباره تقليصاً لسلطة المعلّم. تكشف النتائج أن تصوّرات المعلّمين تتشكّل بفعل المعرفة النظرية، والمعتقدات الشخصية، والتدريب السابق، والقيود السياقية مثل المناهج المركزية، والتقييم القائم على الامتحانات، وكبر حجم الفصول. ورغم توجّه المعلّمين الإيجابي نحو مبادئ LCA ، فإن تفسيراتهم غالباً ما تكون غير متسقة أو مثالية. وتُبرز الدراسة الحاجة إلى تطوير مهني يركّز على المفاهيم، واستراتيجيات تطبيق مراعية للسياق، ونُظّم دعم مدرسية أفضل، من أجل مواءمة النوايا التربوية مع واقع الممارسة الصفية وتعزيز التطبيق الفعّال للإصلاح المرتكز على المتعلّم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: منهج التعلّم المرتكز على المتعلّم، تصوّرات المعلّمين، الظاهرية، معلّمو اللغة الإنجليزية، إصلاح المناهج.

Introduction

Both psychology and sociology have played a pivotal role in shaping the foundations of the learner-centred approach (LCA), which has emerged as a dominant paradigm in contemporary educational theory, reflecting a global movement toward enhanced learner autonomy and active engagement in the learning process (Tudor, 1996). Influential contributions to this development can be traced to the humanistic principles advanced by Carl Rogers (1951, 1969, 1983) and the democratic philosophy articulated by John Dewey (1916). From a psychological standpoint, the incorporation of learner-centredness into classroom practice is grounded in the understanding that learning is fundamentally an internal psychological process that occurs within the cognitive and affective domains of individual learners.

Accordingly, learners should be provided with meaningful opportunities to participate in decision-making processes concerning what to learn, how to learn, and when learning should take place (Rogers, 1969). Philosophically, Dewey argued that education should cultivate learners' ability to participate effectively in democratic societies through inquiry, reflection, and problem-solving (Dewey, 1916).

Over the years, learner-centredness has developed into a comprehensive framework that encompasses instructional practices, curriculum design, classroom interaction, and assessment (Weimer, 2002). Researchers argue that LCA is not a single approach but a grouping of principles that enhance responsibility, choice, active learning and significant participation (Lambert & McCombs, 1998). Learner-centred practices in language teaching have been closely associated with communicative teaching, where learners engage in real-life communication and cooperative language tasks that foster interaction and independence (Nunan, 1988).

However, despite overwhelming support in the literature on international education, different meanings of learner-centredness differ significantly across a wide range of educational cultures (Holliday, 1994). Other scholars differentiate between the strong type of the LCA, which is defined by joint decision-making and bargained syllabus, and the weak one, which adjust the theory to the limitations of the traditional systems (Sowden, 2007). It is an aspect of difference that highlights a role of contextual variables, like cultural prescribed expectations, institutional guidelines, and availability of resources in the way that teachers understand and apply learner-centred principles (Borg, 2015).

Such differences are especially acute in the context of pedagogical changes intending to shift the deep-rooted teacher-centred cultures. In this regard, teachers' beliefs and conceptualisation are critical in the definition, assimilations or dissent of the new strategies (Pajares, 1992). The study of the teachers' ideas of the LCA therefore provides important information regarding the possibility and constraints of the implementation of principles of learner-centred to different teaching situations in diverse learning institutions such as the case of the secondary school in Libya.

Regardless of the present-day achievements of the learner-centred approach (LCA), it is stated that the concept of learner-centredness often has a significant variance among the teacher interpretation of it especially in the centralized and examination-based learning environments (Holliday, 1994).

Within the Libyan context, the new revised curriculum of English instructions at secondary school level was purely aimed to develop communicative and learner-centred pedagogies; however, previous research based studies always indicate an ongoing gap between the intended curriculum and classroom learning (Orafi and Borg, 2009).

Such inconsistencies are often cited to beliefs, understandings, and misconceptions of teachers towards the LCA, which affect the implementation of reforms or the opposition to them (Borg, 2015). This view is supported by international scholarship, which proposes that teachers can

theoretically advocate the ideas of learner-centred but persist in using old-fashioned and teacher-centred routines in practice (Farrell and Ives, 2015).

