

## Student-Centered Method in the Higher Education System of the Kurdistan Region: Soran University as an Example

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**ABSTRACT** This study examines the implementation of student-centered learning at Soran University in the Kurdistan Region and identifies factors that limit its adoption. The research emphasizes student involvement in the learning process, shifting the primary responsibility from teachers to students, and assessing the approach's effectiveness. Grounded in John Dewey's "Learning by Doing" theory, which advocates for learning through activities with active student participation, the study provides a theoretical framework aligned with creating a more participatory learning environment. A structured survey was conducted with 104 teachers from various faculties and departments, focusing on the extent of student-centered practices, faculty attitudes, and organizational constraints. Data analysis through SPSS revealed a moderate adoption of student-centered approaches. However, significant barriers persist, including the continued reliance on traditional teaching methods, large class sizes, limited resources, and insufficient institutional support. These obstacles highlight the challenges educators face in fully embracing student-centered learning. The study notes some progress in implementing student-centered approaches but underscores the need for effective strategies to enhance this implementation at Soran University. Recommendations include providing more faculty training, improving resource allocation, and increasing institutional support to overcome these barriers and maximize the benefits of student-centered learning in higher education.

**Keywords:** Banking education, learning by doing, student-centered.

**ABSTRAK:** Studi ini bertujuan mengkaji penerapan pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa di Universitas Soran, Wilayah Kurdistan, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang membatasi penggunaannya. Fokus studi ini meliputi keterlibatan siswa dalam proses pembelajaran, pergeseran tanggung jawab utama pembelajaran dari guru ke siswa, dan efisiensi pendekatan yang diterapkan. Berlandaskan teori "Belajar dengan Melakukan" oleh John Dewey, yang menekankan pembelajaran melalui aktivitas dan keterlibatan peserta didik, studi ini menawarkan dasar teoretis yang mendukung penciptaan lingkungan belajar yang lebih partisipatif. Survei terstruktur dilakukan terhadap 104 dosen dari berbagai fakultas dan departemen, mencakup pertanyaan tentang tingkat penerapan praktik pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa, sikap dosen, dan kendala organisasi. Hasil analisis data menggunakan SPSS menunjukkan adopsi pendekatan berpusat pada siswa masih pada tingkat moderat. Namun, terdapat hambatan signifikan, seperti penggunaan metode pengajaran tradisional yang terus berlanjut, ukuran kelas yang besar, kurangnya sumber daya, dan dukungan institusi yang terbatas. Hambatan ini memperlihatkan tantangan yang dihadapi pendidik dalam mengadopsi pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa secara penuh. Studi ini menemukan adanya peningkatan dalam penerapan pendekatan ini, namun menekankan perlunya strategi efektif untuk meningkatkan penerapannya di Universitas Soran.

*Rekomendasi mencakup peningkatan pelatihan bagi dosen, distribusi sumber daya yang lebih baik, serta dukungan institusi yang lebih kuat.*

**Kata Kunci:** belajar dengan melakukan, pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa, pendidikan perbankan.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of student-centered learning is emphasized in academic centers in most countries, and they try to implement it in their education systems; one of the countries that advocate this concept is Iraq specifically the Kurdistan Region. After the fall of the Ba'ath regime in 2003, there were optimistic hopes for rebuilding Iraq based on independence, democracy, and a free market. One of the aspects that is effective in this regard is the education system particularly higher education. In recent years, universities in Iraq, in general, and the Kurdistan Region, in particular, have seen many different changes and reforms due to globalization. For example, in 2009, the Ministry of Higher Education reformed several aspects of higher education institutions, one of which was to establish quality assurance in teaching methods, there was a relationship between students and teachers. However, the teacher still played all the roles; in most cases, the student was outside the process, which meant that the system was not student-centered learning but rather teacher-centered (Faqe Ibrahim & Shams, 2022). In 2015, other changes were introduced in the higher education system, including the implementation of the Bologna Process in higher education institutions with the aim of improving the quality of higher education institutions. The new system was aimed to replace the old system, as the report of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR-KRG) describes the previous higher education system as "outdated" and "closed market". It had been taken from the old Iraq, i.e., the Ba'ath regime, and is incompatible with the modern world, progress, technology, and the labor market (MoHESR-KRG, 2009). In addition, part of the reforms emphasized changes in the teaching and learning system, which was very traditional in which the teacher was the center and the student was outside the process.

From a theoretical perspective, education experts and educators in academic institutions such as primary, secondary, and higher education have discussed the importance of the student-centered learning approach. In addition, student-centered as a practical learning approach is constantly evolving, though one of the main problems of the approach in terms of theory and implementation is its definitions. As Farrington (1991), regarding the definition of the concept, suggests, there is considerable disagreement and confusion about what student-centered learning is. This problem may be partly related to the lack of attention and consistency in introducing and defining of student-centered learning methods, so it often has several synonyms, such as learner-centered education and flexible learning. Sometimes, this may be due to the inability to compare research on the approach and how the learning process is practiced directly (Lea et al., 2003).

