Moroccan EFL Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Learner-Centered Teaching in Taroudant Directorate of Education, Morocco

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Abstract

The present paper reports on a qualitative study that (a) investigated Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of LCT, (b) assessed how these perceptions affect their actual teaching practices, and (c) surveyed the different constraints to the implementation of LCT in Moroccan EFL classes. Structured open-ended interviews and non-participant classroom observations were used to collect data from four EFL secondary school teachers belonging to three public secondary schools in the provincial directorate for national education in Taroudant, Morocco. First, teachers were interviewed to obtain information related to their perceptions and understanding of LCT as well as the challenges facing its implementation. Then, they were observed to gain complementary data about teachers' practices of LCT. The results have revealed that teachers do hold right perceptions and good understanding of LCT. Yet, due to constraints such as the standardized curriculum and examination, lack of materials and large class size, teachers find themselves obliged to keep different traditional practices.

Key words: Learner-Centered Teaching (LCT); Teacher-Centered Teaching (TCT); English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Perceptions; Practices; Constraints; Public secondary schools; Morocco

INTRODUCTION

Since its independence in 1956, Morocco has been trying to adopt and implement different educational reforms with the aim of improving the quality of education. One of the reforms the country launched several years ago was the implementation of the National Charter for Education and Training in 1999 (Bedmar, 2014).

The Moroccan English curriculum in secondary schools was also covered by the reform. The pedagogical guidelines to EFL teaching (M.E.N, 2007, 2009) are in accordance with the principles set for the national charter for education and training. These pedagogical guidelines have suggested new approaches to teaching English, namely standard-based approach (M.E.N, 2007) and competency-based approach (M.E.N, 2009), both of which have learner-centeredness as a distinctive characteristic. These guidelines have proposed a learner-centered perspective to teaching EFL. They have stressed the importance of a radical shift in the techniques and strategies to teach EFL, in the roles to be assumed by both teachers and learners, and finally in the assessment model to be adopted. In this vein, an EFL classroom (teacher) should engage students in problem solving activities and real tasks wherein the teacher is no longer a purveyor of knowledge but rather a facilitator and an equal participant in the learning process. It should as well develop learners' autonomy through being actively engaged in the learning and teaching process, and finally become one where alternative and innovative modes of assessment are used in addition to standardized tests.

The guidelines imply that after the educational reform, all English classes in secondary schools must be adopting a learner-centered perspective to learning and teaching to achieve a good quality education. However, previous research has proved that implementing any educational reform or change can be challenged by teachers' perceptions of that change (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Pedrsen & Liu, 2003).

According to McCombs & Whisler (1997), teachers' beliefs and perceptions are important because they (un) consciously shape how they see and relate to learners, learning and teaching. It is teachers' perceptions that guide the decisions they make and the actions they take in their classrooms. In general, it has always been argued that teachers' perceptions are what shape their practices (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992).

Teachers' educational perceptions and beliefs can be a serious barrier against the implementation of any educational change. Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness and applicability of LCT can affect their teaching practices. Those who believe that LCT is an effective approach and that it can be adopted in their classes are most likely to implement the approach and to benefit their students from its numerous benefits. On the other hand, teachers who believe the opposite will not plan LCT lessons and will prevent their students as well as themselves from the great benefits the approach can have on the learning and teaching process (Hallinger & Lu 2013; McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Because LCT was seen as a great change in the view of learning and as a movement towards sound teaching practices, many practitioners in the field of education have tried to explore it from different perspectives. A plenty of research was conducted to examine a variety of issues related to LCT. Some studies have investigated the effects of the approach on motivation and learning while some have searched the challenges affecting the implementation of the approach. Others have tried to look at teachers or students attitudes' or both towards LCT and others just like the current one have tried to examine teachers' perceptions of LCT and how those perceptions affect their teaching practices (McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Weimer, 2002).

Previous research has empirically proved that LCT can have positive effects on learners and learning (Al-Humaidi, AlBarwani, & Almekhlafi, 2014; Hallinger & Lu, 2013; McCombs, Daniels, & Perry 2008; Stefniak & Tracey, 2015).

