

The Efficacy and Techniques of LCE Implementation in Iraqi EFL Learning Context: Instructors' and Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

Despite the current prevalence of learner-centered education, little research has examined teachers' and students' attitudes toward its implementation, particularly in under-researched contexts like Iraq. Thus, to gain a better understanding of the status quo of LCE, and pinpoint the perceptions of the key stakeholders in the Iraqi EFL context regarding LCE efficacy and implementation techniques, the researchers in the current study chose a cohort of 110 EFL instructors and 200 students from a number of schools and universities located in Iraq. To gather data, the researchers employed a Likert-type questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The results obtained in the quantitative phase revealed that all participants (high school teachers and students as well as university instructors and students) had positive perceptions of the proper use of different LCE techniques in their context. Nevertheless, the instructors in both high school and university contexts expressed more positive impressions regarding the cogent application of LCE techniques in their settings, and in the high school context, teachers were characterized by more positive perspectives than students in this regard. Moreover, the qualitative findings substantiated the efficacy of LCE for *fostering personalized learning, developing critical thinking, enhancing meaningful learning, boosting problem-solving skills, encouraging self-directed learning, and engendering more learner engagement*. The findings will hopefully offer practical implications for instructors and students, particularly in the context of Iraqi high schools and universities, concerning the efficient use of LCE techniques to move toward better educational outcomes.

Keywords: LCE efficacy, LCE techniques, learner-centered Education, Iraqi EFL context, perceptions

1. Introduction

Successive to the advent of communicative approach to language teaching toward the end of the twentieth century, language teaching prospect, objectives and principles went through a remarkable metamorphosis. Initially inspired by Hymes' (1971) notion of communicative competence, Haliday's (1973) functional accounts of language, and Widdowson's (1978) focus on the use of language in place of usage, communicative approach was introduced to the realm of language teaching "in late 1970s and early 1980s" (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 115). 'Communicative language teaching', belonging to the 'weak version' of communicative approach and 'content-based instruction', 'task-based language teaching' and 'participatory approach' falling under its strong version (Howatt, 1984) all constitute the offsprings of this communicative movement. Though approaching the goal of attaining sufficient communicative competence and efficient use of language for different social contexts by implementing varied principles, all these perspectives are founded on a focal cornerstone, which is creating maximum engagement for learners, and hence following a learner-centered approach to language teaching. Overall, this paradigm shift foregrounded learner-centeredness and meaningful interaction as the unifying principles of communicative methodologies, thereby redefining both the aims and practices of language teaching in contemporary applied linguistics. The following section situates this communicative turn within its broader theoretical and pedagogical background.

1.1 Background and Context

Though practiced by teachers and educational administrators in different educational settings since decades ago in one way or another, learner-centered education (LCE) seems not to have achieved the degree of success its proponents once advocated, particularly in some specific learning contexts, including third world countries, East Asian learning context, and African and Russian community of learning (e.g., Moradi & Alavinia, 2020; Moradi & Alavinia, 2025; Schweisfurth, 2013). This lack of popularity and failure of LCE to catch on and prove efficacious in the afore-said contexts has been owing to a myriad of factors, among which mention can be made of the dominant belief systems in such countries. For instance, as Schweisfurth (2013) maintains, in East Asian context of learning, for instance in China, affected by the dominant Confucian creed and principles, the students are accustomed to being obedient and submissive to the teacher power and dominance in the class, are used to being spoon-fed by the teachers, and have problem developing their sense of initiative and autonomy in the learning process.

Though what stated above may hold true to a certain extent, following the social-constructivist perspective to educational psychology and learning (e.g., Palincsar, 1998), one may claim that the degree of success in LCE depends on the extent to which the four key components in the process of learning (teacher, learner, task, and context) interact with each other in a proper way (e.g., Williams & Burden, 1997). Nevertheless, among these four elements of learning, it appears that the teachers' role in creating appropriate conditions for LCE to take place is more prominent. This is not to disavow the critical part played by the other elements of learning, including materials and textbooks. It goes without saying that inappropriate materials might hamper the attempts made by the teachers, no matter how efficient they are, in achieving the goals of learner-centered instruction, because effective practice of LCE heavily relies on the tasks and activities in the textbooks that provide for a higher degree of interaction, pair work and group work.

The present study is grounded in the social-constructivist theory of learning (Palincsar, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that knowledge is actively constructed through social interaction and collaborative meaning-making. From this perspective, learning is not an individual endeavor but a socially-mediated process shaped by the learner's engagement with peers, teachers, and contextual factors. The theory highlights the pivotal role of the teacher as a facilitator who scaffolds learners' development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), helping them move from assisted to independent performance. In the realm of language education, this framework underscores the importance of authentic communication, dialogic interaction, and task-based collaboration—principles that align closely with learner-centered instruction. Within this theoretical lens, the efficacy of LCE depends on the dynamic interplay among learners, teachers, tasks, and context, and on the degree to which classroom practices foster autonomy, agency, and co-construction of knowledge. Accordingly, the present study examines learner-centered education within a context where traditional, teacher-fronted practices remain predominant, with particular attention to how teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, and the nature of instructional materials mediate the implementation of LCE principles in this specific educational setting.

1.2 Research Gap

Despite the sustained and widespread scholarly attention devoted to LCE across diverse educational contexts, several critical dimensions of this construct remain insufficiently explored. In particular, existing studies have tended to emphasize theoretical formulations and pedagogical rationales for LCE, while comparatively little empirical attention has been directed toward the perceptions of instructors and learners regarding the specific techniques employed to operationalize learner-centered principles in classroom practice and the perceived effectiveness of such techniques. This omission is noteworthy, given that the successful enactment of LCE is contingent not only on pedagogical design but also on the beliefs, attitudes, and experiential evaluations of its primary stakeholders.

Moreover, this gap becomes even more pronounced when viewed through the lens of underrepresented educational contexts, such as the Iraqi EFL setting. Although learner-centered approaches have been widely advocated as central to contemporary language education, systematic investigations examining how these approaches are interpreted, implemented, and evaluated by teachers and students in this context remain scarce. Consequently, there is limited empirical evidence documenting whether, how, and to what extent LCE techniques align with contextual constraints, institutional expectations, and learner needs in Iraqi EFL classrooms.