Besides, it focuses on student responsibility and activity in learning, rather than teachers playing all roles in the learning process. Student-centered learning is student-responsible and active, which is the opposite of the notion that teachers control all academic roles in traditional learning methods (Lea et al., 2003, as cited in Cannon & Newble, 2000). This study attempts to emphasize the student-centered learning style of the teachers of Soran University, which is one of the learning process methods in academic settings. The reforms in the Kurdistan Region included an emphasis on student-centered education.

### **Problems, Questions, and Research Objectives**

The quality of education depends on the quality of teaching and learning. However, the key to success in curriculum development relies on training and participation in addition to the teaching process. Besides, the teaching and learning process is the most important activity for students and teachers in academic institutions, especially at universities, because it is the process that helps students to develop mentally and change their behavior (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). There are two methods of teaching at different levels of education, namely teacher-centered and student-centered learning. In the teacher-centered approach, the teacher plays all academic and professional roles in the classroom, and the teacher is the source of knowledge. The student is only a listener. The goal of student learning is to develop student independence by placing responsibility for the learning process in the hands of students (Dollard et al., 1996). Because learning does not mean just sitting in class and listening to the teacher, students should critically seek answers to questions, and they should talk about what they learn, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it in their daily lives (Jerome-Freiberg et al., 2009). Though, what is observed in the education system in the Kurdistan Region is not based on the banking method, which means that the inculcation method is given great importance as a common method of education. In addition, critical awareness in educational institutions is mainly weak, and a culture of silence prevails. However, since 2009, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has focused on learning methods in a roadmap for higher education reform while attempting to change from teacher-centered to student-centered learning methods (MoHESR-KRG, 2009). This change called for a rethinking and implementation of the principles of the Bologna Process in the teaching methods in the institutions and universities of the Kurdistan Region. This new learning style focuses more on the student-centered to participate in the learning process. Under the student-centered learning method helps students better understand key topics and information in the teaching process (Goran, 2018). But alongside this, there is now strong empirical evidence that explains that active participation of students in the learning process is important in terms of mastering skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Although the traditional teacher-centered system has been criticized, some universities and university teachers still focus on teacher-centered

learning methods, which in most scientific departments students are used to, or teachers make students feel loneliness, listen and write down the lessons, and rely on the slides and textbooks given by the teacher during the exam. Through the guidelines, the Ministry of Higher Education focuses on implementing the Bologna Process; one of the characteristics of this process is the student-centered learning approach. What is noteworthy is that Soran University, like any other university in the Kurdistan Region, has paid great attention to the student-centered learning style within the framework of implementing the Bologna Process.

Although it can be said that there is still a problem of teacher-centered and exclusion of students from the education process at Soran University, it can also be pointed out that some of the teachers emphasize the traditional education system. Thus, the questions of the study are: 1) To what extent do Soran University teachers follow the student-centered teaching methods in their departments? 2) What is the level of barriers that affect the implementation of student-centered teaching methods?

Also, this study aims to Determine the level of practical implementation of student-centered learning methods by university teachers in their departments and the barriers that affect this implementation.

### **Significance of the Study**

Obviously, each scientific research has its importance; the importance of this study stems from the results because the information related to the subject from the perspective of academic staff may be helpful in understanding the learning methods of students at Soran University. Additionally, the results of this study will help us to identify all the problems and challenges that hinder student-centered learning at Soran University from the perspective of academic staff in order to find appropriate solutions to this issue.

### **A Brief History of Higher Education in the Kurdistan Region**

The history of higher education in the Kurdistan Region is not long, but the history of the higher education system goes back to the establishment of Sulaimani University in 1968. Before the establishment of Sulaimani University, Kurdish students went to Baghdad and neighboring countries to study. When Sulaimani University opened, the number of students studying higher education in Kurdistan Regional Government cities increased. Later, in 1981, Sulaimani University was moved to Erbil, and its name was changed to Salahaddin University-Erbil (Hamad, 2018). After the Kurdistan Uprising in 1991, there was only one university and three technical institutions in the Kurdistan Region, but after the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government, the number of universities and higher education institutions increased, as by 2018, there were 11 public and 14 private universities, besides 24 public and 11 private institutions (Goran, 2018). One of the universities established in late 2009 was Soran University. As can be seen from the documents

and slogans of Soran University, from the very beginning of its appearance, it has focused on the quality of science, developing international relations with foreign universities and bringing and using the academic strength and capacity of local and international teachers. Soran University has five faculties and more than 4,000 students, 430 teachers, and academic staff (Soran University, 2022).