McCombs, Daniels and Perry (2008) have investigated the issue of children and teachers' perceptions of learner-centered practices and students' motivation in kindergarten and 1st grade elementary school. The study was conducted with 2027 students and 124 teachers from 6 states in the United States. Data were collected using two assessments of learner-centered practices to surveys: One was devoted to students and one was addressed to teachers. The students' survey was designed to assess students' perceptions of three domains of teachers' learner-centered practices. The domains were intrapersonal relationships/climate, motivational support for learning and facilitation of thinking and learning. Multivariate analyses, co-

relational analyses, factor analysis and reliability were applied to the collected data. Results have demonstrated that students' perceptions of their teachers' learner-centered practices had a very strong impact on students' motivational outcome. Reliability coefficients for the three domains of students' perceptions of classroom practices were .70 or above. Also, scales for students' motivation have shown an internal consistency of .63 or above. In general, children's perceptions of their teachers' efforts to establish intrapersonal relationships value LCT use and were strongly related to their interests and perceived competencies, their motivational support, and attempts to facilitate students' thinking: "My teacher cares about me", "my teacher asks me what I want to learn" and "my teacher gives me work that makes me think hard". Children's motivation was dependent on their perceptions of the extent to which their teachers have demonstrated such qualities. In brief, students who perceived their teachers as learner-centered have demonstrated more motivation to learn compared to those who perceived their teachers as non-learner-centered.

Likewise, Al-Humaidi, Al Barwani and Almekhlafi (2014) have looked at the effects of implementing LCT approach in a teacher education program as well as students attitudes towards learning the language in a learner-centered environment (LCE) in Oman. 189 students participating in the study were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. Students' performance was measured through a national test designed by the ministry of education. As for students' attitudes, a questionnaire was used. Data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. Just like the previous study, results have affirmed the positive effects of LCT on students' motivation and achievement. Prospective teachers from the experimental group have outperformed those from the control group. The mean score of learner-centered students surpassed that of students from the non-learner-centered group in all skills they were assessed on. A total mean of (M= 45.58) was scored by learner-centered students compared to (M= 38.67) for students from the control group. The experimental group has also demonstrated positive attitudes towards learning the language. A twenty item survey results have revealed the positive attitudes participants held towards LCT. The means of 16 out of 20 items are above 80. The means of the remaining items range between 78 and 35. Only one item obtained less than 50 (x=35).

Finally, Stefniak and Tracey (2015) have searched the same issue of LCT impact on learning and they have reported almost the same results as the two previous studies. The study has examined how 109 undergraduate students in the United States have experienced learning in a learner-centered environment (LCE) through an introductory public speaking course. Data was collected through different sources: participant observation, a

survey and a semi-structured interview. Data were both qualitative and quantitative. Therefore, they were analyzed both qualitatively through displaying participants' answers and quantitatively through descriptive statistics. Findings have indicated that the students who were engaged in learner-centered activities have demonstrated higher levels of motivation towards the course and were actively engaged in their learning. The experimental group's mean score ($x = 139.3$) was high as constructed with that of the control group ($x = 130.6$). Again, this study has confirmed the positive impact of LCT on students' motivation, engagement and achievement.

Though the above studies were conducted in different educational contexts, employing varied instruments and at diverse educational levels, from early schooling to higher education, they all support the fact that LCT does have different positive effects on learners and learning. Learners become highly and actively engaged in the learning process when LCT methods are applied. They also tend to demonstrate higher levels of motivation. Moreover, thanks to LCT, students start to hold positive attitudes towards the subject matter as well as their teachers. This in turn, affects students' performance and achievement positively. In this vein, for its great effects on learners and learning, the implementation of LCT was highly encouraged by educational systems that aspire for quality learning (Chipiko & Shawa, 2014). However, the integration of such approach into teachers' daily practices is no easy task.

Previous research has revealed that the implementation of LCT can be challenged by teachers' perceptions of the approach as well as different contextual constraints (Chipiko & Shawa, 2014; Jabbour, 2013; Jo & Reigeluth, 2011; Nonkhetkhong, Baldaug & Moni, 2006; Pedersen & Liu, 2003; Tawalbeh & AL-Ashmari, 2015; Yilmaz, 2008; Zeki, 2014). Below are some of the reviewed studies that have examined teachers' perceptions of LCT and the obstacles to its implementation ordered chronologically.

Nonkhetkhong, Baldaug, and Moni (2006) have elicited teachers' perceptions of LCT from five in-service EFL teachers in five public secondary schools in Thai. A purposive sampling procedure was used to select the participants who were acknowledged by school principals as good, active and committed to developing LCT classes. Data was collected through different sources: teachers' self-reporting, classroom observations, and interviews. Then, they were analyzed qualitatively through detailed descriptions of the five cases. Findings have revealed different perceptions of teachers concerning LCT and how those perceptions guided their actual teaching practices. First, teachers perceived teaching enough content as a very central aspect even in a LCT class. According to them, if students do not learn enough vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, they will have problems in language proficiency at higher levels. Teachers also have claimed

that LCT is more suitable for bright and highly motivated students who are ready to take the responsibility for their own learning. Furthermore, they have suggested that the implementation of LCT was impossible due to several constraints such as inadequate teachers' qualifications, students' low-motivation, poor English ability, large classes and poorly resourced classrooms. Finally, teachers reported that regardless of the challenges to implementing LCT, they believed in the importance of applying the approach and they have tried to use LCT activities in their classes. However, when teachers were observed, it turned out that the majority of their activities were teacher-centered and traditional in nature such as grammar explanation and pronunciation drillings. Teachers misinterpreted LCT. Thus, their practices of the approach were a result of their individual perceptions. That is why teachers have suggested that the key to implementing LCT is both teachers and students' readiness and sufficient training prior to adopting any change.