Taken together, the lack of stakeholder-focused inquiry and the dearth of context-sensitive research point to a significant gap in the existing literature. Addressing this gap necessitates research that foregrounds the voices of both instructors and learners and critically examines their perceptions of LCE implementation strategies and their instructional efficacy within specific sociocultural and educational milieus.

1.3 Purpose/Aim of the Study

Informed by the need for developing more learner-centered pedagogical environments, particularly in third world countries like Iraq, the researchers in the current study sought to explore Iraqi EFL instructors' and students' views regarding the techniques used for LCE implementation in their context. In so doing, the efficacy of LCE in the context of Iraqi high schools and universities was also investigated. Accordingly, this study adopts social constructivism as its guiding framework for analyzing how Iraqi EFL instructors and learners perceive and implement learner-centered techniques in their educational settings. To put it in plain terms, the researchers in the current study aimed to examine instructors' and students' perceptions of LCE effectiveness and implementation, with the aim of understanding how learner-centered approaches are experienced and valued in the Iraqi EFL context.

1.4 Research Questions

Attempting to bridge the aforesaid gaps, the researchers in the current study strove to shed more light on the perceptions of Iraqi high school teachers and students as well as university instructors and students regarding the status of LCE implementation and its efficacy. In doing so, comparisons were also made between the two contexts. In line with the study objectives, the following research questions were put forth:

RQ1: What are the techniques of implementing learner-centered education in the context of Iraqi EFL schools and universities?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of high school and university instructors as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of high school and university students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of high school teachers and students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of university instructors and students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education?

RQ6: How do the participants perceive the efficacy of learner-centered education in the context of Iraqi EFL schools and universities?

2. Literature Review

One of the primary missions of educational systems in the present era is preparing the learners for attaining adequate communicative skills to function well as efficient members of the society. In this regard, Lizuka (2019) is of the view that today we are in need of developing more communicative environments in our classes, and hence communicative syllabi must replace purely grammatical ones. Herranen et al. (2018) contend that the ubiquity of learner-centered approaches can pave the way for achieving the goals of sustainable education. This argument is also in line with the tenets of the curriculum philosophy referred to as 'social and economic efficiency' (Richards, 2017), which endeavors to offer a kind of schooling that turns the learners into efficient and practical members of the society. In accordance with this underpinning philosophy of LCE, Madani (2019) also avers that the educational system is expected to equip the learners with the required competencies and skills contributing to their further social awareness, critical thinking, and improved functioning in the society.

Literature is replete with the investigations offering suitable guidelines for the improved implementation of LCE and the factors leading to its success and proper application. Pan (2023), for instance, documented that collaborative professional learning can contribute to more practical materialization of LCE principles. In other words, her study probed the effectiveness of teachers' engagement in professional communities as well as their sense of self-efficacy for their enhanced practice of LCE. To conduct the study, she recruited 226 school teachers from the Taiwanese context of education. Her scrutiny revealed that though teachers' membership in such collaborative professional forums didn't directly lead to their better practice of LCE, their self-efficacy played a mediating role in driving them to have a more efficacious conduct as regards learner-centered instruction.

In like manner, Chan et al. (2024) confirmed that teachers' participation in collaborative professional forums can act as a facilitator for their better LCE practice. In so doing, they also gauged the effect of teachers' involvement in such professional groups on their self-efficacy development. In their study which was conducted in the context of secondary school education, 430 Malaysian teachers were included. Their findings pointed toward the notable impact of attending such collaborative gatherings on the amelioration of teachers' LCE implementation and betterment in terms of their self-efficacy. Though the role of membership in such specialized, LCE-oriented forums in bringing about teachers' enhanced LCE practice is undeniable, research has also offered other means of nurturing teachers' LCE literacy and augmenting their proficiency in this regard.

As a case in point, the use of active teaching strategies has been claimed by Socas-Rodríguez and Herrera-Herrera (2025) to result in more proficient practice of LCE in the academic context. Based on the findings of their research, the success of the teachers' employed teaching styles was evident based on the enhanced performance of the students on the posttest and lower failure rates. Hence, they claimed that the application of more engaging, collaborative techniques of teaching is bound to facilitate LCE implementation, and produce augmented educational outcomes.

In addition to the efficient use of practical instructional strategies by the teachers, the role of other educational infrastructures in creating more burgeoning learning conditions which facilitate the implementation of LCE must not be ignored. One such prerequisite which has been highlighted as a focal building block of progressive learner-centered instruction is the appropriate use of online learning environments and digital resources. In this respect, Allayarova (2025), for instance, draws the researchers' attention to the facilitative role of digital technologies in generating more successful LCE practices. In her research, which is based on the integration of technology into pedagogy, she underscores the multifarious opportunities created by technology-enhanced learning for personalized, learner-initiated experiences. This transition to more technology-integrated environments, however, as she argues, requires adopting new roles for teachers and students, as well as preparing the learning context in a way that provides more room for maximum learner involvement and autonomous practice.

Now with all this being said concerning the attempts for establishing the optimum conditions for LCE to take place, provided that the teachers receive proper LCE training, are in touch with other peers in collaborative forums, do their best to use apposite strategies for effectual LCE implementation, and if access to technology-integrated learning environments is easily provided for the learners, self-directed learning will thrive and improved educational outcomes will be obtained. Research also supports the impacts of properly conducted learner-centered instruction on enhancement in different facets of learning. As a case in point, Marwan's (2017) research shed light on the efficacy of LCE for achieving more improved learning upshots. To conduct the study, they chose a sample of 25 college students majoring in computer sciences. Performing the study in the Indonesian higher education context, they gathered data via semi-structured interviews and observation. In accordance with the findings, it was disclosed that LCE practice led to a noticeable amount of betterment in learners' educational outcomes, particularly with respect to oral proficiency.

In a similar vein, Kassem (2019) examined the impact of LCE on uplifting learners' performance and heightening their motivation. Conducting his research in the Saudi Arabian context, he selected a cohort of 86 students. The participants in his study were all male

students pursuing their education at the university. Data collation in his study was performed by administering a questionnaire to the participants. The results demonstrated a remarkable degree of improvement in the students' overall performance, as well as a tangible amount of upsurge in their motivation level.

