

## **Strategies for Shifting Teaching in UNRWA Schools in Palestine from Teacher-Centered to Student-Centered**

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### **Abstract:**

This study explored the experiences of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) school principals in the West Bank who participated in education reform (2011 - 2015). In response to the 2022 UNRWA Classroom Observation Study, this study examined strategies for shifting education teacher-centered to student-centered teaching methods using the descriptive qualitative methodology. The research interviewed fifteen principals with over five years of experience, and observed four classrooms. The findings highlighted the need for professional development, peer observations, monitoring, recourses, student support, teacher capacity building and accountability. Achieving a sustainable transition requires long-term stakeholder commitment. The researcher recommended further studies on long-term impacts and greater involvement of education specialists and area education officers for comprehensive reform.

**Keywords:** Student-centered, Teacher-fronted, UNRWA Education Reform, School Principal.



## استراتيجيات تحويل التعليم في مدارس الأونروا في فلسطين من التدريس القائم على المعلم إلى التدريس المتمركز حول الطالب

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### ملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى بحث تجارب مديري مدارس الأونروا في إقليم الضفة الغربية والذين شاركوا في برامج اصلاح التعليم الخاص بالأونروا بين عامي 2011 و2015. وجاءت الدراسة استجابةً لتوصيات دراسة الأونروا للمشاهدات الصفية عام 2022 والتي خلصت إلى أن معظم وقت الحصة الدراسية في مدارسها ما زال متمركزاً حول المعلم. لتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي النوعي، إذ شملت الدراسة مقابلات مع خمسة عشر مدير مدرسة بأكثر من خمس سنوات خبرة، وأربع مشاهدات صفية. خلصت الدراسة إلى أهمية التطوير المهني، وتبادل الخبرات، والرصد المستمر، وتوفير الموارد، ودعم الطلبة، وتعزيز كفاءة المعلمين، والمساءلة. يتطلب تحقيق التغيير المستدام التزاماً طويل الأمد من جميع الأطراف لذلك، أوصت الباحثة بمزيد من البحث حول الآثار طويلة المدى وإشراك المختصين التربويين لتعزيز الإصلاح الشامل.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** إصلاح التعليم في الأونروا، مركز على الطالب، وموجه نحو المعلم، ومدير المدرسة.

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## **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental right, and student-centered approaches are increasingly emphasized over traditional teacher-centered methods. At UNRWA schools, adopting these approaches fosters student engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration. This shift involves training educators and creating interactive learning environments to enhance academic performance and future readiness. However, challenges like limited resources and teacher availability persist. Effective implementation requires targeted support, long-term planning, and professional development to ensure inclusive, high-quality education for refugee children while addressing structural barriers (UNRWA, Classroom Observation Study 2022, 2023).

## **Context of UNRWA**

UNRWA is the primary service provider for Palestine refugees across five regions (Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan, West Bank, and Syria). In the West Bank, it offers basic education (grades 1–9) to over 45,000 students in 96 schools (2023/2024).

From 2011 to 2015, UNRWA implemented an ‘Education Reform Strategy’ focusing on teacher development, curriculum, assessment, inclusive education, and data management. To evaluate its impact, UNRWA periodically conducts assessments like the ‘Classroom Observation Study’. The 2022 study found that, despite efforts to promote student-centred learning, teacher-fronted methods still dominate.

This paper presents school principals' perspectives on shifting teaching practices toward student-centred approaches, considering the 2022 study findings and four classroom observations. Using UNRWA’s frequency observation tool, the study highlights the need to support teachers in effectively applying student-centred methods.

## **Rationale**

The 2022 ‘Classroom Observation Study’ highlights the need to support teachers in effectively adopting student-centred practices. Shifting from teacher-led instruction to active student engagement fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Teachers become facilitators, guiding students through interactive learning strategies such as group work, inquiry-based learning, and technology integration.

Professional development, structured observations, and feedback are crucial for improving classroom practices. Principals play a key role in fostering innovation by providing resources and monitoring progress, while

education specialists design training programs. Decision-makers influence policies and budgets to support this shift (Louis, 2015; Importance of Teaching Techniques, 2024).