A critical study of the conceptualization of the Libyan EFL teachers towards the LCA is hence necessary in order to clarify the differences, misperceptions, or partial following of the LCA that might influence application of a learner-centered curriculum change.

Thus, this study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of Libyan EFL teachers' engagement with the learner-centred approach (LCA) by exploring how they conceptualise it, distinguishing their accurate understandings from their misconceptions. It will then examine how these conceptions, both accurate and inaccurate, influence their actual classroom practices, while also identifying the contextual factors that shape and inform their conceptualisations.

Achieving these aims would offer valuable theoretical and pedagogical contributions. By clarifying how Libyan EFL teachers conceptualise the learner-centred approach and identifying specific gaps in their understanding, the study can directly inform targeted teacher training programmes. Furthermore, it would enrich the international literature on teacher cognition by revealing how contextual factors shape the interpretation of pedagogical reforms.

Literature Review

The Learner-Centred Approach: Philo-psychological Underpinnings.

Learner-centred approach (LCA) derives some of its greatest roots in the humanistic psychology of Carl Roger and the educational philosophy of democratism adopted by John Dewey. Psychologically, Rogers argued that learning is a highly individual process, that is internalized and experiential and it takes place whereby the learners are engaged and emotionally connected to the process. He believed that an environment of support in the education setting that encourages autonomy, self-direction, and personal development should be offered to them as a step away of the passive knowledge reception. Learner-centred pedagogy is based on such key concepts as the freedom to learn, self-initiated activity, intrinsic motivation.

Through sociological and philosophical lens, Dewey emphasized the part of education in the growing up of active, reflective and socially responsible people who can engage in active democratic life. He understood learning as an ongoing rebuilding of experience, and the inquiry, problem-solving, and co-creation (collaboration) as the important elements of the construction of meaningful knowledge. These two educators introduced the background upon which learners can be regarded as the proponents of the construction of their learning experiences.

The Scopes of the Educational Practice of Learner-Centred.

Although there is generally accepted value of the learner-centred principles, the LCA is yet to have a single, cohesive definition. Modern research defines the LCA as simply a wide line of pedagogical approach, instead of a template. It is characterized by researchers by a number of dimensions that are interrelated:

- Learner autonomy: allows the students to take charge of their learning.
- Active learning: This involves keeping the learners actively involved in practical and valuable work.
- Shared decision- making: giving students a chance to make instructional decisions.
- Group learning: it focuses on cooperation between students and is a form of learning through the establishment of groups.
- Flexible instruction: changing the content, pace, and strategies to support the needs of the learners.

These inhomogeneous definitions have prompted researchers to differentiate a strong form of it, where syllabi are negotiated and the content selected by the learners, and a weak form, where the learner-oriented concepts are implemented in the limited framework of current school

systems. This difference comes into specific relief when curriculum centralisation, high stakes assessments, and school schedules or systems limit the freedom of the teacher.

Centredness as a way of learning languages.

The LCA is related closely with the communicative language teaching (CLT) in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). These two are quite similar in that they emphasize purposeful communication, use of real language use and engagement of the learners in the classroom activities. In TEFL, the typical practices that are included in learner-centred classroom include role-plays, pair activities, group activities, problem solving activities, peer feedback, and self-evaluation. The practices promote language as a creative and interactive process, which can be summarized as follows; the second language acquisition theories focus on negotiation of meaning, input, and output with underlining its significance.

Empirical studies, however, have shown that a considerable part of the teachers is implementing the surface aspects of the learner-centred teaching (i.e., group work) without subscribing to its principles. This gap highlights the importance of conceptualizations and beliefs of teachers in defining the way learner-centred practices are carried out.

Teacher Cognition and the Classroom practice It influences.

Teacher cognition, beliefs, knowledge, perception and attitudes all of them are very central in teaching choices. The scholars are holding the argument that teachers do not just apply curricula but instead they interpret and alter it depending on their own conceptions. Teachers tend to filter new pedagogic strategies with beliefs and either adopt or reject innovations and change the techniques to suit their situations.

There is always a range of research evidence that proves that the teachers can theoretically accept the ideas of the learner-centred theory and still display the teacher-centred attitude towards the learners in their practice. This difference might be based on long-established educational practices, previous educative experiences, cultural norms which govern the role of a teacher or more prosaic influences like the size of the classroom and insufficient resources. Consequently, the conceptualizations of teachers are major factors that determine the success or failure of some reforms in the real classroom.