In another investigation, Ghafar (2024) indicated that LCE can prepare the ground for learners' boosted performance on diverse learning tasks, and help the learners engage more in self-reflective practices and collaborative learning experience. To gather data, he made use of focus-group interview and observation. Carried out in higher education context, the study concluded that enriched learning outcomes are likely to be attained via LCE-integrated practice. This booming performance resulting from the implementation of LCE, according to him, is more notable in terms of collaborative learning experience.

The contribution of LCE to better learning results is also corroborated by Mbonimana and Sikubwabo (2024). In their scrutiny which was performed in the Rwandan secondary school context, they probed the influence of LCE on different aspects of learning enhancement. To this aim, a total of 141 partakers (comprising both students and teachers) were selected from their chosen educational context. The main means of data collection for their study were questionnaire and interview. The findings pointed toward the effectiveness of learner-centered instruction in achieving a remarkable level of improvement, particularly in relation to cooperative learning practices.

The researchers in this section endeavored to present a concise overview of the existing literature on the importance of proper LCE training, involvement with collaborative teams to upgrade one's knowledge of LCE, making use of appropriate LCE-directed strategies, and the provision of better opportunities for technology-integrated learning which can in turn facilitate LCE. Evidence was also provided based on the available literature regarding the impact of LCE on learning enhancement and the attainment of improved educational outcomes. The brief review of literature presented in this section reveals that though LCE has been in the foreground of attention of researchers from all over the globe, some perspectives of the issue still remain underresearched. Among such issues toward which scant heed has been appropriated, mention can be made of the perceptions of instructors and students toward the techniques employed for implementing LCE, and their efficacy. Furthermore, the paucity of research in this area gets more prominence if we consider the lack of such scrutiny in the Iraqi EFL context. To address these identified gaps, the present study adopts a systematic methodological approach, which is detailed in the following section. Specifically, the study outlines the characteristics of the participants, the instruments employed, the procedural steps undertaken, and the data collection methods utilized to investigate instructors' and students' perceptions of LCE techniques within the Iraqi EFL context.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

To select the participants for the current study, the researchers relied on non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. In doing so, a total of 310 male and female participants (110 EFL instructors and 200 students) were chosen from a number of schools and universities located in Baghdad, Iraq. The pie chart presented in Figure 1 demonstrates the percentages for gender distribution. More specifically, the sample comprised 62 high school teachers, 48 university instructors, 110 high school students and 90 university students. The selected sample was quite diverse in terms of demographic features, including age, educational background, language proficiency and learning/teaching experience. The teacher participants were characterized by a diversified amount of teaching experience, ranging from three to over 20 years, and held different academic degrees, including BA, MA, and PhD. To put it more clearly, 30% of the participants held a PhD degree, whereas the majority had B.A. and M.A. degrees (see Figure 2).

Although convenience sampling does not ensure complete representativeness of the broader population, it was considered appropriate given the accessibility constraints and logistical limitations associated with data collection in the Iraqi educational context. Moreover, efforts were made to include participants from various educational levels, institutional types, and demographic backgrounds to enhance the diversity and representativeness of the sample. Nevertheless, since participants were not selected randomly, the findings should be interpreted with caution, as they may not be fully generalizable to all EFL teachers and learners across Iraq.

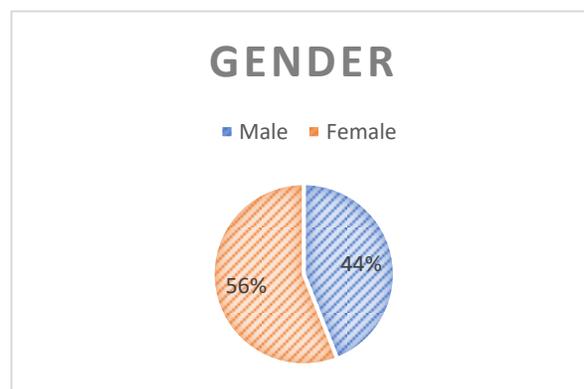


Figure 1. Gender Distribution of Participants

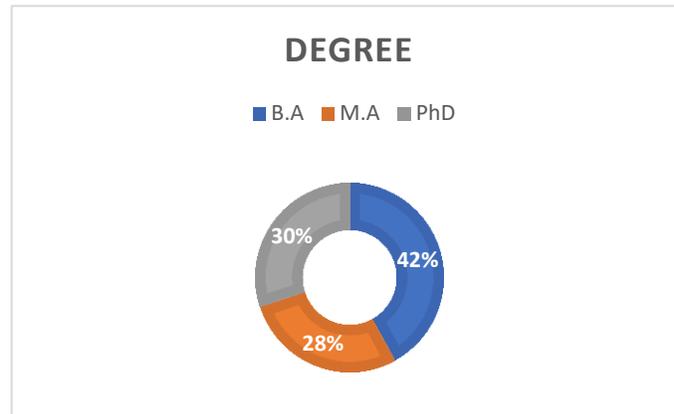


Figure 2. The Participants' Academic Degree

3.2 Instruments

To collect the data, the researchers in the current study made use of a Likert-type scale, as well as a semi-structured interview. The LCE scale employed in the study was developed based on the available literature concerning different techniques of implementing LCE. The initial pool of items was drawn from previously validated instruments (e.g., Lea et al., 2003; Weimer, 2013) and adapted to suit the Iraqi EFL context. Following expert review by three specialists in applied linguistics and educational psychology, the preliminary version contained 15 items, which were examined for clarity, content validity, and contextual relevance. After pilot testing with a group of 30 EFL learners and instructors, five items that demonstrated low item-total correlations ($< .30$) or conceptual overlap were removed, resulting in a final 10-item version.

The participants were then required to complete the questionnaire in a matter of 10 minutes. It is also worth mentioning that the questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Sample items included statements such as "In my teaching/learning context, students are usually involved in active learning, problem-solving, brainstorming, and other activities that require critical thinking" and "There are sufficient opportunities for cooperative learning, pair-work and group work in my teaching/learning context". To further ensure the reliability of the scale, it was piloted prior to main administration and Cronbach's alpha calculated for its reliability equaled .79, which is a satisfactory index. Construct validity was additionally confirmed through exploratory factor analysis, which revealed a single dominant factor representing overall learner-centered orientation.