Building on findings of the 2022 study, this research explores practical strategies and principal-driven recommendations for further enhancing the implementation of student-centred learning to ensure effective implementation and sustainable improvements in UNRWA schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the growing emphasis on student-centered learning, there remain significant gaps in research. One major gap is the lack of longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impact of student-centered approaches on non-academic outcomes, such as critical thinking, creativity, and social development (Tawfik, A.A., Reeves, T.D., Stich, A. E., Gill, A., Hong, H. Y. & Pilutla, V.S, 2021). Additionally, much of the existing research is context-specific and lacks generalizability across different educational systems and cultural settings (Lee, E., Hannafin, M. J., 2016). Another significant limitation is the insufficient focus on the challenges and barriers of implementing student-centered learning in under-resourced schools. Factors like large class sizes, limited access to technology, and inadequate teacher training can hinder effective adoption (Vanderlinde, R., & van Braak, J., 2010).

Furthermore, there is a scarcity of empirical studies comparing the effectiveness of specific student-centered strategies and their adaptability to diverse student populations (Strobel, J., & Van Barneveld, A., 2009). Addressing these gaps in the literature is essential for providing a more nuanced understanding of student-centered practices and for guiding educators in effectively integrating these approaches into their teaching.

Therefore, the problem of this study can be identified in the existence of shortcomings in suggesting concrete actionable strategies for UNRWA teachers to better implement the student-centered approaches in the light of the school principals' views as supervisors and core supporters to the teachers.

### **Purpose and Questions of the Study**

This qualitative study presents the perceptions of fifteen experienced UNRWA school principals of the West Bank Field, focusing on their visions into effective interventions for transitioning UNRWA teachers' instructional practices and time allocation in the classes from traditional teacher-fronted approaches to student-centered pedagogies. The aim of this

research is to identify and evaluate practical interventions that facilitate this transition within the context of UNRWA schools, ensuring a sustainable shift towards student engagement and active learning.

### **Main Question:**

This study aims at finding actions that can be implemented to facilitate a shift from teacher-fronted instructional approaches to student-centered pedagogies, by answering the following sub questions:

### **Sub questions:**

1. In what ways can educators effectively implement student-centered methodologies within the classroom environment?
2. How can the integration of technology and digital learning platforms contribute to the enrichment of student-centered instructional practices?
3. What strategies and tools can teachers employ to reinforce the effectiveness of their assessment techniques?
4. How can school principals provide support and encouragement to teachers in the implementation of student-centered approaches within their classrooms?
5. In what capacity can education specialists and strategic support units offer assistance in promoting and facilitating student-centered learning initiatives?
6. How can decision-makers within the educational program actively facilitate the adoption and long-term sustainability of student-centered instructional practices?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study stems from its subject, shifting to student-centered approaches; it is hoped that the following parties would benefit from its results:

- UNRWA school principals and the education supervisors who are aware of the significance of practising student-centered approaches to foster student engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration; thus, enhancing the learning outcomes of the students.
- UNRWA decision makers and decision takers to sustain the shift toward student engagement and active learning, thus sustain the education reform objectives.
- Researchers and educators in the educational field.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Student-centered learning (SCL)** is an educational approach that emphasizes active participation and responsibility of students in their

- own learning process. This paradigm shifts the focus from the teacher to the learner, allowing students to influence what and how they learn, fostering autonomy and engagement (O'Neill, G., & McMahon, T, 2005).
- **Teacher-fronted learning** refers to traditional instructional settings where the teacher directs the classroom activities, often characterized by lecture-based delivery and limited student interaction. This approach positions the teacher as the primary source of knowledge, with students typically adopting passive roles (Garton, 2012).
  - **UNRWA Education Reform:** The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) initiated an Education Reform Strategy aimed at enhancing the quality of education for Palestinian refugees. This reform focuses on improving teaching and learning practices, curriculum development, and capacity building to ensure equitable and quality education (UNRWA, Education reform, 2024).
  - **School Principal:** A school principal is the head of the school staff, responsible for designing and implementing the school's educational strategies. This role encompasses overseeing daily operations, managing staff, setting academic goals, and fostering a conducive learning environment. Principals play a pivotal role in shaping school culture and ensuring the institution's overall effectiveness (Bawinilie J.M.; Prudence, M., 2023).

### **Proof of Literature**

The teaching and learning process is defined as a dynamic interaction between teachers and students, where knowledge is constructed rather than merely transferred. Modern educational research emphasizes that effective teaching goes beyond mere knowledge delivery; it requires creating an engaging, interactive, and student-centered learning environment (Freire, 1970).