Jo and Reigeluth (2011) have examined teachers' perceptions of LCT and the barriers that hinder its implementation in elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States. An online survey, which included both Likert-scale and open-ended questions, was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from 126 teachers who have participated in the study. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data were analyzed via constant comparative method. Results have demonstrated that the majority of participants (70%) held positive attitudes towards LCT and saw themselves as learner-centered teachers. Only very few teachers (3%) perceived learner-centered approach as time consuming, hence diminishing the amount of content to be taught and requiring too much work. The rest of participants were neutral.

Jabbour (2013) has examined teachers' perceptions of challenges that prevent them from adopting a learner-centered instruction to teach. The study involved 100 teachers from 10 middle and high schools in Lebanon. A survey was used to collect data. Results have revealed that the majority of teachers had the same perceptions of the constraints to the implementation of LCT. (96%) of teachers have agreed on class size as one of the main challenges to LCT adoption. Then, all teachers without exception (100%) saw the standard curriculum and standard examination as well as lack of professional development as major barriers. Finally, (56%) of teachers perceived schools policies, precisely leaders' resistance to adopt new approaches, as one of the chief constraints to the implementation of LCT.

Chipiko and Shawa (2014) have searched the implementation of LCT in primary schools in Malawi. A purposive sampling was used to select 12 teachers who have participated in this study. The study targeted schools facing challenges such as lack of resources

and large classes. The study has also targeted teachers who are expected by the government to use LCT in their classrooms. Data was collected via classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Then, they were analyzed through inductive strategies of qualitative research. Results have confirmed that all teachers agreed on the importance and the need for using LCT. Still, they have all failed to plan for a learner-centered class due to challenges of inadequate resources, large classes and lack of pedagogical knowledge.

Finally, Tawalbeh and Al Ashmari (2015) have searched instructors' perceptions of LCT as well as barriers that hinder its implementation. One hundred and forty-four English teachers from Taif University in Saudi Arabia have contributed to this study. Data were collected by a 4-point likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed via descriptive statistics and one way ANOVA since two variables, teachers' years of teaching and qualifications, were taken into account in the study. The findings have revealed that all teachers held positive attitudes towards LCT regardless of their teaching experiences and qualifications. Between 80% and 90% agreed with the fact that though LCT is such a challenging approach yet it is very rewarding. The participants have agreed that integrating LCT into their daily teaching practices is challenging due to different constraints such as lack of time, lack of pedagogical knowledge, crowded classes, seating arrangements, students' attitudes towards the approach, and institutional barriers such as schedules and university rules.

Again, regardless of the fact that the above reviewed studies were conducted in different educational contexts and at diverse educational levels, and approached through different research designs, the results were almost the same. The findings of the reviewed studies have revealed that the majority of teachers held positive attitudes towards LCT. They have all perceived it as a sound teaching approach that can bring about positive learning effects and results. Nonetheless, most teachers have admitted that they failed to plan learner-centered lessons due to different contextual constraints.

One of the main challenges claimed by the majority of teachers to hinder the implementation of LCT was the lack of pedagogical knowledge. Teachers in different studies have confessed that they do not have enough theoretical knowledge as far as the approach is concerned. Hence, they had to base their implementation of the approach on personal perceptions and beliefs. This in turn, has affected their teaching practices. As it has been argued before, LCT implementation is majorly affected by the following obstacles: (a) large class size not responding to appropriate seating arrangements and hence rendering group activity challenging, (b) lack of technological adequate resources, (c) time demands for learner-centered methods worrying teachers about the coverage of the entire content especially when there is a standard curriculum and standard exams, and finally, (d) the institutional policies and regulations resisting the implementation of LCT as a useful approach within the curriculum with reluctance to resources demands: more efforts and funds.

The general conclusions that can be drawn from this literature review are revealing. First, LCT is an effective approach that can have positive effects on learning and learners. Second, most teachers do hold positive attitudes towards LCT and see the need for implementing it. Finally, even if teachers hold positive attitudes towards LCT, there are many constraints to its implementation, the major one being teachers' perceptions and beliefs about the approach.

Just like the reviewed studies in this section, the current one is going to tackle the same issues of teachers' perceptions of LCT, their practices of the approach and the constraints to its implementation it in three Moroccan public secondary schools which belong to the provincial directorate for national education in Taroudant, Morocco.