Also, in the follow-up semi-structured interview, the participants' attitudes concerning the efficacy of LCE as well as the implemented techniques in the Iraqi context of education were elicited. The interview took approximately 5 to 8 minutes for each participant. The interview protocol was carefully designed to align with the last research question exploring participants' perceptions of the efficacy of LCE in Iraqi EFL schools and universities. Drawing on the main constructs identified in the literature and those reflected in the questionnaire results, the initial pool comprised five open-ended questions addressing the perceived advantages of LCE, challenges in implementation, and classroom role negotiation between teachers and learners. The questions were also adjusted to elicit responses relevant to key pedagogical outcomes associated with LCE, such as fostering personalized learning, developing critical thinking, enhancing meaningful learning, boosting problem-solving skills, promoting self-directed learning, and encouraging greater learner engagement. Example questions included: "In what ways do learner-centered techniques help or hinder learning in your classes?", "How do you and your students share responsibilities in the learning process?" Also, expert validation was done for the interview questions, by means of which questions were reworded, and one was eradicated due to its inappropriacy. The final version thus consisted of four questions, whose face and content validity were confirmed by two university instructors experienced in qualitative research.

3.3 Procedure

The study strictly adhered to the ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, institutional approval was obtained from the respective authorities in the venues where the study was conducted. Moreover, all participants were provided with a detailed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without any negative consequences. At the outset, the participants were briefed on the study objectives, and an attempt was made to make sufficient disclosure to the participants as regards the research objectives. To cater for ethical considerations, the researchers explained the anonymity and confidentiality conditions for the participants and reassured them that the gathered data were going to be used only for research purposes and would not be revealed to any third parties. They were also ensured of their right to leave the research scene whenever they decided. After these preliminary steps and gaining the informed consent, the researchers distributed the questionnaires among the participants. Upon the completion of the questionnaire phase, the interview was conducted with one fifth of participants from each group. The interview protocol for each participant lasted between 5 to 8 minutes, during which the interview responses were recorded to be later transcribed and coded.

3.4 Data Analysis

To analyze the data for research questions 1 to 5, the responses given to different questionnaire items were screened, based on which frequencies and percentages were reported, and comparisons were made between the groups. Additionally, to further analyze research questions 2 to 5, and check whether significant differences existed between the perceptions of participants from different groups (high school vs. university instructors, high school vs. university students, high school teachers vs. students, and university instructors vs. students), Chi-square test was run using SPSS 26. Also, as regards the last research question, the researchers made use of thematic analysis. In doing so, the interview responses were initially transcribed and then the overriding themes were extracted. It is worth mentioning that in analyzing the interview data, inductive procedure of thematic analysis was employed, through which bottom-up coding (e.g., Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021) was carried out. Also, to guarantee the reliability of coding procedure, two coders were engaged to reach a satisfactory degree of inter-coder reliability.

4. Results

4.1 Findings Obtained for the First Research Question

The first research question was after pinpointing LCE techniques employed in the Iraqi context of secondary and tertiary education. It is worth noting that data collection for this research question relied on questionnaire results. Among the diverse techniques and strategies applied for LCE, different ways of implementing LCE were highlighted by the high school teachers and university instructors. In the Likert-type questionnaire which had been designed and given to participants, as stated before, the participants were supposed to rate the items based on their own experience and knowledge of LCE implementation on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of LCE techniques utilized in the Iraqi high school context based on high school teachers' impressions.

Table 1. LCE Techniques Employed in High School Context Based on Teachers' Responses

No.	Item	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
		Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.
1	In my teaching/learning context, students are usually involved in active learning, problem-solving, brainstorming, and other activities that require critical thinking.	4	6.5%	8	13%	12	19.5%	23	37%	15	24%
2	There are sufficient opportunities for cooperative learning, pair-work and group work in my teaching/learning context.	3	4.8%	7	11.3%	11	17.7%	24	38.7%	17	27.5%
3	Inductive teaching and learning is commonly employed in this context, and learners can benefit from inquiry-based, problem-based and project-based learning.	5	8%	9	14.5%	13	21%	23	37%	12	19.5%
4	Personalized learning is advocated here through which teaching and learning are tailored to learners' needs, learning styles and desires.	4	6.5%	9	14.5%	14	22.5%	22	35.5%	13	21%
5	The learners are provided with authentic learning experiences which engages them in real-world situations.	2	3.2%	7	11.3%	12	19.5%	25	40.3%	16	25.7%
6	The education here is based on self-directed learning, pushing the learners toward goal-setting, monitoring their learning, and reflecting on the learning process.	4	6.5%	9	14.5%	9	14.5%	23	37%	17	27.5%
7	The classes are mostly discussion-based, and the students are encouraged to have meaningful conversations.	6	9.5%	8	13%	12	19.5%	26	42%	10	16%
8	Self-assessment is encouraged in this learning context, and the learners are stimulated to feel more responsible for their own learning.	4	6.5%	10	16%	13	21%	26	42%	9	14.5%
9	Educational technology is used appropriately to create more opportunities for learner-centered instruction and personalized learning.	4	6.5%	8	13%	9	14.5%	25	40.3%	16	25.7%
10	The students are aided to build more self-confidence and a better sense of autonomy and initiative.	5	8%	6	9.5%	13	21%	21	34%	17	27.5%

Fr. = Number; Pct. = Percentage

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of LCE techniques utilized in the Iraqi high school context based on the students' perspectives.

Table 2. LCE Techniques Employed in High School Context Based on Students' Responses

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.
Item 1	9	8%	16	14.5%	22	20%	39	35.5%	24	22%
Item 2	7	6%	14	13%	24	22%	42	38%	23	21%
Item 3	10	9%	15	14%	26	23.5%	38	34.5%	21	19%
Item 4	9	8%	17	15.5%	23	21%	38	34.5%	23	21%
Item 5	7	6%	13	12%	22	20%	44	40%	24	22%
Item 6	11	10%	14	13%	23	21%	40	36%	22	20%
Item 7	8	7%	15	14%	22	20%	41	37%	24	22%
Item 8	10	9%	18	16.5%	21	19%	42	38%	19	17.5%
Item 9	13	12%	8	7%	24	22%	43	39%	22	20%
Item 10	14	13%	11	10%	22	20%	40	36%	23	21%

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of LCE techniques utilized in the Iraqi university context based on the instructors' perspectives.