Higher education institutions in the Kurdistan Region have faced many obstacles and problems, including the economic crisis, migration of lecturers, and the civil war between 1994-1997 (MoHESR-KRG, 2016). In 1992, the Kurdistan Regional Government was established, without a Ministry of Higher Education, but a High Council for Higher Education Affairs was established to deal with higher education issues in the Kurdistan Region. The members of the council worked hard to establish, develop and maintain higher education institutions, but they could not properly meet the expectations of the society of South Kurdistan in terms of progress, labor market, etc. in the field of higher education. Part of the reason for this may be the difficult financial situation and the civil war, which had disrupted the region. In fact, the period between 1991 and Saddam's decline in 2003 had two main factors affecting the Kurdistan Region: the imposition of international economic sanctions on Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region in 1990 by the United Nations. This is in addition to Iraqi economic sanctions against the Kurdistan Region, which lasted until 2003. This meant that the Kurdistan Region was under two severe economic sanctions at the same time, one by the international community and the other by the Iraqi government. However, the outbreak of civil war between Kurdish political parties from 1994 to 1997 resulted in the KRG being divided into two administrations. It is worth saying that these consequences highly affected education, especially higher education, to an extent where obstacles emerged in front of the higher education system (Ahmed, 2016:119). For example, Pacheco (2013) states that after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003, the United States and its allies organized several conferences to address challenges to the higher education system, prompting Kurdish authorities to plan to begin rebuilding, reforming, and modernizing the country's higher education system. However, this was a difficult task as the Iraqi and Kurdistan higher education systems have suffered significant losses in their ability to provide quality higher education due to reduced services and widening gaps between educational opportunities and demands.

After 2003, the Kurdistan Region made significant progress compared to Iraq. In 2006, the two administrations of Sulaimani and Erbil were merged into one administration, which coincided with the formation of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. According to Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, the higher education system in the Kurdistan Region was inherited from Iraq, which was outdated and failed while supporting a closed market economy (Ala'Aldeen, 2010). Thus, in 2009, Dr. Dlawer Ala'Aldeen, the former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, launched a roadmap for higher education reform, which aims to

make the higher education system flexible and responsive to the needs of the people and the government. As Ala'Aldeen, the then minister (2010), believes it is no secret that the Kurdistan Region's current higher education system, inherited from Iraq, is outdated and administratively inefficient. There is also little transparency, democracy or accountability in this system and the role of staff and pupils in management is weak. Internal audits, performance monitoring and quality assurance are virtually non-existent. In short, the existing system has been the main obstacle to progress, incapable of healthy evolution. One of the aspects of the 2009 higher education reform was the establishment of quality assurance in teaching. In fact, universities have had many problems with teaching methods, examinations, assessments and relationships between students and teachers. For example, Ala'Aldeen (2009) pointed out that before 2009, there was a huge gap in the higher education system in terms of teaching, which meant that previously, when students participated in class, they did not know about the subject and the lesson before going to class.

The teacher played all the academic roles in the classroom, but the student was only a listener and did not have a role. As Ala 'Aldeen's (2013) roadmap for higher education reform clearly defines the principles of students' duties and rights in universities and states that students must know what subjects they are studying and why they are studying. How will they benefit from educational programs in the future? On what basis do teachers evaluate students? And how does it help them to be involved in the learning process? All the expressions that Ala 'Aldeen's, as the former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Kurdistan Regional Government, has made are true for Soran University, in terms of teaching methods and exclusion of students from the education process. In addition, the focus was on the traditional teacher-centered method. Therefore, after 2009, Soran University tried to make some changes in the education system in the light of the higher education reform, one of which is the teaching methods and the relationship between teachers and students. However, implementing this system in the education process has faced several obstacles in terms of lack of materials, teaching facilities, building structures, lack of teaching time, educational methods and traditional teaching, etc.

### **Previous Studies**

This section reviews the critical points of existing knowledge in this area and provides an unbiased and comprehensive overview of previous research that has been done on this topic. As is obvious, several different studies have been conducted by researchers on student-centered learning methods with different results. For example, Anton (1999), in his study of student-centered and teacher-centered discourse, focuses on teacher-student interactions. From student discourse, the center has become clear that it provides opportunities for interaction and negotiation while creating a better and more conducive learning environment.

Yet the center's discourse does not provide an opportunity for negotiation. However, in his study, Combs Paris (2000) on student-centered learning styles points out several aspects, such as emphasis on the learner; the primary role of the teacher is to facilitate learning and promote teacher participation or active collaboration with learners.

Wells and Jones (2005) in their study point out that collaborative teaching methods (i.e., with student participation) affect the teaching process so that students acquire information better than traditional teaching methods. The study also notes that students learn important skills such as cooperation and responsibility for their own learning in this learning method. Tadesse (2020), in his mixed-method study, relies on survey forms and group interviews to collect data and information. Tadesse points out that, although the teaching and learning process policies in Ethiopia emphasize the use of active teaching and learning, traditional or traditional teaching methods are still common in the teaching and learning process. He points out that the obstacles to student-centered learning are due to a lack of time and resources for implementation, to some extent, teacher attitudes, lack of teaching materials and administrative support, and a large number of students in the classroom.