Traditionally, teaching was dominated by teacher-fronted instruction, where educators played the central role in knowledge dissemination, while students were passive recipients. However, there is a growing shift towards student-centered pedagogies, which emphasize active learning, critical thinking, and student autonomy (Weimer, 2013).

Students today expect their instructors to be cooperative, engaging, and capable of delivering clear explanations through relevant examples. According to Deci and Ryan's (2000) Self-Determination Theory, when

students are given autonomy in their learning process, their intrinsic motivation and engagement levels increase. Research suggests that active student engagement leads to deeper understanding and improved learning outcomes (Prince, 2004).

Munna, and Kalam (2021) argued that ensuring inclusive education in curriculum design and assessment is essential for improving teaching effectiveness. They highlighted that student-centered pedagogies accommodate diverse learning styles, allowing for a more personalized and equitable educational experience. These pedagogies provide an analytical approach to education that not only enhances teachers' understanding of instruction but also improves students' ability to retain and apply knowledge (Munna, A.S. and Kalam, M.A, 2021).

Similarly, Hattie and Zierer (2019) emphasized that transitioning from traditional to student-centered teaching is crucial for making learning more visible. Their research on visible learning suggests that the way students interact with peers and teachers significantly affects their learning opportunities. This shift enhances student engagement, fosters a growth mindset, and encourages collaborative learning. (Hattie, J. and Zierer, K, 2019)

Moreover, research indicated that teachers' ability to adapt their teaching styles is crucial for promoting student-centered learning, especially in diverse classrooms. Effective adaptation requires ongoing professional development, collaboration among educators, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017)

Thus, students' learning outcomes are largely dependent on the type of pedagogy also on the learning environment within the classroom. Halim, & Wahid (2018) explained that classroom observation is a key tool for providing teachers with constructive feedback, enabling them to refine their instructional strategies. Effective feedback mechanisms promote reflective teaching practices, helping educators transition toward student-centered approaches. Additionally, classroom observation fosters collaboration among colleagues to enhance teaching practices and student learning (Halim, S. Walid, R. & Halim, T., 2018).

Tang (2023) argued that student-centered approach in teaching and learning or student-centered instruction has been a dominant theme in modern education. In this approach, teachers shift from being the sole knowledge providers to facilitators who guide students in constructing their own understanding (Burner, 1961). This transformation places responsibility

on students to actively engage with content, critically analyze information, and apply knowledge to real-world contexts (Tang, 2023).

On other hand Elhashash (2022) suggested that, teaching techniques should be viewed as an integrated system that includes a materials, tools, and educational instructional strategies that facilitate the concept comprehension (Elhashash, 2022). Student-centered methodologies, such as inquiry-based learning and project-based learning, provide frameworks for fostering deeper student engagement and independent problem-solving skills (Hmelo-Silver, Duncan, & Chinn, 2007).

The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (Talis, 2009) examined the role of school leaders in supporting teachers' professional development. (Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environment: First Result from Talis, 2009). Findings suggested that when teachers receive ongoing professional training in student-centered pedagogies, their instructional effectiveness improves significantly. Additionally, student-centered approaches contribute to lifelong learning skills, adaptability, and knowledge retention (Freeman et al., 2014).

The importance of student-centered education cannot be overstated, as it shifts learning from passive reception to active participation. Constructivist learning theories emphasize that knowledge is best acquired through exploration, discussion, and hands-on experience. Research has demonstrated that student-centered learning enhances problem-solving skills, analytical thinking, and creativity (Tanner, 2013). Moreover, this pedagogical approach has been associated with higher student motivation and engagement levels, leading to better academic outcomes (Prince, 2004); (Freeman, S., Eddy, S. L., McDonough, M., Smith, M. K., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M. P., 2014).

According to a study by the National Research Council (2000), when students actively engage in there are more likely to retain and apply knowledge effectively. Student-centered learning also accommodates diverse cognitive and learning styles, making education more inclusive and responsive to individual needs (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) (How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School: Expanded Edition, 2000).