Table 3. LCE Techniques Employed in University Context Based on Instructors' Responses

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.
Item 1	2	4%	4	8.5%	6	12.5%	20	41.5%	16	33.5%
Item 2	3	6.5%	5	10.5%	7	14.5%	19	39.5%	14	29%
Item 3	4	8.5%	3	6.5%	8	16.5%	18	37.5%	15	31%
Item 4	6	12.5%	2	4%	9	19%	19	39.5%	12	25%
Item 5	4	8.5%	7	14.5%	5	10.5%	17	35.5%	15	31%
Item 6	5	10.5%	6	12.5%	8	16.5%	17	35.5%	12	25%
Item 7	3	6.5%	5	10.5%	10	21%	15	31%	15	31%
Item 8	5	10.5%	8	16.5%	7	14.5%	19	39.5%	9	19%
Item 9	7	14.5%	4	8.5%	6	12.5%	20	41.5%	11	23%
Item 10	7	14.5%	5	10.5%	7	14.5%	18	37.5%	11	23%

Table 4 shows the frequencies and percentages of LCE techniques utilized in the Iraqi university context according to the students' perceptions.

Table 4. LCE Techniques Employed in University Context Based on Students' Responses

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.	Fr.	Pct.
Item 1	4	4.5%	8	9%	20	22%	31	34.5%	27	30%
Item 2	5	5.5%	9	10%	17	19%	30	33.5%	29	32%
Item 3	6	6.5%	7	8%	18	20%	31	34.5%	28	31%
Item 4	3	3.5%	10	11%	19	21%	35	39%	23	25.5%
Item 5	8	9%	7	8%	18	20%	33	36.5%	24	26.5%
Item 6	7	8%	11	12%	17	19%	37	41%	18	20%
Item 7	5	5.5%	12	13.5%	16	18%	36	40%	21	23%
Item 8	4	4.5%	12	13.5%	19	21%	38	42%	17	19%
Item 9	6	6.5%	13	14.5%	15	17%	35	39%	21	23%
Item 10	3	3.5%	6	6.5%	20	22%	36	40%	25	28%

Overall, the results reported in Tables 1 to 4 indicate a generally positive trend toward the implementation of learner-centered education (LCE) techniques in Iraqi EFL classrooms. Both instructors and students at the high school and university contexts reported moderate to high levels of agreement regarding the presence of core LCE strategies such as active learning, cooperative work, discussion-based instruction, and the integration of educational technology. University instructors and students tended to express slightly stronger agreement across most items compared to their high school counterparts, suggesting that LCE principles are more consistently enacted in higher education settings. This may reflect the relatively greater pedagogical autonomy and professional experience of university instructors, as well as the more flexible instructional environment of tertiary institutions. At the high school level, while teachers and students acknowledged the growing use of LCE practices such as problem-solving, authentic learning experiences, and self-directed learning, their responses also revealed some uncertainty, implying that full adoption remains in progress. Taken together, these findings highlight a gradual but tangible shift toward more interactive, reflective, and student-centered pedagogical practices in Iraq's EFL system, with universities leading the transition and secondary schools progressively aligning with this educational reform.

4.2 Findings for the Second Research Question

The second research question strove to find the differences between the perceptions of high school and university instructors as regards

the techniques of implementing learner-centered education. To answer this research question, the questionnaire data reported in the previous section were reconsulted and in so doing, item-by-item comparisons were made between the results gained for high school teachers and university instructors. The result of this comparison is portrayed in Figure 3.

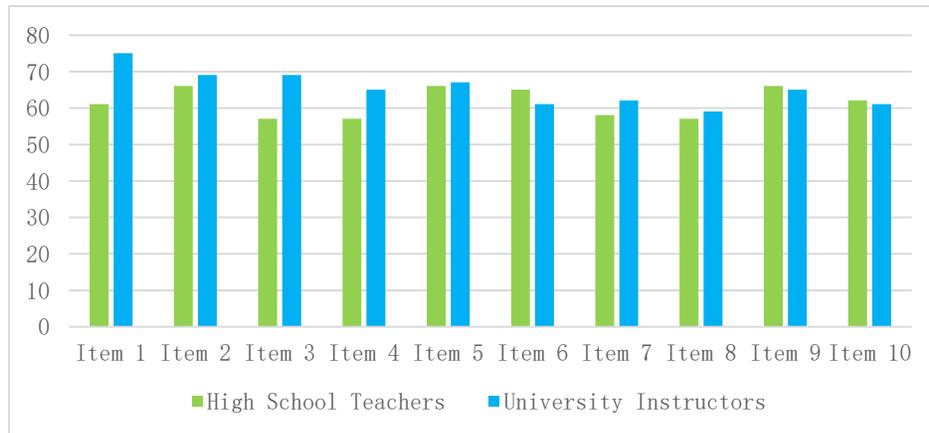


Figure 3. The Perceptions of High School Teachers and University Instructors regarding the Implementation of LCE Techniques

Though Figure 3 shows some differences between the perceptions of high school and university instructors, to gain deeper insights concerning the statistical significance of the differences, Chi-square analysis was conducted, the results of which are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Chi-square Results for High School and University Instructors

	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
Item 1	1.73	0.189
Item 2	0.01	0.932
Item 3	1.25	0.263
Item 4	0.45	0.505
Item 5	0.00	1.000
Item 6	0.06	0.809
Item 7	0.08	0.784
Item 8	0.00	0.997
Item 9	0.00	1.000
Item 10	0.00	1.000

As Table 5 shows, no statistically significant differences were found between high school teachers and university instructors on any of the ten LCE techniques. The instructors reported slightly higher agreement rates, but the differences were not statistically significant.

4.3 Findings for the Third Research Question

The third research question surveyed the differences between the perceptions of high school and university students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education. To deal with this research question, comparisons were made between the values obtained for high school and university students, the result of which is shown in Figure 4.