These studies indicate the student-centered learning style and the barriers to this style. There is little or no research on the Kurdistan Region within the framework of the Bologna Process. This is partly because this method of teaching and the Bologna Process are new in the Kurdistan Region. One of the characteristics of the Bologna Process is the student-centered learning method. Therefore, the coming parts refer to some of the studies regarding the implementation of the Bologna Process. As is clear, there has been a considerable expansion of the Bologna Process from Europe to other continents, such as Africa, South America, and Asia, over the past two decades. One of the studies conducted on Garmian University in the Kurdistan Region by Omer et al. (2021), this study aimed to investigate the potential for success of the Bologna Process and the necessary preparations by assessing the attitude of Garmian University academic staff towards the Bologna Process. The study used a community survey method. A survey form was used to collect data, which had a research sample size of (N=115) people consisting of academics from Garmian University who participated in an intensive Bologna training course and were pedagogues. The findings of the study explain that the process is feasible, but there must be a number of requirements, such as the number of academic staff and the appropriate infrastructure of the university.

Another study conducted by Ade (2021) examined the obstacles in the implementation of the Bologna Process. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by Kurdistan universities during the implementation of the Bologna Process. Three universities are focused on in this study there were two public universities (Erbil Polytechnic University and Soran University) and one private university (Cihan University). A survey form was used for data collection. The

results of that study reveal that most university staffs were conflicted on success in implementing the Bologna Process due to inadequate infrastructure and university academic calendars. Although the results of the study show that from the perspective of academic staff, several steps have been taken towards the implementation of the Bologna process, more preparation and effort are needed.

### **Student-Centered in the Learning Process**

Perhaps by looking back at human history on the issue of centralization, there have been many different pedagogical trends that have existed under different political, economic and cultural influences and circumstances. Each of these trends was active under the influence of educational paradigms and policies at certain moments, which, at times, were teacher as well as student-centered in the education and teaching process. For example, during traditional teaching (from the 17th century to the 19th century), great importance was placed on the teacher. This meant that the teacher was influential and central to the education and teaching process, and also the main source of knowledge, insight, and activity designer, while the students' role was only to orally regenerate the pedagogical implications taken from the teacher. In other words, students were outside the learning process. The teacher was versatile. Nevertheless, in the modern teaching method that lasted from the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, a pedagogical approach places the student at the center of educational action and believes that the student must be given absolute freedom. It was also an attempt to make students understand in depth how the knowledge gained can be used in life practically (Santi & Gorghiu, 2017).

From the above perspectives, especially in today's academic centers, what is noticed is that much attention is paid to student-centered learning because if we introduce student-centered learning, students not only can choose what to study but also discuss how and why they study the subject. This case looks interesting in many cases. In other words, in the learning environment, various activities, participation and thinking, etc., students play a role in themselves. Rather than being outside the learning and education process, because when they are outside the process, the process is seen as a traditional teaching method. This contrasts with student-centered learning, where students find the learning process more meaningful when topics are relevant to their lives, needs, and interests. This is while more actively engaged in creating, understanding, and engaging with knowledge (Pai & Mallya, 2016). Therefore, what has been observed and found in recent years is much emphasis on moving away from traditional teaching methods. Instead of that method of learning, the student-centered learning method has been adopted. In this learner-centered learning type, power is transferred from the teacher to the student. In addition, it treats the student as a partner or as part of the learning and teaching process; in other words, the student is active rather than passive (Barr & Tagg, 1995). What about teachers or educators who follow the student-centered



learning method and involve students in learning how and what they learn and how they evaluate what we have learned? This creates a kind of respect for the individual differences, backgrounds, interests, abilities, and experiences of students, and this expression is also true for the learner himself (McCombs & Whistler, 1997). In the student-centered learning style in the classroom, the role of the teacher is to encourage students to participate in the learning process and learn from each other (Weimer, 2002).

In addition, there are several characteristics of student-centered learning, such as students having a great deal of responsibility, independence, and accountability for the learning process; the student is actively involved, and the teacher only plays the role of facilitator and collaborator. There is a kind of interdependence and mutual respect between students and teachers, which helps promote the learning environment. This teaching method provides a platform for active rather than passive learning, contributing to an education aimed at learning and deep understanding. Instead of students learning subjects that have nothing to do with themselves and their lives, they get the opportunity to learn and use the subject in the real world. It contains information that is directly related to ongoing issues and problems in real life.

### **Presentation of the Constructivist Theory of Learning**

This study relies on the constructivist theory of learning, especially the theory by John Dewey, in the education process called Learning by Doing, to analyze student learning. In recent years, constructivist theory has gained popularity for studying various social phenomena, although it is not an essentially new idea. If we look at history, it is clearly visible that in the early history of dialects, such educational methods tried to involve the learners in the teaching process. For example, the ancient Greeks used 'dialogue' in their educational process. In this method, the teacher suggests a problem and helps the student solve it by asking questions. This method can be observed in Plato's works (427-347 BC). Plato describes how Socrates helped a slave solve the Pythagorean Theorem. Yet the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (470-320 BC) all contain ideas about science, the branch of philosophy studies the nature and scope of knowledge (Loyens, 2007). The epistemology of a philosopher such as Immanuel Kant from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries can be seen as fundamentalist. Kant talks about the Faculty of Knowledge that humans have, which refers to the influence of human minds in interpreting the environment around them. Like Kant, all our knowledge begins with experience, but this does not mean it all arises from experience. For example, some mental activity begins in those who experience it, but people need to produce or construct knowledge based on their individual experiences (Kant, 1959 as cited in Kitcher, 2005).