By prioritizing the needs and interests of students, educators can create a more adaptive and innovative learning environment that fosters lifelong learning skills.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

**This study utilizes the qualitative descriptive analytical**



**methodology to attain the objective stated as it aims at** finding actions that can be implemented to facilitate a shift from teacher-fronted instructional approaches to student-centered pedagogies at UNRWA schools in the West Bank.

### **Setting**

The study sample was selected using nondiscriminatory snow-ball sampling in April-May of 2024. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants. The participants were recruited in accordance to two criteria; having been in school principal position for at least 5 years and having participated in 'Reform education program "The 'Education Reform Strategy' which was implemented by UNRWA completely transformed all aspects of education across UNRWA schools, hence, principal familiarity with it was a selection criterion. Additionally, for randomly selected UNRWA elementary and preparatory (two each) schools in the West Bank were included to ensure diverse subject and grade representation for classroom observations. The research conducted these observations us the UNRWA's classroom observation tool to assess teaching practices.

### **Population of the Study**

Fifteen school principals participated in this study having met the selection criteria. Ten of the participants were females. Experience as principals ranged from 5 to 21 years. Participants were not exclusive to a given UNRWA area of operations. All participants were familiar with 'Reform' strategies and participated in the program 'Leading for the Future'. The identity of the participants was exclusive to the researcher.

The first participant was chosen by the researcher having been identified as a candidate for the study. Following their interview, the participant was asked to nominate two principals that meet the selection criteria. One of nominated principals was then selected by the researcher and interviewed. This was repeated until saturation resulting in twelve total participants.

Additionally, four teachers were observed as part of the classroom observations conducted by the researcher. Two were female and two were male teachers, randomly selected by the school principals. The selection criterion required that the teachers represented diverse teaching experiences and instructional approaches to ensure a balanced understanding of classroom practices. These observations allowed for a comparative analysis between reported perspectives from principals and actual classroom dynamics, providing a more comprehensive evaluation of the shift towards

student-centered pedagogies.

### **Data collection**

Virtual semi-structured interviews with study participants were conducted. The selected software for conducting interviews was Microsoft TEAMS. Interviews were recorded in video and audio form and initially transcribed in Arabic before being translated into English.

Translated transcriptions were input into Atlas Ti version 7.5.7 for coding. Atlas Ti was selected following experimenting with various qualitative analysis software including nVivo and QDAS. The raw English transcripts were cleaned and divided into sections based on the questions posed by the researcher. For data validation, another round of analysis was conducted manually using excel spread sheet. The raw data was entered, transcripts were cleaned, then coded and sub-coded. Themes and sub-themes were generated. The resulting answers were summarized and cleaned prior to final coding.

In addition to the interviews, four supplementary classroom observations were conducted by the researcher to provide further contextual insights into instructional practices. These observations were carried out using the same standardized frequency observation tool employed in the 2022 Classroom Observation Study. The selected classrooms represented a diverse range of subjects and grade levels to ensure a comprehensive assessment of teaching practices. The findings from these observations were integrated into the study to support and validate the themes emerging from the interview data.

The observational data was analyzed using Atlas.ti version 7.5.7, following a systematic coding approach similar to the interview analysis. Observations were transcribed and categorized based on key indicators such as teacher-student interaction, instructional methods, and classroom engagement levels. Additionally, quantitative frequency analysis was conducted to measure the proportion of teacher-fronted versus student-centered activities. This structured analysis provided a more objective assessment of pedagogical practices and complemented the qualitative insights derived from the interviews.

### **Validation and Reliability**

To ensure validity, two expert raters - native Arabic speakers and fluent in English - were responsible for data and tool validation. The raters were provided with Arabic and English transcripts and audio recording of the interviews taking into account participant anonymity. Transcripts were

accepted after being approved by each of the raters separately as acceptable representation of the interviews.

Regarding reliability, the UNRWA classroom observation tool was used, as it has been previously validated and employed in formal studies by UNRWA, ensuring its consistency and credibility in assessing teaching practices.

## **Results and Discussion**

This specific sample was chosen as it represents vital individuals to education processes. In addition to being principals and in managerial roles, the interviewed participants are most capable of answering questions regarding education whether it confirms the existence of resources, the lack of strategies, or the improvement potential in the practices and approaches of teachers.

All fifteen interviews were fully completed by documenting answers to each of the six research sub questions. Total interview time was 660min with an average of 55min per interview. The number of primary codes was 93. These were initially divided into six groups; one for each of the research sub-questions. This sorting enabled the identification of both general and problem-specific themes.