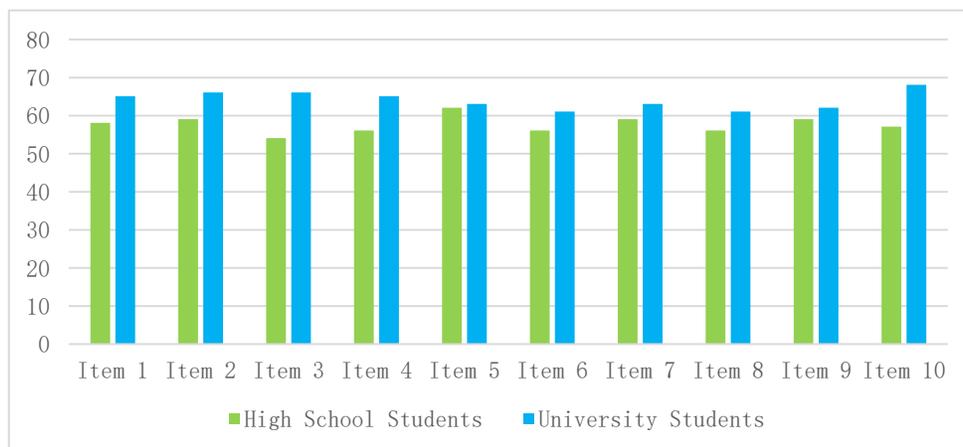


Figure 4. The Perceptions of High School and University Students regarding the Implementation of LCE Techniques

Though Figure 4 reveals some differences between the perceptions of high school and university students, to gain deeper insights as to the statistical significance of the differences, Chi-square analysis was run, the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Chi-square Results for High School and University Students

	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
Item 1	0.79	0.375
Item 2	0.63	0.429
Item 3	2.44	0.119
Item 4	1.31	0.253
Item 5	0.01	0.941
Item 6	0.28	0.594
Item 7	0.22	0.641
Item 8	0.44	0.508
Item 9	0.09	0.760
Item 10	1.89	0.169

As Table 6 illustrates, although university students consistently reported higher levels of agreement on all items, no statistically significant differences were detected between high school and university students (*p* > .05).

4.4 Findings for the Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question probed the differences between the perceptions of high school teachers and students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education. To analyze this research question, comparisons were made between the percentages obtained for high school teachers and students, the result of which is demonstrated in Figure 5.

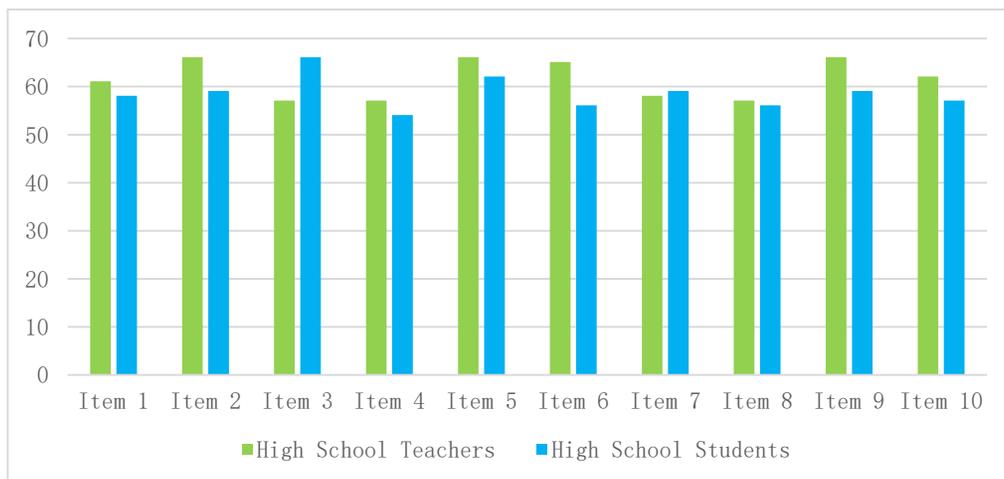


Figure 5. The Perceptions of High School Teachers and Students regarding the Implementation of LCE Techniques

Figure 5 indicates some differences between the perceptions of high school teachers and students. Nevertheless, to gain deeper insights regarding the statistical significance of the differences, Chi-square analysis was performed, the results of which are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Chi-square Results for High School Teachers and Students

	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
Item 1	0.12	0.724
Item 2	0.56	0.454
Item 3	0.04	0.844
Item 4	0.00	1.000
Item 5	0.16	0.690
Item 6	0.78	0.377
Item 7	0.00	1.000
Item 8	0.00	1.000
Item 9	0.56	0.454
Item 10	0.12	0.724

As Table 7 depicts, high school teachers generally exhibited slightly higher agreement percentages, but no statistically significant

differences emerged between their and students' perceptions of LCE implementation.

4.5 Findings for the Fifth Research Question

The fifth research question sought to pinpoint the differences between the perceptions of university instructors and students as regards the techniques of implementing learner-centered education. To examine this research question, comparisons were made between the percentages obtained for university instructors and students, the result of which is depicted in Figure 6.

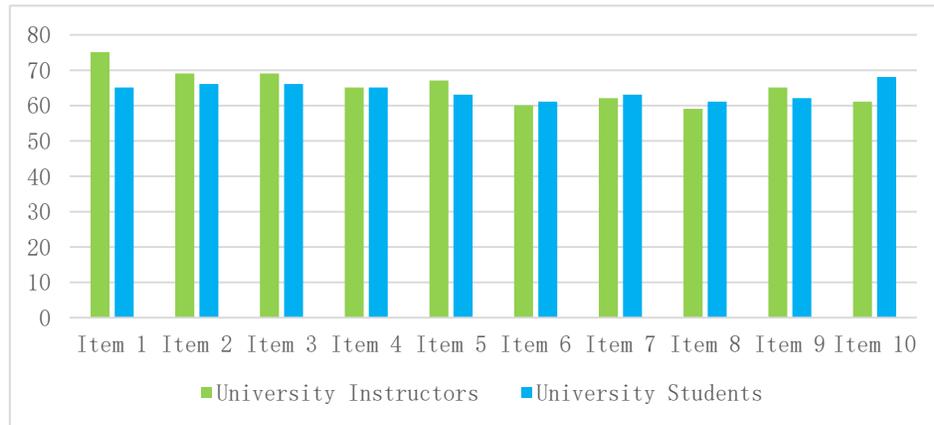


Figure 6. The Perceptions of University Instructors and Students regarding the Implementation of LCE Techniques

Figure 6 demonstrates some differences between the perceptions of university instructors and students. However, to analyze the possible statistical significance of the differences, Chi-square analysis was carried out, the results of which are briefed in Table 8.