In the late nineteenth century, the American philosopher and educator John Dewey focused on the theory of learning by doing. Dewey directed his views heavily

against passive teaching, which meant that passive teaching was common from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Dewey believed that a child or individual is an active learner, so in his view, doing activities improves the learning process. He emphasized constructive activities in the classroom, which are meaningful and interesting for the child or individual because the activity creates strong relationships between the individual and the social environment. He believed that education should not be seen within the framework of a few very narrow academic subjects and titles but should be pragmatic and teach children how to think and adapt to the outside world (Dewey, 1902). Teachers and students should learn from each other in the education process, while all members of the education process should have equal rights to participate and express their opinions. Additionally, this is where the student learning process is centered, and according to John Dewey, students should become the center, and the teacher should only play the role of a facilitator and respond to their comments and problems for the purpose of information acquisition (Santi & Gorghiu, 2017).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study used the quantitative method to analyze the student-centered learning method in the higher education system of the Kurdistan Region, Soran University, as an example. Creswell (2013) believes that the quantitative method is the process of collecting and analyzing numerical data. This method seeks answers to quantitative questions. This type of method is used when the sample size is large and can take the largest number of samples and generalize them to the study community. Therefore, in this study, due to the large size of the research community and the way the questions are expressed quantitatively, as previously presented, this method was implemented.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, a questionnaire was used as a data collection tool to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire consists of two areas: the first includes 9 items, and the second includes 15 with three demographic variables. Questionnaires are a data collection tool that researchers can use to collect data from the research community, especially when the community is very large; it is hard to interview such a large number of participants directly. Due to the large size of the research community, it is normal to implement the research process by simply selecting a section of society. The information from the research sample must ultimately be generalized to the research community. This is done by selecting people who represent the research community (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Furthermore, the questionnaire consists of a set of questions that are designed based on the objectives and research questions and according to specific criteria and principles (Harris & Brown, 2010).

Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability because this method is an important way to find the relationship of consistency of each item with other items, and the value level of this method should always fall between '0 and 1' (Taber, 2018). In Table 1, the stability for each area is calculated. For example, the first area falls to 0.924, and the second area contains 0.932, and the stability rate for all items is 0.928, which is considered a high value of measurement stability because this value is higher than 0.70. Any value, if induced by Cronbach's alpha method, is greater than 0.70, then it is considered to have a nominal vice (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

**Table1.** Reliability Statistics

Areas	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
To what extent do university teachers implement the student-centered learning method in your department?	0.924	9
What are the barriers that affect the implementation of student-centered learning practically?	0.932	15

Furthermore, the research community is Soran University, which consists of the Faculties of Arts, Education, Science, Engineering, and Law, Political Science and Management, which covers 431 teachers, of which 104 responded to the survey. The community also consisted of different academic titles and years of service, as explained in Table (2). The research sample is the teachers of the faculties mentioned previously. The type of research sample in this study is a random sample. In this sample, all teachers of Soran University were given an equal chance to answer the questionnaire. However, not all selected teachers answered the survey form.

**Table 2.** Teachers' Demographic Profiles

Profiles		Frequency	Percent
Faculty of	Arts	45	43.3
	Science	12	11.5
	Engineering	6	5.8
	Education	20	19.2
	Law, Political Science and Management	21	20.2
Scientific title	Professor	55	52.9
	teacher	37	35.6
	Assistant Professor	10	9.6
	Professor	2	1.9

Years of service	Less than 1 year	2	1.9
	1-5 years	14	13.5
	6-10 years	29	27.9
	11-17 years	41	39.4
	16-20 years	12	11.5
	21-25 years	2	1.9
	26-30 years	1	1.0
	31 years and older	3	2.9

### Analyzing the Data

SPSS version 22 was used for quantitative data analysis, including the SPSS Statistical Package for Social Sciences, as Balnaves and Caputi (2001) believe that SPSS is one of the programs that the researcher can use to analyze data in tables, circles, etc. Therefore, in this study, after getting the answers, the data was statistically prepared for analysis to ensure the filling of the forms correctly. To ensure that no questions were filled in incorrectly and that none of the questions were forgotten, the forms are manually checked one by one.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

**Objective** This section evaluates and discusses the research findings on two main themes: implementation methods and barriers to implementing student-centered learning in light of the theories and review of previous research.