To supplement the qualitative interview findings, the researcher conducted four additional classroom observations using the same standardized frequency observation tool employed in the 2022 Classroom Observation Study. These observations allowed for a comparative analysis of self-reported perspectives versus actual classroom practices, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the transition to student-centered learning.

### **1. In what ways can educators effectively implement student-centered methodologies within the classroom environment?**

#### **– Theme 1: Focus on Students Needs and Encourage Students for Learning**

Focus should be directed to the needs of students including working on their personalities, emotional and social needs, promoting a dialogue relationship with them.

*SP1: "We need to work on the student first, his/her personality, motivation, individual needs".*

*SP (11): "We have to believe in our students. If teachers trust that their students are capable and encourage them, that belief itself can drive motivation. Simple things like integrating interactive learning tools or*

*making lessons more relatable can make a huge difference."*

*SP (14): "Motivation is key. If students don't see the value in what they're learning, they won't put in the effort. Using real-life examples, interactive activities, and encouraging curiosity makes learning more meaningful."*

Findings from Classroom Observation 3 (English Language, Grade 5) further support these perspectives. The lesson, which was heavily student-centered, engaged students in a storytelling activity where they created alternative endings, demonstrating high levels of enthusiasm and interaction. This suggests that when teachers implement creative student-centered methodologies, engagement significantly improves.

Incentives for students was also mentioned by SPs as a means towards encouraging the students to learn. Active learning such as the integration of blended learning, digital games, or applying drama (Young Teacher) strategy could enhance the students' motivation to learning. Teachers are requested to believe in their students' capabilities.

– **Theme 2: Addressing Teachers' resistance to Change, Their Needs, and Self-Efficacy**

Eleven out of fifteen SPs stressed the need to work on the teachers' resistance to change as one of the major issues for enhancing the teachers practice in the classroom. The teachers still tend to apply the traditional ways of teaching either because they are convinced that the traditional approaches are the best or as they resort to the easy approach.

*SP (2): "The teacher is adamant that they are the center of the teaching-learning approach. The traditional approaches for teaching- and learning are the best".*

*SP (15): "Teachers need a support system. If they have opportunities to learn from each other, share experiences, and reflect on their teaching practices, they'll be more willing to make adjustments."*

A key insight from Classroom Observation 1 (Mathematics, Grade 6) revealed that 75% of the lesson was teacher-led, with minimal student interaction beyond responding to direct questions. This aligns with SPs' concerns about resistance to change, as many teachers still rely on teacher-fronted instruction despite training in student-centered pedagogies.

**Teachers' Needs:**

A further element the SPs pointed out was the need to build the capacities of the teachers through providing them with new techniques on student-centered approaches especially for the newly appointed teachers or

the daily-paid ones. Education specialists could also support through conducting specialized workshops. Exchanging useful practices amongst teachers both on the school or area level could also support the change of teachers' practices.

### **Self-Efficacy:**

Additionally, promoting the self-esteem of the teachers emerged as another element of the teacher's needs. Acknowledging the performance of the outstanding teachers is believed to encourage them to maintain their achievements. This will also encourage others to follow suit. Rewards, incentives, and spreading the exceptional practices of the teachers through various means amongst teachers and by the support staff (ES and SSUs) will have a good impact on all.

*SP (8): "Encouraging the good practice, with at least a certificate of their outstanding performance. Have an influence and would make a change."*

*SP (7): "To concentrate on specific bits in the lesson. To sit with the teacher after the classroom practices, and show the teachers that the SP was focused and saw all the techniques and approaches used in the classroom and not only give a summative assessment or an overall evaluation of the lesson."*

This coincides with some of the main characteristics of student-centered practices as identified in the report of the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (Reif, G.; Shultz, G.,)

## **2. How can the integration of technology and digital learning platforms contribute to the enrichment of student-centered instructional practices?**

### **– Theme 3: Schools' Infrastructure and Digitizing the Learning Process.**

Responses to this given question were similar in identifying technology as a key factor in enhancing ICT-based teaching. Specifically, tablets and smartboards were mentioned as essential tools for supporting interactive learning. In addition, electronic assessment, reducing paper load, and providing potential for more extracurricular activities.