The Libyan Secondary School of Reform Learning: Student-Centered.

In Libya, English is a core course in secondary schools and students who do English as a special course dedicate a large amount of their weekly schedule to English. In 2000, a new English curriculum was implemented, which specifically focused on a change of instruction in a more traditional and teacher-centered model, to become a more communicative and learner-centered one. This is integrated within the principles of the LCA in textbooks and teacher guides by including communicative activities, authentic texts, pair and group activities, role-plays, and self-/peer-assessment.

Regardless of such a good curricular focus, the use of the LCA in the Libyan classrooms is hampered by a number of contextual factors:

- Controlling the curriculum centrally restrains possibilities of negotiated content.
- Class sizes are large limiting interaction and individualization.
- Examinative evaluation encourages rote learning.
- Conventional expectations strengthen the authority of the teacher and limit the involvement of the student.
- Lack of resources, training reduces the ability of teachers to keep the LCA practised.

Such challenges make it necessary to study how teachers themselves conceptualise the LCA in their own vocabularies because such understandings are the mediator or obstacle between the intentions of curriculum and their ultimate realisation in the classroom.

Theories and Myths about LCA amongst Past studies.

The studies of international nature show that the concept of learner-centredness by teachers is highly variable. There are false conceptions about facilitation, autonomy, active learning, and collaborative engagement demonstrated by some teachers whereas some other have been accurate conceptions i.e. confusing LCA with total learner freedom or assuming that teacher authority necessarily should be reduced completely. These kinds of misconceptions usually result in improper or insufficient application of learner centred practices.

Most teachers in many developing situations have to face some conflicting forces, including the curricular requirements that push towards learner-centeredness, the cultural requirements that push towards teacher authority, and the practical impediments that restrict participatory learning. These conflicting forces form hybrid practices in which there is a combination of learner-centred and teacher-centred. Exploring the conceptualisations of teachers thus is an insight into both the possibilities as well as the constraints of the pedagogical reform.

Previous Studies

Recent research on learner-centred pedagogy has increasingly focused on teachers' beliefs and their role in shaping classroom implementation. In a large-scale quantitative study, Zhang (2024) examined EFL teachers' pedagogical beliefs and confirmed that learner-centred and teacher-centred orientations often coexist rather than function as opposites. The findings indicated that teachers may endorse learner-centred discourse while simultaneously maintaining structured and authority-based instructional patterns. This suggests that conceptual hybridity is a common feature of contemporary EFL teaching contexts. Similarly, in a curriculum reform context, Le (2023) investigated secondary-school EFL teachers' beliefs and classroom practices during the implementation of learner-centred reforms. The study found that although teachers expressed positive attitudes toward student autonomy and active participation, their interpretations of learner-centredness were often partial and shaped by assessment systems, curricular rigidity, and institutional pressures. The research emphasized that reform effectiveness depends on teachers' conceptual clarity rather than policy mandates alone.

In another reform-oriented study, Berhanu (2020) explored learner-centred interactive pedagogy in secondary education and reported a persistent gap between policy discourse and classroom enactment. Teachers frequently demonstrated surface-level adoption of learner-centred techniques while maintaining traditional instructional control. Contextual constraints such as large class sizes, limited resources, and exam-driven systems were identified as key mediating factors.

Within the broader field of teacher cognition, Farrell and Ives (2015) examined the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and observed classroom practices. Their qualitative findings revealed that teachers may articulate support for facilitation and student engagement, yet classroom realities often remain teacher-dominated. The study highlighted the complexity of belief systems and the tension between pedagogical ideals and institutional expectations.

In the Libyan context, Elabbar (2020) investigated challenges to implementing communicative language teaching and confirmed that teachers' perceptions, prior training, and contextual realities significantly influence reform outcomes. The study stressed that learner-centred implementation requires both conceptual understanding and systemic support.

