Student-centered teaching in private higher education institutions in Egypt

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The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN EGYPT

A Thesis Submitted to the

Public Policy and Administration Department

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Administration

By

Soha Sayed Abdelhady Aly

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to learn. And that learning is a life-long, challenging and restless process, but that is also rewarding and enlightening.
STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING IN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN EGYPT
Soha Sayed Abdelhady Aly
Supervised by Dr Artan Karini

Abstract

This study aims at assessing to which extent the teaching approach in private higher education institutions in Egypt employs a student-centered approach from the perceptions of students. This is to review the quality of teaching at those institutions which were originally established to contribute to overcoming the poor-quality issues of the Egyptian higher education sector. As Egypt still ranks very late in global higher education competitiveness, it is important to understand how those institutions are employing student-centered teaching to enhance quality of teaching and equip graduates with problem solving and critical thinking skills. A qualitative methodology was used through conducting fifteen in-depth interviews with undergraduate and graduate students from three foreign-affiliated private universities in Egypt. For conceptual clarity, the study used a framework developed by Weimer (2002, 2013) that provides five key dimensions for the student-centered teaching which are: 1) the role of the teacher; 2) the balance of power in the classroom; 3) the function of content; 4) the responsibility for learning; 5) the student-centered evaluation. The findings suggest that generally there is a lack of using such student-centered approach in private universities in Egypt as teachers were hardly to be perceived as facilitators, but rather largely depended on traditional lecturing and provided no or minimum room for discussions which mostly failed to engage students. This was also associated with clear control by teachers over the classroom environment, lack of interactions with students and lack of using feedback and self and peer-assessment. Thus, in some dimensions of teaching, student-centered features were evident as in using open-ended assignments, the practical nature of assignments using group projects and some teachers’ characteristics that encouraged students to assume responsibility for learning as consistency and deep knowledge of the subjects. Those institutions are therefore recommended to strategically plan and implement the shift towards a more student-centered approach that should enhance the teaching quality and skills acquired by graduates.

Keywords: Private universities; quality of teaching; student-centered teaching; perceptions of students; role of teacher, function of content; balance of power; responsibility for learning; student-centered evaluation
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**List of Acronyms**

ACU: Ahram Canadian University

ADB: Asian Development Bank

AUC: The American University in Cairo

BUE: British University in Egypt

GUC: German University in Cairo

IDSC: Information and Decision Support Centre

HEIs: Higher Education Institutions

MSA: Modern Sciences and Arts University

MoHE: The Ministry of Higher Education

OECD: The Organization for Cooperation and Development

PHE: Private Higher Education

PHEIs: Private Higher Education Institutions

PU1: Private University 1

PU2: Private University 2

PU3: Private University 3

SCU: Supreme Council for Universities
Chapter 1: Introduction

Egypt is still struggling with higher education quality issues. In the 2014–15 Global Competitiveness Report, Egypt was ranked 111 out of 144 in terms of higher education and training competitiveness (Asaad, et al., 2016, Shwab, 2014). The establishment of private higher education institutions (PHEIs) was historically both in Egypt and on the global context associated with responding to higher education quality issues (Assad, et al., 2016; OECD & World Bank; 2010; Buckner, 2017; Barsoum; 2017). As by the 1980s, governments in developing countries were unable to maintain the quality of public services including higher education, the new public management theories called for an increased role of the private sector (Hood, 1995; Osborne & McLaughlin, 2002). As a result, PHEIs were legalized and have been since then largely expanding (Varghese, 2006, Levy; 2009, 2010, 2011; Bjarnason et al., 2009). Egypt legalized the establishment of private higher education (PHE) in 1992 and the number of private universities reached 19 in 2011 (IDSC, 2017). It is then important to understand how far the quality at those institutions responds to the urgent needs of developing the sector that still underlies major quality challenges.