1.1 Research Objectives

The main purpose of the current study was to investigate Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions and practices of LCT. The first objective was to investigate Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of LCT through a structured open-ended interview. Second, the study had as an objective examining how teachers' perceptions of LCT affect their actual teaching practices inside the classroom. Finally, the third objective was to survey the different constraints against the implementation of LCT in Moroccan EFL secondary classes.

1.2 Research Questions

The present study has dealt with three major aspects: (a) teachers' perceptions of LCT, (b) teachers' actual implementation of the approach, and (c) the main constraints that might face teachers when implementing LCT. Thus, the study was guided by three chief research questions:

Question 1: What are Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of LCT?

Question 2: How do Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of LCT affect their actual teaching practices?

Question 3: What are the different constraints that might be challenging the implementation of LCT by Moroccan EFL secondary school teachers?

2. METHODOLOGY

To answer these research questions, a basic qualitative study was adopted. Qualitative research has as an objective gaining a deep insight into others' worlds. For this type of research behavior, meaning and experience

are all context-bound. As a result, the central focus in qualitative inquiry is to portray the meaning of a social activity as it is viewed or constructed by the participants involved in a natural setting (Ary et al., 2010; Bradley, 1993; Creswell, 2009; Gay et al., 2012).

2.1 Sampling and Participants

The participants in this study are two EFL middle school teachers and two EFL high school teachers from three public secondary schools in the provincial directorate for national education in Taroudant, Morocco. The middle school teachers teach the 3rd grade at middle school. It is the last grade at middle school and the first grade in which students start studying EFL at Moroccan public schools. The high school teachers teach common core and 2nd year baccalaureate. Common core is the first grade at high school while 2nd year baccalaureate is the year of graduation from high school.

The four EFL teachers were selected purposefully to participate in the study. Two criteria were taken into account before choosing participants: distance and willingness. First, teachers who belong to the provincial directorate for national education in Taroudant and who work in the same district were selected so as to allow for easily accessible visits in a weekly basis. Second, participants who were willing to contribute to the study were chosen. In brief, the type of purposive sampling used in this study was convenience sampling. Ary et al. (2010) state "convenience sampling is choosing a sample based on availability, time, location, or ease of access" (p.431).

For ethical considerations, the names of participants were kept private (Flick, 2009). That's why each teacher has chosen a pseudo name. Here is a brief demographic chart about the four participants in this study:

Table 1
Brief Demographic Chart About the Four Participants in This Study

Pseudo name	Sex	Age	Academic qualification	Teaching training	Teaching experience	Level taught
Riyad	Male	37 years	BA holder	One year training	11 years	Middle school
Abu-Ziyad	Male	46 years	BA holder	No training	13 years	Middle school
Jamalovich	Male	26 years	BA holder	One year training	3 years	High school
Abdu-Sattar	Male	29 years	BA holder	One year training	2 years	High school

2.2 Research Instruments

Two research instruments were used to collect data necessary to answer the research questions: structured open-ended interviews and non-participant observations.

2.2.1 Structured Open-Ended Interviews

The structured open-ended interview was employed to answer questions related to teachers' perceptions of LCT and of the challenges to its implementation. Gay et al. (2012) claim that the best way to collect in-depth information about people's interests, views, beliefs and concerns are through interviewing them. The choice of a structured open-ended interview was motivated by two reasons. First, structured is an interview that contains a set of specified questions (Turner, 2010). The aim behind choosing this type of interview is to gain the same information from all participants. This in turn has helped in enhancing the chances of comparability between the four cases (Yilmaz, 2008). The open-endedness nature of questions was opted for because it gives interviewees the opportunity to fully and freely express their ideas and share their experiences. Finally, the interview was a one-to-one interview. Every participant was met individually at a time and in a place of their choice. Part of the data was audio recorded from two contributors; while two other participants opted for note taking rather as they claimed do not feel comfortable with audio-taping.

2.2.2 Non-Participant Observations

Non-participant observation was adopted to collect complimentary data on teachers' practices of LCT. In this type of observation, the observer is a visitor who observes behaviors and records them without being engaged in classroom activities (Creswell, 2012). The four EFL participating in the study were observed for two months during November and December of 2016. Every teacher was visited for two hours a week. As a result, every participant was observed for a total of 16 hours. Field notes were taken during classroom observations. To focus on the issue under investigation and to collect the same kind of information from the four sites, an observational protocol was developed and used for taking field notes. The observational protocol has also served as means to facilitate analysis as it enhanced the chances of comparability between the practices of the participants (Yilmaz, 2008).

