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RESEARCH IN EDUCATION



Title: In Defense of the Student-Centered Approach: Responding to a Critical Review

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Page numbers: 28-29

Citation: Akimenko, O. (2018). In defense of the student-centered approach: Responding to a critical review. *NUGSE Research in Education*, 3(1), 28-29. Retrieved from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

Full issue available from nugserie.nu.edu.kz

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In Defense of the Student-Centered Approach: Responding to a Critical Review

OLESSYA AKIMENKO

What can be more rewarding than having your article published and read? It is, of course, having it critiqued. I do think that if your work has motivated others to think and create something of their own, writing it was not in vain. Therefore, I was extremely delighted to see a critical response to my article in the December 2017 edition of NUGSERIE, written by Serik Ivatov. In my opinion, this is a very well-written article, which makes many valuable points. However, as having academic discourse is almost as enjoyable as writing articles, I have decided to address some of the comments Ivatov makes in his article. In his critical response, Ivatov gradually analyzes the main points that have been made in the article, as well as gives his suggestions regarding the areas that could be improved. In this article I will follow the same order to make it easier for readers to review both articles.

First of all, Ivatov states that he agrees with the article's central point that learning about different teaching approaches applied internationally can help to diversify the educational process for teachers and students in Kazakhstan. This was truly one of the purposes of my article—to shed light on most popular teaching methods and their implications, and to show in what circumstances such approaches could be effective. Also, I aimed to show what skills and knowledge the teacher may need if they want to use certain approaches described in the article.

The second point is that not all the purposes of the article were fulfilled. Namely, Ivatov disagrees that the teacher-centered approach is generally considered less effective than the student-centered approach, because they have different purposes. Whereas the goal of the first approach is to change students' ways of perceiving knowledge, the second approach aims to deliver knowledge to students with the teacher being a central figure in this process. Ivatov states that the aforementioned position may be refuted. Although this is a debatable point, Ivatov does not attempt to present any evidence to support this statement. If this is indeed something more than a personal objection, more evidence is needed.

Moreover, Ivatov claims that I arrived at a similar conclusion, by saying that each teaching approach has its own advantages and drawbacks. While I did mention that an effective teacher has to be able to choose the approaches which best suit his goals, this does not contradict the fact that one approach could be better than the other. All teaching approaches have benefits and disadvantages, yet this does not mean that some cannot be more productive than the other ones. A number of researchers compared teacher-centered and learner-centered approaches and confirmed what Prosser and Trigwell (1993; 1999) already stated. For example, Miglietti and Strange (1998) argued that students in a learner-centered environment had better marks, and, in general, were more satisfied with the course than those in teacher-centered classes. This mixed methods study looked at around 200 college students, offering compelling evidence in support of student-centered approach. Furthermore, Lea, Stephenson and Troy (2003) conducted a study investigating the perceptions of university students to student-centered learning, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. According to the results of the survey, students mostly had a positive attitude to student-centered learning.

Regarding the third point, where Ivatov states that some of my claims about teaching methods in Kazakhstani schools should have been supported by more evidence, I can say that I would have included more evidence if it was available. Unfortunately, when it comes to reliable sources of information connected with teaching approaches, they are incredibly scarce. And therefore, I am very glad that NUGSERIE was created and now publishes peer-reviewed articles of our authors about Kazakhstani education, thus, giving scholars, both local and international, a better picture of the current state of education in Kazakhstan.

Finally, Ivatov gives some valuable suggestions on how the article could be improved. For example, he suggests naming the article "Teaching Approaches: International Theory and Practice and the Kazakhstani Context" because it can better show the main focus of the work. He also advises

elaborating more on new educational initiatives, which can help to improve teaching methods, to make it easier for the reader to understand which initiatives are implied. I could take his advice into account if I decide to further research this topic. Teaching approaches is a very popular subject in international research, however, in Kazakhstan this area definitely needs more coverage due to its importance and topicality.

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