This study is therefore seeking to understand how far PHEIs in Egypt are employing student-centered (also known as learner-centered1) teaching approach which supports improving the quality at those institutions and eventually enhance their role in contributing to Egypt higher education development. Expanding the role of student-centered teaching to improve the quality of higher education has been advocated by international agencies working on higher education reforms in the developing countries (Schweisfurth, 2011; Smith, & Hudson, 2016). Such approach is perceived also as one of the best practices in higher education that should support students to acquire the needed skills not only for the job market, but also to the life-long learning process (see for example Doyle, 2011; Deboer, 2002; Huba & Fred, 2000; Felder &

1 The terms student-centered and learner-centered although they may have conceptual differences in the literature, in this thesis they are being used interchangeably.
It encourages the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills that many countries see as essential for economic development (Ginsburg, 2009; Smith, & Hudson, 2016). Private universities globally promote their programmes through employing student-centered teaching and supporting graduates with developing market-tailored and life-long learning skills (OECD & World Bank, 2010; Levy, 2011). In Egypt as well, private universities promote using best global practices including learner-centered teaching and that they aim to equip graduates with acquiring critical thinking and problem solving skills and help them pursue with life-long learning (See for example BUE, 2015; GUC, 2017, BUE, 2017; ACU, 2017).

For this purpose of understanding how far the teaching approach in PHEIs in Egypt is student-centered, the study employs a qualitative approach through exploring the perceptions of students who are the main recipients of teaching. The literature on student-centered teaching informs that students should be at “the centre” of the learning process. It is therefore important to find out how they perceive the teaching approach and how far it meets their needs and expectations and supports their learning development. In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen graduate and undergraduate students from three private universities in Egypt. Data are analyzed systematically using the Grounded Theory and Results are discussed.

The significance of the study comes from filling a gap in the literature on the quality of teaching in such typology of higher education institutions in Egypt that has largely expanded and attracted a large number of students during the past three decades (Asaad, et al., 2016; OECD & World Bank, 2010). This is important to understand to inform policy and decision makers on private higher education in Egypt. The findings should also be useful for understanding more and also developing the competitiveness of such institutions. The study is also timely, given the severity of the quality problem that is still evident in the Egyptian context (Assad, et al., 2016, OECD & World Bank, 2010). Egypt has also developed the 2030 vision in accordance with the United Nations 2030 agenda of Sustainable Development Goals. The vision realizing the current issues highlights the need for the development of the higher education sector and ensuring graduates are creative, responsible and critical thinkers for them to contribute to the country’s economic development (Egypt Vision 2030, 2015). According to El Baradei (2017), building institutions as for example educational institutions is not enough. What
is more important of building structures is having these structures viable for them to contribute to the development goals (El Baradei, 2017). This study therefore aims at assessing quality of teaching approach in private universities in Egypt to support them getting use of global best practices as student-centered teaching. Such approach is perceived to support them improve the quality of their graduates which would contribute to achieving Egypt higher education as well as economic development goals.

1.1.1 The Global Context of Private Higher Education

Although in almost all developing regions PHE has been expanding since the 1980s (Varghese, 2006; Bjarnason, et al., 2009; Varghese, 2006; OECD & World Bank, 2010), there are still major quality issues including quality of teaching facing higher education sectors in many developing regions as Latin America (World Bank, 2017); East and Middle Europe (Galbraith, 2003); Africa, (Goujon, 2017) and MENA region (Assaad, 2016; Altbach & Levy, 2005; ).

During the three decades after the Second World War, public sector dominated higher education (Varghese, 2006, Oketch, 2003; Altbach, 1999). The communism and the celebration of nationalist ideologies in the recently independent countries largely increased this level of public domination. PHE was rarely to exist or to be addressed in public policies (Gvaramadze, 2010; Giesecke, 1999; Altbach & Levy, 2005).