2.3 Access to the Sites

Gaining permission to access the observation sites followed many formal procedures. First, an email that explained the nature and objectives and the length of classroom observations was sent to teachers. Second, an official document that explains the nature, objectives and the length of classroom observations as well was submitted to the president of pedagogical affairs in the

directorate for national education in Taroudant. After one week, the permission was finally gained and every school principal was provided with an official document that confirms the provincial directorate approval.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data collected during the study was qualitative in nature. It consisted mainly of observational field notes and interview transcripts. Therefore, the analysis followed was qualitative as well. The current study has opted for the steps proposed by Creswell (2012). Creswell puts forward six detailed steps to analyzing qualitative data: preparing and organizing the data, exploring and coding the database, describing the findings and forming themes, representing and reporting the findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings and validating the accuracy of the findings.

According to Creswell (2012), the most important step in qualitative analysis is validating the accuracy or the trustworthiness of the findings. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have suggested four criteria to enhance the trustworthiness of the results: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Guba and Lincoln (1981) have also put forward different procedures to meet these criteria. Many procedures were followed in this study to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. First, one of the procedures that were followed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings was prolonged engagement in the site. All teachers in the study were observed for several sessions during the two months period and not just once. This procedure has served as a means to reduce the observer's effect and to gain enough and deep information on teachers' practices of LCT so as to make objective and valid judgments of those practices. Among the procedures that were taken in the study were referential adequacy materials. This procedure suggests that anyone who needs or who is interested at anytime can have access to raw data. The observational field notes and interview transcripts for this study are available in both hard and digital formats. Finally, among the other procedures that were followed was triangulation. Two research instruments were employed in the current study. The structured open-ended interview was used to collect data related to teachers' perceptions of LCT as well as their perceptions of the different challenges against the implementation of LCT while non-participant observation was utilized to gain complimentary information on teachers' practices of the approach. Using the two instruments was extremely important as using only one would have left one of the research questions unanswered.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of the data obtained through both classroom observations and open-ended interviews has led to the emergence of different themes that were summarized into three major ones. The first theme has to do with teachers' understanding of LCT. The second is related to teachers' perceptions of implementing LCT within their work conditions. Finally, the last one explains how teachers' perceptions of LCT have shaped its implementation in their classes.

3.1 Teachers' Understanding of LCT

When responding to different questions related to different aspects of LCT, all teachers have demonstrated a good understanding or pedagogic knowledge of LCT. Starting from the definition of the approach until the nature and purposes of assessment, all participants have shown a good understanding of how an LCT classroom should look like. Just like the definitions offered by different scholars (Weimer, 2002; Doyle, 2008; Jones, 2007), the participants have all agreed upon the fact that LCT is a perspective which shifts the focus from the teacher to the learner

Teachers' responses have also revealed a good grasp of LCT fundamental principles and of the different factors affecting learning that were suggested by APA Group (APA Workgroup, 1996). The cognitive factor was present as participants have claimed that students must not be treated as blank sheets waiting to be filled with knowledge presented through direct instruction but rather as individuals with prior knowledge that need to be used and exploited meaningfully for better learning and improvement in knowledge use. They have also stated that learners have different learning strategies and that teachers should cater for those differences that lie in the heart of individual differences factor. The motivational factor has also evidence in participants' answers. They have argued that motivating students is of paramount importance in a learner-centered classroom. Furthermore, they all view collaboration and interaction as an essential component of any learner-centered classroom which stems from the developmental and social factors, and finally they talked about the necessity of creating a free-anxiety atmosphere and trying to establish a good rapport with students, hence the affective factors that can affect the learning and teaching process.

In addition to teachers' good theoretical knowledge of LCT principles, results have also revealed teachers' good understanding of different practices of LCT. They have argued that the teacher in a learner-centered classroom should be a facilitator of the learning process. Participants have also talked about students as active participants in the learning process and as independent learners. Additionally, all participants without exception have proposed that in a learner-centered class, students should be interacting, collaborating and learning from one another. Finally, they have all agreed upon the fact that the real objective behind assessment must be promoting learning rather than generating grades and judging students which goes hand in hand with what was

suggested by (Al-Zu'be, 2013; Doyle, 2008; Jones, 2007; Weimer, 2002). Here is a comparative chart that shows participants' good understanding of LCT and of the roles to be assumed by teachers and learners in a LCT class.