### Objective 1: Implementation of Student-Centered Learning Methods by University Teachers

The use of One Sample T-Test to determine the level of implementation of the student-centered method by university teachers in their departments was used in practice, the sample of the study was 104 people index ( $SD = 1.71730$ ) and (hypothetical median = 27), as well as the free score ( $df = 103$ ), ( $T = -116.085$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Since the hypothetical median is smaller than the arithmetic median, also the value of ( $P\text{-Value} = 0.00$ ) this value is also smaller than ( $0.05$ ), which means that the level of implementation of the method, student-centered learning, by university teachers is practically and statistically documented in the study sample (see Table 3).

**Table 3.** One-Sample Test: Implementation of center student learning method by university teachers in their departments

Test Value = 27					
N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
104	7.4519	1.71730	-116.085	103	.000

What is clear from the results of this study about implementing the student-centered method in an educational institution such as a university is that this method is being implemented. However, we must not forget that education and teaching in educational institutions, including universities in the Kurdistan Region, originated from traditional methods or, in other words, are established on banking education, where the teacher is the center. The student is outside the process, and this method has its roots in ancient Iraq. Though the education system is based on teaching by teachers, and students learn the lessons, it rarely focuses on critical thinking, dialogue on topics, and making sense of topics discussed in class between teachers and students. Instead, teaching and memorization are highly valued and considered the best method by teachers and students. What is noticed is that students memorize the books word by word, and the teachers teach the lessons themselves. It can be said that dialogue between teachers and students is very weak, and teachers are weak in encouraging students to participate in the dialogue process in the classroom as an important part of the education and teaching process. Furthermore, students in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region are generally weak in their ability to think critically and dialogue on academic topics in their classrooms and in terms of writing essays, argumentation, and how to transfer information to the real world (Mohammed-Marzouk, 2012).

The student-centered learning method at universities has generally become important. Therefore, nowadays, universities and official educational institutions are trying to implement its principles because it can be said that the way students are educated and learn in universities has an impact on changing the way of thinking wherever this method of learning is implemented. In addition, the university as a cognitive institution must logically impact the student's entire life, which will change his thinking and behavior. Therefore, we notice that the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Kurdistan Region 2009 when reformed higher education, and this reform greatly emphasized this learning method. This aims to reform traditional teaching methods in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research academic centers, where the teacher was the center and dominant in all aspects. Yet, student-centered learning has been an alternative to traditional and teacher-centered learning for many years because learning is a socialization process. Student-centered learning helps students interact with their environment and develop their own abilities, as well as deep understanding. In addition, it provides the most effective learning environment for students to be able to explore concepts that interest them and discuss and negotiate the meaning of those concepts with other students (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Sakti, 2014).

For John Dewey, man is in constant contact with his surroundings, so the act of acquiring knowledge is an essential process in which man constructs his experience of the social and physical world. Therefore, in his theory of learning by doing, he emphasizes that the process of knowledge is achieved through action

when individuals try it for themselves, although he believes that learning is based on experience to solve problems. Therefore, the student-centered teaching and education process must meet the student's basic and natural needs. The role of the educator (teacher) is also to encourage students to try to solve their problems through the skills they have (Santi & Gorghiu, 2017). Based on John Dewey's view, it can be said that his method has an impact on students because it develops critical thinking and tries to solve problems that arise in the learning process. In addition, it helps them to become self-reliant and take responsibility in society. Therefore, the student's learning style helps the student to be actively involved in the process of acquiring information through their activities and personal efforts, which is in the student's own interest so that they can develop their personality and become a critical thinker, instead of being alien to the learning process and outside the process, in other words, being passive in learning. Dewey, therefore, places great emphasis on activities in the centers and institutions of the learning process in theoretical experiments and research on issues to allow students to speak and write more critically (Dewey, 1938, as cited in Sakti, 2014).

Moreover, as we have already mentioned, the traditional teacher-centered method is still more or less emphasized at the universities of the Kurdistan Region because this method of learning in Kurdistan has a long history so dialogue and critical thinking are weak. It can be said that such a system cannot produce a person who is able to think critically and has a worldview, and, in some cases influences society (Ala'Aldeen, 2013). The old system, i.e., the traditional system in the KRG universities, focused more on student attendance and examinations (MoHESR-KRG, 2009). Due to the higher education reform in 2009 and the implementation of the Bologna Process in 2015, KRG universities, in general, and Soran University, in particular, have more or less tried to implement the student-centered learning method, as the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research emphasized that teachers should implement this method. In addition, universities have concluded that the old and traditional education and learning methods, which were passive students, cannot produce individuals who are able to take responsibility, think critically, and secure their own job opportunities. The traditional system is not able to meet the demands of society. So, if we look at the old education and learning system, we see that before, when a student went to class, he did not know what his lesson was to prepare for, and the teacher taught based on his interest. If the teacher went to class late or early to teach, there was no one to question him. How many students understood the content? And how much would it make it easier for students? And by what criteria did he test and evaluate? These were not clear. Students did not know what the teacher wanted when they went to the exam. and what he should study. When he took the exam, he was not given the right to know why he succeeded or why he failed (Faqe Ibrahim & Shams, 2020).