Table 8. Chi-square Results for University Instructors and Students

	χ^2	<i>p</i> -value
Item 1	1.16	0.282
Item 2	0.04	0.850
Item 3	0.04	0.850
Item 4	0.00	1.000
Item 5	0.04	0.839
Item 6	0.00	1.000
Item 7	0.00	1.000
Item 8	0.02	0.893
Item 9	0.01	0.929
Item 10	0.46	0.498

As Table 8 indicates, despite minor percentage variations between instructors and students, none of the observed differences reached statistical significance (*p* > .05).

4.6 Findings for the Sixth Research Question

The last research question explored the way the participants perceived the efficacy of learner-centered education in the context of Iraqi EFL schools and universities. To analyze this question, the qualitative data obtained via interview were scrutinized. The analysis of interview responses resulted in detecting a number of key themes, namely *fostering personalized learning*, *developing critical thinking*, *enhancing meaningful learning*, *boosting problem-solving skills*, *encouraging self-directed learning*, and *engendering more learner engagement*. For instance, as regards the efficacy of LCE for fostering personalized learning, most participants surmised that LCE can attend to individual differences among the learners in a better way, and help address such differences by teaching in more personalized, differentiated ways. The following extract from a university professor is indicative of this potential of LCE as a springboard for personalized learning.

Extract 1

Students feel a better sense of agency and are involved more in the learning process when the teaching methods are adjusted to the learners' needs and take account of their differences. When teaching is tailored to personal needs of learners, the students feel more in control of their own learning.

Also, as regards the contribution of LCE to developing critical thinking, the majority of participants were of the view that the teaching methods that are more learner-centered can help increase critical and creative thinking in learners. Among the examples of such

learner-oriented practices, they referred to the efficacy of assigning project work and involving the learners in collaborative practice. In this regard, one of the participants (a high school teacher) stated:

Extract 2

When the teachers give more freedom to learners to learn in their own ways, they may thrive and their critical thinking will develop. We shouldn't offer everything in a ready-made way for the learners. They should be given opportunities to think creatively and critically.

Moreover, concerning the potential of LCE for enhancing meaningful learning, the participants believed that LCE can help relate the taught content to the learners' real-life experiences, which can in turn activate their background knowledge in a proper way, and bring about more meaningful and durable learning. As a case in point, one of the respondents (a university student) averred:

Extract 3

I learn in a better way in learner-centered conditions. I think the teachers who give us more opportunities for self-practice and involvement with the lessons push us toward learning in a meaningful way, which is more long-lasting.

Likewise, another interviewee (a high school teacher) referred to the positive role of LCE in stimulating self-reflection and meaningful learning in the following manner.

Extract 4

To me, the usefulness of learner-centered classes lies in their capacity for pushing the learners to have more self-reflection. I mean, in such classes the learners learn more deeply and are prepared in a better way for using the language for real-life purposes.

In addition, as it comes to the efficacy of LCE for boosting problem-solving skills, the participants asserted that LCE facilitates deeper learning and hence the knowledge acquired through this kind of instruction can be applied better for further learning and problem solving. One of the participants (a university student) declared that:

Extract 5

The things learned in learner-centered environments can prove to be more applicable for problem-solving in real-life. Because the learners are in closer contact with the learned material, they are able to apply it well in other learning contexts.

Moreover, the contribution of LCE to encouraging self-directed learning was underscored by a number of participants. They speculated that in this kind of learning, in which the learners have a greater role in the whole process, they will feel more responsible for their own learning, and will hence achieve better outcome. As an instance, one of the respondents (a high school student) maintained:

Extract 6

In a learner-centered class, I feel more in charge of my own learning. Therefore, I think I am in control of my own learning, and to achieve better results, I try my best. This gives me more motivation to continue.

Regarding the efficacy of LCE for self-directed learning and achieving better outcomes, another student (a university student) said:

Extract 7

Thanks to the learner-centered method used by my teacher, I feel I'm making good progress in my learning. I have also become more independent in my learning, my understanding has improved, and I have become more interested in learning.

In regard to the efficacious role of LCE in engendering more learner engagement, several participants argued that learner-centered practices can pave the way for higher involvement on the part of students. As an example, an interviewee (a university professor) put her perspective in the following manner:

Extract 8

Learner-centered approach to teaching is more involving because it tries to relate the material to the learners' needs and desires. When the content is more relevant to the learners' needs and interests, the level of involvement increases and the students like the course more.

Another participant (a high school student) confirmed the more engaging nature of learner-centered classes by stating that:

Extract 9

I feel better in classes in which students have more freedom for deciding what to learn and how to learn. I feel a lot of pressure in classes in which teachers control everything and move very fast from one task to another. I think I am more involved in the class when I have freedom of choice.

Overall, the findings obtained for the last research question point to the efficacy and potential of LCE in gaining better learning outcomes through *fostering personalized learning, developing critical thinking, enhancing meaningful learning, boosting problem-solving skills, encouraging self-directed learning, and engendering more learner engagement.*

5. Discussion

The researchers in the current study sought to investigate Iraqi EFL instructors' and students' perceptions regarding the techniques used for implementing LCE in the context of Iraqi EFL schools and universities. In so doing, the efficacy of learner-centered education in these

contexts was also explored. As regards research questions 1 to 5, the results demonstrated that all participants (high school teachers and students as well as university instructors and students) had rated all questionnaire items positively and with high percentages of agreement. However, the comparison of results disclosed that 1) university instructors had more positive perceptions toward different LCE implementation techniques as opposed to high school teachers; 2) university students were characterized by more positive perceptions regarding different LCE implementation techniques compared to high school students; 3) high school teachers showed more positive attitudes than students toward different LCE implementation techniques in their context; and 4) university instructors revealed a higher degree of agreement than students with regard to different LCE implementation techniques in their context. In other words, university instructors and high school teachers surpassed the students in both contexts in terms of the percentage of agreement with the use of different LCE techniques in their settings. Two conclusions can be made out of these results. First, students in both contexts have been more cautious in voicing their agreement with different facets of LCE implementation or have tried to be more realistic in their judgements. Second, LCE techniques and principles are purportedly being practiced in a more practical way in the university context, as the instructors in the current study have pointed out.

This finding is in keeping with the result reported in Hung et al.'s (2020) study, in which the positive perceptions of nursing students concerning the efficacy of LCE techniques were indicated. In addition, the positive attitudes of instructors toward LCE implementation are in line with the finding of Kashef and Barzegari (2023). Their study, based on questionnaire data, revealed that teachers held a favorable view of the practicality of learner-centered approaches and self-directed learning. The finding is, moreover, in compliance with the one obtained in Nazim et al.'s (2024) probe. Like the current finding, they also demonstrated the positive perceptions of teachers regarding learner-centered instruction.