Table 2
Comparative Chart Showing Participants' Good Understanding of LCT and of the Roles to Be Assumed by Teachers and Learners in an LCT Class

	LCT definition	Teachers' roles	Learners' roles
Riyad	"Paving the way or cleaning the floor for students to be more engaged in the teaching and learning process".	"A teacher should be there just to monitor, animate, assure a free-anxiety atmosphere and motivate students to engage in the learning process".	"Students interact through pair, group, and project work. Students have different learning strategies. Activities should be varied to meet those strategies".
Abu-Ziyad	"It is an approach that shifts the focus of learning from the teacher to the learner. The learners are engaged in the learning process".	"To guide, to monitor, to provide a free and safe atmosphere, and interfere only when necessary".	"Students should interact and engage in the learning process by taking parts and collaborating with their teacher and mates".
Jamalovich	"It is a sphere or a classroom in which the focus is the student. It is a place where you give students questions and let them interact, discuss and find solutions. You are not even there".	"The teacher is a facilitator. You are a student and not a teacher. You have to establish a good rapport with students and to be close to them".	"Students in such class have to work in groups. They have to listen. I always tell them: The more you listen, the more you get".
Abdu-Sattar	"It is when you give the whole attention to the learner. It means the learner is the guiding or the driving power in the teaching and learning process".	"The teacher must be just like a prompter. You just have to help Students. You are a participant. You are a feedback provider and a monitor".	"Students must participate in the successfulness of each class, feedback provides of their own peers. They are responsible for their own learning".

In general, the teachers' testimonies as recorded in the results have revealed that teachers have a good understanding of LCT. Therefore, and unlike previous studies (Chipiko & Shawa, 2014; Tawalbeh & Al-ashmari, 2015), pedagogic knowledge or teachers' understanding is not seen as a hindrance to implementing LCT in the current study. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge can be attributed to different sources. It can be attributed to the one year pre-service training (¾) three out of four teachers had. It can also be attributed to official documents the Moroccan ministry of education provides teachers with such as the pedagogical guidelines to teach English in secondary schools (M.E.N., 2007). Moreover, teachers benefit from continuous development as they meet regularly with their supervisor to discuss different issues, and novelties in the field of education. Finally, this knowledge can be a result of teachers' personal beliefs of, experiences about, and expectations for best teaching practices.

3.2 Teachers' Perceptions of LCT Implementation

Though teachers have shown a good understanding of LCT principles and practices, they have all insisted that the implementation of this approach is not possible in their classrooms. This suggests that there is a huge difference between their understanding of LCT (theory) and its implementation (practice). Teachers have the necessary pedagogical knowledge but they are not sure if that knowledge can be put into practice, especially when taking into account the different contextual constraints of their workplaces that impede such a promising pedagogical intervention.

Teachers admit that LCT is a perspective that can bring about very positive teaching results. Yet, they believe that when considering their work conditions such an approach is not applicable. They have all listed a virtuous number of constraints that restrain them from adopting LCT. They have conferred many problems such as lack of materials, large class size, seating arrangement, schools policy and teachers' need for reward. However, the most powerful challenges to implementing LCT and especially at the final grade of secondary school were the standardized curriculum and exams, students' poor language proficiency and the grading culture or policy in Morocco.

The implementation of LCT in all educational levels was challenged by different constraints precisely seating arrangements, large classes and lack of materials. Teachers claim that LCT activities such as group work and project work cannot be implemented under their school lives conditions. Large class sizes and seating arrangements prevent students from the chance to interact and cooperate in the classroom. Moreover, teachers insist that to work on projects and presentations, students will need different resources such as magazines, books, and Internet connection. They argue that their schools are not resourced and that sometimes even basic things such as chalk are not available, which is not corroborated by the philosophy of the GENIE program. They add that as teachers cannot supply their classrooms with needed materials, especially given the fact that teachers are not well paid in Morocco. Thus, even if teachers would love to help, their financial situation does not allow them to

do so. This drives us to another problem stated by two teachers which is stakeholders' policy and the need for reward.

Richards (2001) believes that to achieve quality learning and teaching, teachers should be treated professionally. Teachers should not feel underestimated and they should feel the support of different stakeholders starting from the administration staff of the school they work in to the ministry of education.

Besides all the constraints to implementing LCT discussed above, the 2nd year baccalaureate grade level was a special case. High school teachers have claimed that LCT implementation is more difficult at this educational grade level and is challenged by far more serious problems.

Teachers perceive the deficient EFL curriculum as one of the major challenges to integrating LCT into their teaching practices. All teachers in both middle and high school claim that there is a mismatch between the heavy content to be covered in the textbooks and the amount of time devoted to teach that content. All participants see content coverage as an impossible task but they claim that at least at the 3rd grade middle school and common core they do not have to worry about content as students do not have to sit for a standardized test at the end of the year.

As far as 2nd year baccalaureate level is concerned, teachers are compelled to synchronize their class time with the demands of the loaded curriculum. This prevents them from integrating LCT activities due to this dearth of time. Teachers have argued that textbooks contain too much content compared to hours allotted to teaching it. They have suggested that textbook designers did not take into account the fact that different streams study English for different amounts of time. Literary students study English for 5 hours a week while science students study it only for 4 hours a week. The problem is that both streams have to take the same courses and learn using the same textbooks. What makes the situation even worse is that though the time is very limited, content coverage is highly emphasized as students are to be assessed on that content by the end of the year.