Earlier but foundational work by Orafi and Borg (2009) examined communicative curriculum reform in Libyan secondary schools and identified a clear mismatch between curriculum intentions and classroom practices. Their findings demonstrated that teachers' beliefs and interpretations of learner-centred pedagogy play a decisive role in shaping how reform is enacted in practice.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that while learner-centred pedagogy is widely endorsed in educational policy, teachers' conceptualisations often remain hybrid, partial, or contextually

constrained. However, limited research has specifically adopted a phenomenographic approach to explore the qualitatively different ways Libyan secondary school EFL teachers conceptualise and misconceive the learner-centred approach. The present study addresses this gap by identifying distinct categories of conception and misconception within the framework of curriculum reform.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was phenomenographic, aiming to identify qualitatively different ways in which Libyan EFL teachers conceptualise the learner-centred approach (LCA). The purpose of the study was to explore the variations in teachers' conceptions and misconceptions of LCA within the context of secondary school curriculum reform.

The research process was conducted through a series of systematic steps. First, participants were selected purposively based on recommendations from educational inspectors to ensure that the sample included qualified and experienced teachers capable of articulating their conceptual understandings of LCA. Ten teachers from four secondary schools in western Libya participated in the study.

Second, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews began with brief demographic questions to establish rapport, followed by a guiding question: "What does the learner-centred approach mean to you?" Follow-up questions were asked based on participants' initial responses in order to probe deeper into their conceptualisations and clarify meanings. Three interviews were conducted in English and seven in Arabic. The Arabic interviews were translated into English prior to analysis.

Third, the interview transcripts were analysed in accordance with established phenomenographic procedures, particularly those outlined by Marton (1981,1986). The analysis involved iterative and open-minded reading (bracketing) to minimize the imposition of prior assumptions. Meaning units relevant to the research question were identified and compared, and similar responses were grouped into categories of description. These categories collectively formed the outcome space, representing the range of conceptions and misconceptions held by teachers regarding LCA. In the final stage, these categories were interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical perspectives and existing literature.

Findings

A phenomenographic analysis of the interview transcripts identified six categories of description that reflect the qualitatively different ways Libyan secondary school EFL teachers conceptualise the learner-centred approach (LCA). These six categories were organised into two broader groups: four conceptions, in which teachers demonstrated partial yet generally accurate understandings of LCA, and two misconceptions, in which certain principles of the learner-centred approach were misunderstood or misinterpreted.

Student Centred Learning

The conceptualization of LCA as proposed by eight teachers was that the learner should be in the centre of the learning process. These educators held the opinion that learners must be actively involved in the construction of their learning, student instructional choices must be student centered in terms of need, interest, and involvement. This orientation is indicated by terms like the learner is the centre of the process, students must be involved in all the issues concerning their learning. This conception implies that the assumptions of the teachers are consistent with this fundamental philosophical ideology of learner-centredness.

Facilitation Rather than Direct Instruction

Six teachers conceptualised LCA as a shift from controlling instruction to facilitating learning. They described the teacher's role as guiding, supporting, and enabling students rather than transmitting knowledge.

For example, one teacher stated:

“In learner-centred teaching, the teacher is not the controller of knowledge but a facilitator who guides students to discover and use the language themselves.” (T3)

Another participant explained:

“My role is to help students participate and express themselves, not to dominate the lesson.” (T7)

These statements reflect a conception of LCA as a movement away from traditional teacher-directed instruction towards a more facilitative and guidance-oriented role. However, while facilitation was emphasised, the teacher was still perceived as maintaining structural control over classroom procedures.

Active Participation and Learning

Five teachers interpreted LCA primarily in terms of active engagement in learning activities. They associated the approach with communicative tasks, pair work, and group discussions that promote student interaction.

As one teacher expressed:

“Learner-centred means students must be active; they should talk, discuss, and work together instead of just listening.” (T2)

Similarly, another teacher noted:

“Students should participate in every part of the lesson, not only answer questions but take part in activities.” (T5)

This category highlights teachers' understanding of LCA as promoting engagement, interaction, and experiential learning. The emphasis was placed on observable participation rather than deeper dimensions such as learner autonomy or decision-making.

Cooperative Learning

Four teachers conceptualized LCA as collaborative learning built on shared responsibility and cooperation among students.

One participant commented:

“Learner-centred classes depend on group work and cooperation between students.” (T8)

Another teacher added:

“Students should learn from each other, not only from the teacher.” (T1)

These responses indicate that LCA was interpreted as a structured cycle of collaboration, peer interaction, and shared responsibility. While cooperation was central to this conception, it was often described as an instructional technique rather than a broader pedagogical philosophy.