What can be said here is that the university teachers in the Kurdistan Region, particularly Soran University teachers, try to implement the student-centered

learning method in all fields as shown in Table (4). The officials are satisfied with the implementation of the student-centered learning method by university teachers in their departments, but they face some obstacles during the implementation even though it is a new method in the higher education system.

**Table 4.** Implementation of the center student learning method by university teachers in their departments

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I use student-centered learning methods in my classroom.	3.8	8.7	14.4	60.6	12.5
I always try to create an environment in the classroom that is fully student-centered.	8.7	1.9	8.7	51	29.8
I posit that student-centered learning style affects student active participation in the classroom .	5.8	6.7	11.5	52.9	23.1
I believe learning through working in groups helps students better understand new topics and concepts.	5.8	6.7	17.3	44.2	26
I think discussions among students themselves are a good way to gain a deeper understanding of the content of the new subject.	8.7	5.8	9.6	48.1	27.9
I spend a lot of time assessing students in the student-centered approach to learning.	8.7	6.7	10.6	47.1	26.9
I help students take responsibility for learning while teaching.	5.8	6.7	18.3	42.3	26.9
I often assess students when they work in groups, especially when students are trying to solve their problems by participating and discussing problem topics.	6.7	5.8	5.8	55.8	26
I help students to learn new knowledge and concepts in the learning process.	2.9	8.7	16.3	53.8	18.3

## Objective 2: Barriers to the Implementation of Student-Centered Teaching Methods

One Sample T-Test was used to determine the level of barriers affecting the implementation of student-centered teaching methods. The sample of the study

was 104 participants, and the results as presented earlier. The arithmetic mean ( $M = 1.6620$ ) with standard deviation ( $SD = .41478$ ) and (hypothetical mean = 45). Also, the free score ( $df = 103$ ), ( $T = -1065.540$ ,  $P\text{-Value} = 0.00 < 0.05$ ). Since the hypothetical median is smaller than the arithmetic median, also the value of ( $P\text{-Value} = 0.00$ ) this value is also smaller than ( $0.05$ ), which means that the level of barriers that affect the implementation of the student-centered methods are statistically documented in the study sample (see Table 5).

**Table 5.** One-Sample T-Test: Obstacles to Implementation of Student-Centered Teaching Method

Test Value = 45					
N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
104	1.6620	.41478	-1065.540	103	.000

What is evident from the results of the level of barriers to the implementation of student-centered teaching methods in the view of teachers with different faculty and academic titles is between satisfied and very satisfied (see Table 6). However, after the introduction of the Bologna Process in the higher education system, one of the system's characteristics was the implementation of the student-centered learning method, but universities have faced various obstacles. Some of these obstacles are related to the teachers and students themselves at the universities of the Kurdistan Region because, as mentioned earlier, the teaching system in the universities of the Kurdistan Region is based on the banking system as seen by 39.4% of the respondents, traditional learning methods hinder the implementation of the student-centered learning methods. In a way, the teacher is the speaker and plays all the roles, and the student is the listener. the culture of silence prevails in the classroom because part of the silence and listening is that the student does not seek information or read different sources. Students memorize the tests and give the same information back to the teacher. In other words, the system only exchanges information without critical thinking and students' views on subjects (Faqe Ibrahim & Shams, 2020).

When this banking approach to education is changed to a liberal approach, it allows teachers and students to work together, creating a variety of duties and responsibilities for students and teachers, which may increase teacher duties and cause difficulties in preparation, assessment, and classroom management. This is also true for students. Thus, the majority of respondents, 48.1%, felt that their task had become more difficult.

The admission system in the Kurdistan Region is centralized by the admission center at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, and Universities do not have freedom in the admission process. What is noticed is that if the



scientific departments request 25 students annually, while the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research admits more students to the departments, it may range between 60 and 70 students for each department. This may be due to a number of social, political and cultural reasons for sending such a large number of students to the departments. The results of the survey showed that the majority of respondents, 28.8%, agreed and 38.5% were strongly agreed that the large number of students is an obstacle to the implementation of student-centered learning methods. In addition, some studies emphasize that the large number of students in the classroom, in the view of teachers, creates a kind of obstacle to this learning method because in a class with a large number of students, or more precisely in large classes, the participation of students in various educational activities limits the ability of teachers and individual opportunities for students (Borda, 2017; Sweetman, 2017). According to Mulryan-Kyne (2010), in classes with few students or small classes, the development of student-centered learning styles is more effective, and students have more skills, critical thinking, and opportunities to be part of the educational process. In addition, teachers and students demonstrate their skills. Therefore, it can be said that when the number of students in the classroom increases, various problems arise, such as a lack of opportunities for all students; because teaching in a classroom 45 to 50 minutes, 25% say they are very satisfied, citing lack of time as an obstacle to this learning method. As Aksit et al. (2016) indicated, some teachers consider lack of time a major factor that is an obstacle to student-centered learning. This is because lack of time leads to a lack of opportunities for students to master the topics they have included in their coursebooks. We must not forget that one of the characteristics of this learning method is to go into the subjects, ie a deep understanding rather than quantitative and superficiality. Because through the deepening and follow-up activities students are encouraged to think critically about the subjects and take responsibility rationally (Lea et al., 2003). In addition, 40% of the research sample, which is the majority of the research sample size, consider the increase in the number of students, lack of adequate classrooms, lack of adequate libraries, lack of teaching materials as obstacles to this type of teaching. Despite the lack of teaching time, many days off with different occasions and many subjects in the coursebooks, lack of expertise in the new system prevents the implementation of this learning method properly (see Table 6).

