



Title: Critical Response: "Teaching Approaches: Theory and Practice" by Olessya Akimenko

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Page numbers: 30-31

Citation: Ivatov, S. (2017). Critical response: "Teaching approaches: Theory and practice" by Olessya Akimenko. *NUGSE Research in Education*, 2(2), 30-31. Retrieved from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

Full issue available from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

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Critical Response: “Teaching Approaches: Theory and Practice” by Olessya Akimenko

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In her article published by *NUGSE Research in Education* in December 2016, Akimenko discusses the theoretical understandings of teacher-centred and student-centred approaches, and examines these theories with regard to teaching approaches in Kazakhstan. Teaching approaches have been studied very well abroad so that they can be considered as old chestnuts. However, Kazakhstan will likely benefit greatly from a comparison of teaching approaches in international and Kazakhstani practices. If we study international practices, we will get better understanding of our own. In addition, comparative research may help us to discover which teaching approaches are beneficial and how best to implement them. I agree with the author’s position that Kazakhstani teachers should take advantage of teaching approaches from international practice; however, she does not manage to accomplish all her goals set in the article.

To begin, the first goal of the article is to observe the international understandings of different teaching approaches, which the author accomplishes successfully. First, she discusses the definitions of a teaching approach by different scholars, and then chooses one as a theoretical framework for her paper. Then, she selects certain types of teaching approaches such as teacher-centered and student-centered approaches that include facilitator, executive and liberationist approaches (Fenstermacher & Soltis, 2004, p. 5). Her rationale for this choice is that these approaches are the most common ones. After this, she describes three techniques: lecture, direct instruction, and group discussion. Furthermore, she gives pros and cons as well as examples for each approach and technique.

Although the author presents the pros and cons, several contradictory statements lead to an ambiguity in understanding the efficacy of teacher-centered and student-centered approaches. In her theoretical part, Akimenko (2016) states that the former provides a shallower approach to learning, whereas the latter employs a deeper learning approach. She supports this point with empirical findings (Trigwell, Prosser & Waterhouse, 1999), but I disagree with her position because it may be easily refuted since each approach focuses on different learning goals. She appears to arrive at the same opinion later, acknowledging that each teaching approach has its own advantages in achieving different goals.

The second goal of Akimenko’s (2016) article includes the examination of these teaching approaches and techniques with regard to the Kazakhstani context. The author does not fully achieve this goal for several reasons. First, it should be noted that the given topic does not fully reflect its content. In the abstract and the introduction, Akimenko (2016) states that theory and practice of teaching approaches will be examined within the international and Kazakhstani contexts. Therefore, the author should have mentioned these two contexts in her title, so that readers who are interested in the comparative study of Kazakhstan and other contexts could find easily this paper by its title in the databases. Moreover, the author does not cover the practice of applying different teaching approaches within the Kazakhstani context, although she sets it as a goal in the introduction. Therefore, the writer should have specified the title. For example, the paper should be named as “Teaching Approaches: International Theory and Practice and the Kazakhstani context”. The formulation of this topic implies that the author will focus on investigating the international theory and practice of the teaching approaches and will outline current context of Kazakhstan in general. For instance, the change in the Unified National Testing (UNT) format is a great case for that. It means that teaching approaches will be changed eventually, as teachers will be interested not only in transmitting knowledge to the students, but also in developing their critical thinking skills.

Second, the author claims that a domination of teacher-centered approaches leads to poor results of students in Kazakhstani mainstream schools, although there are on-going processes to change the teaching styles through professional development trainings. I agree with her assumption that the teacher-centered approach prevails in Kazakhstani mainstream schools, but this claim should be backed up by evidence. The author will not persuade those readers who are not familiar with Kazakhstani contexts, and should provide better arguments supported with evidence. For instance, she states that the practice of teaching approaches in Kazakhstani schools is unclear. Then, she refers to her unpublished master’s thesis as an argument without mentioning its main conclusions. She could have pointed out main findings of her work, as her readers might not have access to her paper. Another example is an argument that the tendency to use private tutors implies the domination of the teacher-centered approach (OECD, 2014, p. 79). This argument is not relevant to the goal. There is no

guarantee that tutors do not use a teacher-centered approach. No empirical studies are presented to support a link between tutors and student-centered approach. Moreover, there are too many factors that might affect learning such as class size, school culture, and teacher professionalism.

The third goal is to provide recommendations for the improvement of the teaching process, but it is not addressed to full extent. For this goal, Akimenko (2016) dedicates one short sentence saying that the situation in Kazakhstan will change with the help of new educational initiatives. She does not mention which educational initiatives she is talking about. Whether she means the ones (e.g., the new format of UNT, new professional development programs) discussed in her article, or something else, it had better specify them in concluding paragraph so that readers will not wonder.

In general, I agree with the author that teaching approach is a topic worthwhile for a scholarly discussion. Comparative studies that outline the pros and cons of different teaching approaches in international and Kazakhstani contexts are useful for Kazakhstan since they show which approaches are beneficial to our context, and how best to implement them. However, it is crucial for scholars to include relevant and complete evidence to justify the beneficence of certain approaches for our context. This is especially important for those readers who are unfamiliar with Kazakhstani context. Future studies on this topic would benefit from a more representative topic, and a stronger alignment between the goals and the steps to achieve them. By doing so, Kazakhstani scholars will write in a way that delivers the message to all readers.

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