This difference between high school and university participants may also reflect the varying degrees of teacher agency across contexts. In line with recent theoretical perspectives (e.g., Biesta, Priestley, & Robinson, 2015; Tao & Gao, 2017), teacher agency is viewed as the capacity of educators to act purposefully within structural and institutional constraints to implement pedagogical reforms such as LCE. Hence, the more favorable perceptions among university instructors could be interpreted as an indication of greater professional autonomy and agency in enacting learner-centered practices, whereas high school teachers' relatively moderate attitudes may stem from more restricted institutional environments that limit their ability to act agentively.

Moreover, the qualitative findings for the last research question pointed toward the efficacy of LCE for *fostering personalized learning, developing critical thinking, enhancing meaningful learning, boosting problem-solving skills, encouraging self-directed learning, and engendering more learner engagement*. The finding obtained for the last research question is corroborated by the results of Marwan's (2017) probe, in which LCE was found to be efficacious in ameliorating learning outcomes. Moreover, this finding gains further support from Kassem's (2019) research, which indicated the efficacy of LCE for improving learning and sparking motivation. However, it must be noted that Kassem's study was conducted in the Saudi Arabian context, and unlike the current research which gauged the perceptions of instructors' and students in both high school and university contexts, it merely gathered data from university students. The finding also resonates with the one reported in Ghafar's (2024) scrutiny. Akin to the present probe, Ghafar concluded that LCE can help with more self-reflection and may lead to better practice of self-directed learning. Ghafar's finding also revealed that LCE can result in more engagement on the part of students. It must also be noted that like the present investigation, Ghafar's survey was done in the academic context; however, unlike the current probe which benefited from questionnaire and interview for data collection, he made use of interview and observation. The finding is also consistent with that of Mbonimana and Sikubwabo (2024) which declared the efficacy of LCE for attaining better learning outcomes. Though they also employed questionnaire and interview in their research, their research context was confined to Rwandan secondary school settings, whereas the current scrutiny collated the perceptions of instructors and students from both high school and university contexts.

Nevertheless, engagement with recent theoretical debates on contextual constraints in developing countries suggests that positive perceptions alone may not guarantee effective implementation of LCE. As argued by Schweisfurth (2013, 2015) and Mtika and Gates (2010), structural and cultural conditions—such as exam-oriented curricula, large class sizes, limited teacher training, and rigid educational hierarchies—often impede the full enactment of learner-centered pedagogies in certain contexts. Within the Iraqi EFL system, similar constraints may limit the translation of teachers' favorable attitudes into actual classroom practice. Hence, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting both teachers' aspirational endorsement of LCE principles and the contextual realities that shape their pedagogical agency.

After all, the results obtained in the current study urge us to conclude that LCE can provide the ground for more efficient learning and improved learning outcomes. Though favorable, the findings are to be treated with due care and further evidence is required, particularly as regards the efficacy of different LCE techniques in varied learning contexts.

6. Conclusion

The researchers in the current study set out with the aim of probing the techniques employed for LCE implementation in the context of Iraqi EFL schools and universities. By way of doing so, Iraqi EFL instructors' and students' perspectives of the efficacy of learner-centered education were also researched. The quantitative findings were indicative of the participants' positive perceptions of different LCE implementation techniques in both high school and university contexts. Also, according to the qualitative findings, LCE was found to be efficacious for *fostering personalized learning, developing critical thinking, enhancing meaningful learning, boosting*

problem-solving skills, encouraging self-directed learning, and engendering more learner engagement.

The findings offer practical implications for different educational stakeholders in secondary and tertiary education, particularly as regards the Iraqi university and high school EFL context surveyed in the current study. Inspired by the findings, the high school teachers and university instructors might rethink their teaching methods and instructional techniques in an attempt to adjust themselves to more recent approaches such as LCE. By way of doing so, they can hope to bring about more self-directed learning and higher levels of involvement, which may in turn help improve educational outcomes. Students in these contexts may also benefit from the findings by achieving increasing awareness of and familiarity with the techniques and tenets of LCE, and developing their problem solving and critical thinking skills. However, to set the scene for a better practice of LCE, changes must also be applied in the educational infrastructures, including the curricula, teaching resources as well as teaching methods prescribed for teachers by the ministries of education and higher education. In this regard, and in view of the sluggish educational reforms occurring in third world and developing countries, including Iraq, perhaps LCE prospect may look more aspiring provided that the new generation of teachers act as the agents of change and convince the policy-makers and educational administrators of the dire need for this reform.

It must be noted that like all other studies in the field of humanities and social sciences, the current research also suffered from a number of limitations. One of the principal limitations was the difficulty of recruiting and convincing a sufficient number of participants to take part in the study. Though the researchers succeeded in finding the needed participants, future researchers might be advised to think about the desirability of larger samples which may help raise the generalizability of the findings. The second limitation facing the researchers was lack of a reliable scale for gauging the participants' perceptions of LCE implementation techniques. Though the current scale was developed based on the available literature on the topic, and attempts were made to cater for its reliability, future interested researchers are recommended to replicate the study with the researchers' devised questionnaire or other similar tools to help further validate the scale, and come up with more conclusive results. The other major limitation of the current research was the inaccessibility and insufficiency of articles and resources related to LCE, which shows further research in this area is highly required to move toward more generalizable upshots. The last limitation ensues from the researchers' failure to substantiate the findings related to utilized techniques for LCE implementation with the qualitative data. In other words, the qualitative findings were only reported for the last research question, while the researchers could have drawn on the qualitative data to support the findings obtained for the first five questions. This limitation might also be addressed by the future researchers who may choose to replicate the current probe. Finally, though the current scrutiny might be regarded as a step forward toward filling in the gaps in studies on LCE, a lot more research is needed to shed more light on this underresearched domain.

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Authors' contributions

The first author (Zainab Yaseen Shakir) was responsible for data collection and writing up the first draft of the paper. The second author (Dr. Parviz Alavinia), as the supervisor of the first author's doctoral dissertation, was in charge of different steps in the study, including research conceptualization, screening the whole process of conducting the investigation, data analysis, as well as revising and proofreading the article.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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