**Table 6.** Barriers that affect the practical implementation of student-centered learning styles

Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teachers generally have a negative view of student-centered learning styles.	5.8	21.2	37.5	24	11.5
There is a lack of time for students to	6.7	25	11.5	31.7	25

actively participate in my classroom.					
My career mandate has been greatly increased by students' active participation in a student-centered learning approach.	6.7	12.5	17.3	40.4	23.1
The learning of the student-centered method makes it difficult to manage my classroom.	16.3	35.6	22.1	17.3	8.7
When the number of students in the classroom is large, implementing a student-centered learning method becomes very difficult and impractical.	13.5	10.6	8.7	28.8	38.5
The topics I have listed in the coursebook for study during the semester prevent me from following a student-centered learning method in my classroom.	12.5	33.7	19.2	25	9.6
The small number of weeks and the presence of vacations hinder the implementation of student-centered learning method techniques.	8.7	23.1	24	28.8	15.4
Due to increased learning responsibilities and increased tasks, students have negative attitudes toward the implementation of student-centered learning methods.	7.7	29.8	23.1	28.8	10.6
Student-centered learning increases the task-centered efforts of tutors.	6.7	10.6	13.5	48.1	21.2
The department administration, faculty, and university are not helping with the student-centered method of learning.	11.5	27.9	31.7	24	4.8
The lack of teaching materials hinders the implementation of the principles of a student-centered learning method.	6.7	14.4	17.3	40.4	21.2
Traditional learning methods hinder the implementation of the principles of student-centered learning styles.	4.8	19.2	28.8	39.4	7.7
Students' lack of experience in previous educational stages (kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high school) prevents them from implementing the principles of student-centered learning.	10.6	7.7	14.4	39.4	27.9

The culture of individual education in society prevents the implementation of the principles of student-centered learning.	9.6	19.2	22.1	38.5	10.6
Lack of training and knowledge about student-centered learning styles hinder the implementation of student-centered learning style principles.	8.7	10.6	20.2	47.1	13.5

All of the above expressions are an obstacle to implementing the student-centered learning method. Implementing the method is not only associated with a specific dimension, but the process is multi-dimensional. It requires some follow-up and patience because, despite this being a new system for the universities of the Kurdistan Region, the teaching method in the universities of the Kurdistan Region is still traditional and not properly prepared to implement this learning method. Kurdistan is based on traditional banking, from kindergarten to higher education. Therefore, we need to spread awareness of this learning method in all educational institutions so that we can implement this learning method properly.

## CONCLUSION

Although the move towards such an approach is crucial for developing critical thinking and involvement, teacher-centered approaches remain dominant due to some challenges. Such challenges mainly include limited resources, large class sizes, limited teaching time, and entrenched educational culture. Understanding the relationship between the teacher and student is important in higher education as this directly affects how effective student-centered learning can be. Unfortunately, there appears to be quite a big gap between the theoretical framework of student-centered learning and practical application. Many educators at Soran University wish to follow this path, but they get restricted because of systemic issues, such as poor support and entrenched traditional ways of teaching.

The right interventions are necessary to close the gap between expectation and realization. These recommendations entail professional development for teaching staff, curricular reforms aligned with student-centered principles, and developing an inquiry and exploration culture among students. All these challenges can be overcome to ensure success in the student-centered learning approach, which will then shape individuals who are critical in their thinking and courageous and who act actively in the higher education system of the Kurdistan Region. Moreover, administrators in higher education institutions, policymakers, and teachers must come together to create an enabling environment for these changes. This environment needs to facilitate a changed mindset among teachers and students, with support in resource infrastructure and active promotion. One way to get everyone on board with this process is to highlight the long-term benefits of

student-centered learning: improved problem-solving skills, adaptability within the changing job market, and personal growth. Therefore, the success of this initiative will be a benefit not just for academic standards at Soran University but will be the frontline for other institutions within the Kurdistan Region, thus establishing a new standard in higher education learning and teaching processes.

### Research Recommendations

To enhance the effectiveness of student-centered education, it is recommended that educational institutions consider opening various courses specifically designed to train teachers in this method of teaching. These courses would equip educators with the necessary skills and strategies to effectively implement student-centered approaches in their classrooms. Additionally, there is a need for further research on student-centered learning by other researchers, utilizing diverse methodologies. Such studies would contribute to a broader understanding of the impact and best practices of this educational approach, ultimately leading to its more successful adoption and implementation across different educational contexts.

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