In order to do so, all schools should be provided with the means needed for digital learning. Equal resources should be offered to all schools as variations amongst still exist.

*SP (5): "Not all schools have the resources in all the classrooms such as the smart boards. Having mobile smart boards will give the teachers the*

*opportunity to apply students centered strategies in a better way”*

*SP (13): "Technology isn't just a tool; it's a bridge between students and knowledge. When used correctly, it can make lessons more interactive and help students take control of their learning."*

Classroom Observation 2 (Science, Grade 8) showed partial implementation of student-centered learning, where students were divided into small groups for a hands-on experiment. However, some groups struggled with task comprehension and relied on teacher intervention. This indicates that while digital learning tools and hands-on methods can enrich instruction, structured training on integrating these tools effectively is necessary.

Also, it was unanimously agreed that digitizing the learning and teaching process will best promote the student-centered approach. Yet, have to be habituated to using technology in their teaching.

### **3. What strategies and tools can teachers employ to reinforce the effectiveness of their assessment techniques?**

#### **Theme 4: Authentic assessment**

The importance of the availability of tools and material that aid in reinforcing formative assessment techniques was the main theme apparent in the answers. Tools were mentioned as readily available through the UNRWA Reform Programme, specifically SBTDI, SBTDII, and the Leading for the Future (LfiF) classroom observations and monitoring were identified as essential techniques to assist teachers.

*SP (13): "Assessment should be about learning, not just measuring. When we use real-world tasks and performance-based assessments, we get a better understanding of what students actually know and can do."*

*SP (14): "Teachers have plenty of assessment tools available, but the challenge is using them effectively. Regular training and practical workshops can help them apply these tools in ways that truly benefit students."*

*SP (15): "Feedback is as important as assessment itself. If students don't understand their mistakes or how to improve, the assessment loses its purpose. We need to focus more on constructive feedback rather than just scores."*

Classroom Observation 4 (Social Studies, Grade 7) revealed challenges in implementing formative assessment, as students had difficulty managing group discussions and staying on task. This highlights the need for professional development in assessment techniques that align with student-centered learning.

Furthermore, capacity building on the integration of assessment tools especially authentic assessment was proposed as by seven out of fifteen school principals.

**4. How can school principals provide support and encouragement to teachers in the implementation of student-centered approaches within their classrooms?**

**– Theme 5: Mentoring and accountability**

The main themes present in answers to this question were **activities, strengthening accountability, and incentives**. Workshops, refresher training, and exchange visits were repeatedly mentioned as activities by which principals can provide support. In addition, continuous monitoring and accountability strengthening through the teachers' practices.

All interviewed SPs confirmed they conduct planned classroom observation annually, with additional quick informal visits to monitor the schools in general. This action is part of the SPs roles and responsibilities as identified in the LfF reform document. Yet, some of the SPs noted that although the short and quick observations reflect the actual setting of the teachers' practice in the classroom, they cannot evaluate the performance based on them. Therefore, they mentioned the complementarity of the ES's roles and the need to give them partial percentages for evaluating the practice of the teacher collectively with the SPs.

*SP (4): "The tools for monitoring and assessing the teachers practices in the classrooms are available such as (classroom observation tools (pre, during and post) with indicators to assess)" "Lack of outside monitoring not only from the school itself, is one of the factors that influenced the students' practices and could thus make the change."*

*SP (13): "Being a principal isn't just about managing a school—it's about being a mentor. Teachers need guidance, feedback, and encouragement to confidently implement student-centered teaching."*

Nine SPs out of the fifteen interviewed raised concerns about the accountability in the Agency. They see that accountability is not well practiced, and therefore related this issue as a core aspect for changing the perception and practices of the teachers to student-centered. They also noted that importance of applying accountability collectively and holistically within the education program.

*SP (3): "Accountability and thorough monitoring are essential for changing the teachers practices which should be applied not only through the SPs but with the support of the rest of the education cadre (AEO, ES and*

Units) ”.

*SP (9): “The SP and the ES should conduct the visits without previous notification ”.*

*SP (14): "Accountability should be seen as a way to improve, not just to evaluate. When teachers feel supported rather than judged, they'll be more willing to experiment with new teaching approaches."*

Observations 1 and 4 revealed that classroom management and engagement levels varied significantly across subjects, suggesting that ongoing principal mentorship and accountability measures could help standardize student-centered teaching across different disciplines.