LCA as Free, unstructured learning.

Four teachers showed the lack of the clarity in the learnercentred approach (LCA) as the compulsory requirement of providing excessive freedom to students to control the content, time, and means of their learning. They conflated the LCA and unmediated autonomy, which meant any form of instructional intervention would infringe on learner-centredness.

This explanation is setting the strong version of the LCA astray and demonstrates an idealistic as opposed to a realistic concept of autonomy.

LCA as disempowerment of teachers.

Three teachers felt that the LCA lowers or removes the authority of the teacher thus making the teacher less significant in the classroom. They indicated trepidation that adoption of the approach would diminish their professional role by saying things like the role of the teacher is reduced too small or there is a loss of teacher power with the approach.

This myth represents the fear of having no control in terms of instructing and shows that there is no understanding of how the authority may be distributed not be eliminated in learner-centred classrooms.

From these findings, it is clear that there is a comprehensive difference in the understanding of the LCA by the Libyan EFL teachers, spanning the range of correct conceptualization of the principles of learner-centred approach based on the consideration of traditional beliefs and the specifics of the situation. Although a good number of the teachers had positive orientations towards the learner-centred concepts, their conceptualizations were sometimes incomplete, idealized or did not relate well to the realities of the classroom.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this research show that there is high variation in the way Libyan EFL secondary school teachers perceive the learner-centred approach (LCA). These differences represent not only the spheres of knowledge but also the spheres of ignorance, providing a clue to the complicated processes of teacher comprehension of pedagogical reform in the framework of centralized and exam-based schooling. These findings are discussed below within the framework of the theoretical basis of LCA and the existing literature.

Fields of Competence: Agreement with Humanistic and Democratic Foundations.

Student-centred learning

The LCA was found to be consistent with the humanistic theory of Rogers (1969) and the Deweyan democratic education philosophy as teachers who considered placing the learner at the centre of the education process. The focus on the needs of learners, the involvement of human beings, and the agency by these teachers reiterates the argument by Rogers that effective learning happens when the learners actively engage in making decisions that would affect their learning journey. Their opinions are also sympathetic to the ideas of Dewey that learning is not passively received, it is actively constructed.

New teacher role of facilitation.

The facilitation notion of teaching contains a partial but significant shift in terms of the old teacher-centered authority. According to Rogers (1983), the teacher role was defined as the ability of the teacher to provide learning conditions that empower and nurture students in their development. Teachers in the current study who embraced this conception appeared to know that facilitating as opposed to dictating learning make students become independent. This is also comparable with results suggested by Nonkukhetkhong et al.(2006) who also indicated the existence of the same tendencies among the teachers who tried to adjust to the practice of learner-centre.

Teachers emphasised that learners should be active participants in the learning process.

The focus of teachers on students' engagement and participation is reminiscent of the active approach to learning of Dewey (1916) that regards learning as a process of reconstruction. Their allusions to pair work, group activity and communicative tasks are consistent with the learner-centred activities that are frequently suggested in the context of communicative language teaching (Nunan, 1988). This implies that teachers realise the behavioural component of learner-centredness- though their own conceptualization may still be constrained to classroom activities that can be observed.

Cooperative learning

The vision of cooperative learning is also correlated with the literature that explains that the learner-centred environment is often collaborative, interactive, and dialogic (Tudor, 1996). The theme of learner-centred teaching, depicted by teachers who deemed the worth of cooperation, also reiterated an argument by Weimer (2002) that transfers responsibilities and patterns of

interaction in the classroom would be required. This holds the notion that there are teachers who can internalize interpersonal aspects of the LCA.

Areas of Misunderstanding Idealized and Incomplete Interpretations.

LCA as unstructured learning which is free.

The fallacy that LCA is the manifestation of complete learner autonomy without tutor assistance is the expression of a misconception about autonomy. Those teachers who identified the approach as unrestricted choice took an idealised version much nearer to the strong version of learner-centredness (Sowden, 2007). Such a misperception is not surprising in an environment where the formal structures restrict autonomy; teachers can think about autonomy in absolute terms since they can hardly find a useful example of organized autonomy. The same has been recorded in other developing situations where teachers consider learner-centredness to be anarchic or uncontrollable (Holliday, 1994).