Content coverage and assessment policy are intertwined problems that challenge adopting a LCT perspective by teachers. The assessment policy in Morocco encourages students to give much importance and priority to grades. In Morocco, for 2nd year baccalaureate students to compete and be admitted in a leading school, they have to pass the final standardized exam with distinction and hit the top level grades. For this reason, students at this level develop a very competitive attitude. Every single student wants their teachers to provide them with all content needed and to prepare them for exams as their future is at stake. Thus, teachers find themselves forced to meet the different requirements that

would grant their students not just success but success with outstanding grades. To meet that objective teachers tend to adopt a more teacher-centered perspective rather than a learner-centered one.

Teachers argue that for students to pass exams with distinction their language proficiency level should be enhanced and the only means to that is through a more teacher-centered learning approach. Teachers believe that one of the major constraints to implementing LCT activities such as group work is students' poor English. The aim behind putting students into groups is interaction, collaboration and ideas sharing using the target language. However, without a good language proficiency level that would be quite impossible. As a result, teachers prefer providing students with enough content and structure. They also prefer that students practice different skills especially reading comprehension and writing individually as they are all skills they will be tested on at the final standardized exam (National Baccalaureate Exam).

These results about teachers' perceptions of LCT implementation and how this implementation is affected by different constraints have also been revealed by previous studies (Chipiko & Shawa, 2014; Jabbour, 2013; Jo & Reigeluth, 2011; Nonkhetkhng, Baldaug, & Moni, 2006; Tawalbeh & Al-ashmari, 2015). Previous research has confirmed the fact that the integration of LCT can be challenged by different contextual constraints and so did the current study. Finally, these study findings have revealed a strong consistency relationship between teachers' practices and their perceptions or beliefs.

3.3 Teachers Practices as Shaped by Their Perceptions

As discussed earlier, teachers' understanding or pedagogical knowledge was not seen as a constraint to the implementation of LCT in this study. However, teachers' perceptions concerning the implementation of LCT were. Comparisons between teachers' perceptions of the obstacles against implementing LCT and teachers' actual teaching practices have revealed a strong consistency relationship between the two (Fang, 1996).

Three out of four (3/4) teachers have suggested that their teaching practices lie somewhere between LCT and TCT. They believed that their classes were a combination or a mixture of both perspectives. This belief was consistent with their classroom practices.

From the findings on teachers' practices, it was self-evident that teachers were trying to take advantage of and use some learner-centered strategies. Among the LCT strategies or techniques employed by all participants were inductive teaching and building on students' prior knowledge. Teachers also assumed different learner-centered roles. They have acted as facilitators and they have tried to establish a good rapport with their students.

Nonetheless, teachers have also kept many traditional practices such as summative assessment, too much talking, too much interest on teaching enough content and only teacher-students interaction while no student-student interaction was there, especially that all practice was done individually by students.

Among the reasons why teachers kept many traditional practices were the belief that teaching enough content and structure is the key to help students attain a good language proficiency level. Though content coverage was more important at 2nd year baccalaureate level compared to other levels, teaching enough content was believed to be necessary for all grades. As a result, participants' practices were more teacher-centered.

As discussed earlier, three out of four (3/4) teachers have suggested that their classes are a combination of both LCT and TCT except one teacher who stated clearly that his classes are teacher-centered and that they can never be learner-centered unless students are trained from primary school on LCT.

Taken into account their classes conditions, participants have tried to use whatever activity they felt was appropriate for their students, be it a LCT or TCT activity. Yet, and as it was both claimed by teachers and witnessed during the observation sessions, teachers had more chance to use LCT activities with 3rd grade and common core students compared to 2nd year baccalaureate students because they did not have to worry neither about content coverage nor about standardized examination. As a result, 3rd grade and common core students were more motivated, active and engaged in the learning process compared to 2nd year baccalaureate students who were very passive and unmotivated as they are rather driven by content grasp and coverage. This fact confirms the positive impact of LCT on students' motivation and engagement as it was proved by previous research (Al-Humaidi, AlBarwani, & Almekhlai, 2014; Hallinger & lu, 2013; McCombs, Daniels, & Perry, 2008; Stefniak & Tracey, 2015).

In general, findings have revealed a consistent and strong relationship between teachers' perceptions and classroom practices. Teachers due to their perceptions of the inapplicability of LCT under their work conditions found themselves split between two different perspectives. Teachers' planning of the lessons, activities used, and decisions made were all shaped and guided by their beliefs as well as the different contextual constraints in their schools (Fang, 1996; McCombs & Whisler, 1997; Pajares, 1992).