Identifying the professional needs of the teachers is usually discussed with the teachers at the beginning of each year, SPs consequently prepare workshops and trainings to assist the teachers based on their needs. Peer visits with other colleagues in the school is conducted also for exchanging the experiences among the teachers. Usually, the experienced teachers were selected by the SPs to assist their peers in sharing information and interchanging the best techniques as student centered practices in the classrooms. This approach could be invested in all the schools with a request from the education program.

*SP (6): “The SP support the teachers through the classroom observation, then through the peers learning, or microlearning, or through a research-based assignments”.*

One SP also raised a point of the need to have a role in recruiting and hiring the daily paid teachers. This point although not mentioned by the other SPs interviewed, the researcher found that an important point to be further discussed within the Education Programme decision making level. The voice of the SPs as the research think, is essential in the close monitoring and evaluation of the practices in the classrooms.

*SP (4): “SPs to have a role in choosing the daily paid teachers”.*  
*“Hiring teachers who love teaching (love the profession) have the energy to give”.*

## **5. In what capacity can education specialists and strategic support units offer assistance in promoting and facilitating student-centered learning initiatives?**

Similar to the support provided by principals, ongoing monitoring and experience exchange activities were further emphasized as Education Specialists (ES) and Support Units (SUs) roles. However, it was clear that principals understood the main setting of ES as within the classroom while SU provided support outside the school boundary.



SP (14): *"Support units should work closely with teachers to identify challenges and find practical solutions. Their role shouldn't just be about supervision—it should be about collaboration."*

The ES's contribution to the support of the teachers at the school level coincides mainly with the SPs type of support. Therefore, the SP's inputs in supporting the teachers were significantly similar to their support, yet they provided concrete examples to do so.

#### **6. How can decision-makers within the educational program actively facilitate the adoption and long-term sustainability of student-centered instructional practices?**

Reduction of daily paid teachers was mentioned as a hindrance to sustainability. In addition, reducing the workload of teachers, updating the reform material or providing summaries of the materials available.

The decision to group coded answers by each of the sub-questions helped identify common responses agreed on by the participants. Such similarities reflected important ideas, observations, tools and problems. A clear example of complete agreement was the principles' expression on the availability of Reform materials.

SP (2): *"The number of daily paid teachers is high in some schools".*

SP (5): *A good number of teachers in schools are daily paid teachers. The fluctuation in the contract types might hinder the sustainability of the reform strategies".*

SP (13): *"If we want real change, we need to address teacher workload. A teacher who is overwhelmed with administrative tasks will struggle to focus on improving their teaching methods."*

Findings from all four classroom observations confirm that student-centered methodologies require consistent implementation and support. Decision-makers should consider policy reforms that address teacher workload, infrastructure disparities, and ongoing professional development to sustain pedagogical improvements.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study highlights the ongoing challenges UNRWA schools face in transitioning from teacher-fronted to student-centered pedagogies. Despite past reform efforts and increased training, many teachers continue to rely on traditional methods due to ingrained habits, inconsistent professional development, and limited resources. Although school principals and supervisors play a crucial role in facilitating this transition, they require stronger structural support, clearer accountability measures, and enhanced

teacher motivation strategies.

To achieve meaningful and sustainable change, UNRWA is recommended to focus on the following key strategies:

1. Targeted Professional Development: Provide continuous, practical training in student-centered methodologies, such as inquiry-based and cooperative learning, while integrating digital tools to enhance engagement.
2. Structured Peer Mentoring: Establish peer observation programs where experienced teachers mentor their colleagues, fostering collaboration and shared best practices.
3. Enhanced Accountability Mechanisms: Implement a transparent teacher evaluation system involving both school principals and education specialists to ensure consistent application of student-centered teaching methods.
4. Improved Infrastructure and Resource Allocation: Ensure equitable distribution of essential digital tools, such as smartboards and tablets, to facilitate interactive learning environments.
5. Sustainable Policy Reforms: Reduce teachers' administrative workload, allowing them to focus more on lesson planning, student engagement, and effective instructional strategies.

By implementing these measures, UNRWA can create a more engaging and student-centered learning experience. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these interventions while incorporating perspectives from students and education policymakers to ensure a holistic and effective transformation.

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