LCA as declining teacher authority.

The thinking that the LCA weakens the teachers means that there is fear of giving authority in the classroom. This is the same resistance to change in identity of teachers which Rogers (1969) referred to. Educators had the concern that by embracing the learner-centred approach they were going to reduce the role of a teacher; this is one of the reasons why Orafi and Borg (2009) found that Libyan teachers thought that communicative reforms diminished their powers. This implies that cultural demands of the teacher power have held strong roots and impact on the ways teachers perceive pedagogical innovations.

Contextual Effect on Teacher Conceptions.

The results show that the conceptualizations of the teachers are not informed only by theoretical knowledge but also by situational pressure. The lack of training, large classes, centralised Libyan curriculum and exam assessment limit the ability of teachers to live out or even practice the LCA in its entirety. As a result, their concepts seem partial (addressing such activities as group work) or idealised (seeing the absolute autonomy). This is similar to the world literature that has indicated that the surroundings reality has a powerful mediating role on the way teachers interpret learner-centred reforms (Kasanda et al., 2005; Bax, 2003).

This paper demonstrates that teachers have positive orientations towards learners centred notions, however, conceptualisations are uneven with both true components, superficial comprehensions, and evident wrong perceptions. This is also in line with the teacher cognition literature that points out the complexity of beliefs, their unwillingness to change, their sensitivity to individual experience, and environmental limitations (Borg, 2015).

Another important tension highlighted by the findings is the desire of teachers to admire the principles of the LCA, and one cannot easily imagine this concept in the context of their school. This makes the thesis that successful administration of learner centered reform demands conceptual, structural, and cultural change, and not a fresh text book or curriculum.

Conclusion

This phylogeographical investigation explored how Libyan secondary school EFL teachers conceptualise the learner-centred approach (LCA) and identified the variations and misconceptions that shape their interpretations of this pedagogical reform. Using a phenomenographical framework, the study aimed to reveal the qualitatively different ways in which teachers understand and interpret the principles associated with learner-centred teaching. The findings revealed the existence of six qualitatively distinct conceptions that reflected both informed interpretations and notable misconceptions regarding the LCA. On the one hand, a considerable proportion of teachers demonstrated sound understanding of core learner-centred principles, including the positioning of learners at the centre of the educational process, the promotion of learner autonomy and engagement, and the transformation of the teacher's role

from knowledge transmitter to learning facilitator. Additionally, several teachers associated learner-centredness with active and cooperative learning practices, indicating awareness of interaction-based pedagogical strategies. On the other hand, the study identified significant misconceptions, particularly the tendency to equate learner-centredness with unrestricted learner freedom or with a reduction of teacher authority. These misconceptions, together with contextual constraints such as large class sizes, centralized curricula, examination-driven practices, and limited institutional resources, contributed to hybrid and occasionally inconsistent interpretations of learner-centred pedagogy.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that teacher-training institutions and supervisors should model learner-centred practices through demonstration lessons, peer observation, and reflective teaching cycles that facilitate the transfer of theoretical knowledge into classroom practice. The implementation of learner-centred principles should be context-sensitive, taking into account the realities of large classes and examination-oriented systems.

Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to engage in systematic reflective practice to examine the relationship between their beliefs and classroom actions. In addition, schools should strengthen institutional support by providing flexible learning environments, relevant teaching materials, and supportive administrative policies.

Despite its contributions, this study is subject to several limitations. The findings were based on interview data collected from a limited sample of Libyan secondary school EFL teachers, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts. Moreover, the study relied primarily on self-reported perceptions rather than direct classroom observation, which may not fully capture the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual instructional practices. In addition, the contextual focus on secondary education limits the applicability of the findings to other educational levels, such as primary or tertiary education. In light of these limitations, several directions for further research are recommended. Future studies may incorporate classroom observations and mixed-method designs to examine how teachers' conceptualisations of the LCA are enacted in real instructional settings. Comparative research across different educational levels or regions within Libya may also provide deeper insight into contextual influences on learner-centred implementation. Additionally, longitudinal studies investigating the impact of sustained professional development programmes on teachers' conceptual change would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how learner-centred pedagogy can be effectively institutionalized within the Libyan educational system

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