Though teachers were aware of what it takes to have a learner-centered classroom and though they were very conscious of the great benefits of applying LCT, they were not able to adopt a pure LCT perspective but only some of its aspects. Below are suggestions for better and sound applications for adoption, integration and assessment of LCT in the Moroccan educational context that has been sampled by the schools investigated:

- Supplying schools with different materials and resources that can facilitate the use of LCT activities;
- Reducing students' numbers in EFL classes in order to create chances for applying fair collaborative learning;
- Redesigning textbooks with less content. This would make teachers worry less about content coverage and look for effective ways to implement LCT. For this reason, textbooks must be redesigned with a focus on the quality of content rather than its quantity;
- Working on students' attitudes through preparing them from early schooling to assume LCT roles;
- Encouraging teacher learning communities (TLCs) for teachers to share their experiences, discuss their problems and come up with efficient solutions;
- Providing an effective pre-service teacher training and continuous development on LCT and on educational novelties;
- Providing all teachers with emotional support and rewarding exceptional teachers.

As a matter of fact and with regard to students' number, the ministry of education has released a ministerial circular on June 15th , 2017 that emphasizes the need for reducing the number of students to 40 students as a maximum number in every classroom.

4. POTENTIAL PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: HOW TO USE LCT IN THE MOROCCAN CONTEXT

The study findings have revealed that for LCT to be applied in the Moroccan context, many educational aspects must be covered by positive changes. First, curriculum development and textbook design must receive more attention. The focus of policy makers must not be on the quantity of content but on its quality. By shifting the focus from quantity to quality, teachers would worry less about content coverage and be more concerned with providing effective teaching. Second, school policies must be altered. The administrative staff should be more open to change and more supportive in order to encourage teachers to be more productive. Additionally, schools must be well resourced to facilitate the implementation of LCT activities. Finally, teachers' education as offered in the training centers must be given more importance. Deficient teaching training is one of the main reasons why the Moroccan educational system is still lagging behind (Bedmar, 2014). Teachers need more practical training instead of training that provides them with nothing but theory. Teacher training in Morocco must be more concerned with training prospective teachers on how to put theory into practice taking into account the different

contextual barriers of Moroccan schools than focusing squarely on teaching methods or pedagogy. These were some of the main changes that must be adopted in the Moroccan context if LCT is to be implemented successfully in EFL classes.

5. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS: SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Though this study was context-bound, previous research has claimed that the majority of Moroccan schools are facing the same problems discussed in this study (Bedmar, 2014). Therefore, the findings of this study can apply to different schools all around the country. In addition, more studies can be conducted on the same issue of LCT in different parts of the country to seek more generalized results and come up with more suggestions and practical procedures.

Fang (1996) claims that more research must be conducted not only on investigating the (in)consistency in the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices but on how to help teachers cope with the realities of their work lives. Because regardless of the reforms that might be launched and regardless of the attempts that might be taken to overcome the different constraints imposed by schools contexts many challenges will continue to exist. For those reasons, instead of trying to eliminate all obstacles against the implementation of a change which is somehow impossible, Fang (1996) suggests that educators must try to conduct more research and try to develop more practical procedures that can make the implementation of innovations applicable regardless of any obstacle. Further research can investigate how LCT is to be implemented in schools that face different challenges just like the schools involved in this study. That is to say, if this study has opted for qualitative design, further research might opt for experimental design and come up with strategies and practical procedures that can help teachers implement LCT practices such as collaborative work and formative assessment even with massive classes of more than 100 students in the classroom let alone (36) or (46) students.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that the four participants had a good theoretical background of LCT. They have demonstrated a good understanding of both LCT principles as well as its practices. Yet, they have all suggested that applying this teaching approach was not possible within their work conditions. For teachers, obstacles of standard curriculum, standard examination, oversized classes, lack of materials, students' poor language proficiency, and

unsupportive policy of stakeholders undermined putting their theoretical or pedagogical knowledge into practice.

Teachers' beliefs about the difficulty of implementing a pure LCT approach in their classes have shaped their teaching practices. Though the EFL curriculum has proposed a learner-centered perspective, teachers found some traditional practices to be more appropriate for their contexts. Teachers were actually torn between two different perspectives. Thus, instead of adopting either LCT or TCT, teachers were eclectic and they have made use of principles and practices of both approaches.

The participants have claimed that their practices lie somewhere between LCT and TCT. Teachers believed that when their students' language proficiency was the objective, TCT was a more appropriate choice. They have suggested that only through teaching enough content, structure and vocabulary, students' language level could improve. This in turn can affect their performance in standardized exams positively, and would grant students the opportunity to apply and compete for leading schools after graduation.

In general, results of this study have revealed a powerful consistent relationship between teachers' perceptions and practices of LCT. Teachers' belief about the inapplicability of LCT in their classrooms was reflected in their actual teaching practices.

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