By the 1980s, there was a global shift towards reducing the role of the public sector in general, and the public spending on higher education programmes in particular transferring public resources to lower levels of education (see for example Varghese, 2006; Oketch, 2003; Chae & Hong, 2009; Shah & Nair, 2012). This was associated with new public management theories advocating for major changes in the public sector due to governments deficiencies in delivering services as education (Osborne & McLaughlin, 2002). Governments could not afford the increased relevant costs of higher education facilities in addition to the increased number of students graduated from pre-university education with limited capacity at public universities (Shah & Nair, 2012; Suleiman, et al., 2017; Duraisamy & Duraisamy, 2016; Powell, 2004). By the 1990s, the globalization called for more information and knowledge based market and highly skilled graduates requiring new and changing set of skills and increasing the competition
for students. Diverse institutional arrangements and sources of funding were needed, not only to respond to those challenges, but also to widen access and increase enrollment, which supported the increase of private higher education (Varghese, 2006; Altbach, 1999; Jamshidi, et al., 2012). Those universities were able to provide market-tailored programmes (Levy, 2011) and also the size of students’ body is small with more advanced and student-friendly admission facilities (Otiende, 2006; Barsoum, 2017). By the new century, the high investments in basic and secondary education led to an increase in the number of qualified learners to join higher education. The share of the private sector in higher education was accordingly greater than its share in basic education in both OECD and non-OECD countries (Patrinos & Tan, 2008). By 2010, 30% of global enrollment in higher education was in PHE (Altbach, et al., 2010).

James and Ackerman (1986) distinguish between two development patterns for higher education, which are “excess demand” that exists when governments are unable to provide sufficient supply of higher education to meet social demand which leads to establishment of PHEIs; and “differentiated demand” to respond to the need of special groups in the society through establishing particular types of PHE such as religious institutions or training programs for an area of high employability. Jamshidi et al., (2012) believe that the increase of PHE is a combination of both development patterns and that increase of PHE might be excess demand in developing countries and differentiated demand in developed countries.

The great transformation towards PHE has mostly taken place in developing and transitional economies (Suleiman et. al., 2017, Jamshidi, et al., 2012) with size of PHE in most developed countries below 10% with an exception of Japan, while in developing countries it has grown to have 35% to 60% of total higher education enrolment (Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

Looking at PHE education by region, Asian countries have a longstanding share of PHE and by 2008 came first with largest percentage of PHE (Altbach & Levy, 2005; Bjarnason, et al., 2009, ADB, 2012). Across Asia, 35% of students are enrolled in PHE and about 60% of higher education institutions (HEIs) are private (ADB, 2012, Levy, 2010). Major countries as Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan have over 70% of their students enrolled in PHE (Altbach, 2004; Altbach et al., 2010). By 2013, 58% of Indian students were enrolled in PHE (Duraisamy & Duraisamy, 2016). PHE in China and Hong Kong accounted for 59% of total higher education by 2009 (ADB, 2012). Although PHE in the region largely
increased access to higher education and reduced the load on the government on financing this sector, and despite some private universities in Asia being top ranked, many PHEIs still suffer from poor quality (ADB, 2012; Raza, 2010).

Latin America is also one of the top regions in PHE share. The percentage of PHIs in comparison to public institutions went up from 43% to 50% between 2000 and 2013 (World Bank, 2017). Historically, Latin America started PHE programmes before Asia, as by 1986, its share of the global PHE was reaching 40% (Bjarnason, et al., 2009). By the end of 1990s, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela had at least half of the students enrolled in PHE (Altbach, 1999). As per the World Bank (2017), despite the fast growth of access to higher education in both public and private institutions in Latin America, there is still a lot to do on quality. In North America, the United States is considered the world’s most notable experience of PHE with a stable share of 20% to 25% of total size higher education in the country for decades (Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

In the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, higher education was largely dominated by the government prior to 1990 (Giesecke, 1999, Gvaramadze, 2010). During the 1990s, governments gradually authorized the establishment of PHIS (KlemenČič, & Zgaga, 2014). This was in response to the global neoliberal policies and to overcome the challenges of increased demand on public universities and the lack of job-oriented academic programmes (KlemenČič, & Zgaga, 2014; Giesecke, 1999). Legal reforms followed in different countries of the region to enhance those policies. Thus, the number of PHEIs has largely increased and the number of enrolled students in total was doubled and sometimes tripled. However, the increase in PHEIs number is larger than the increase in number of enrolled students, as a large percentage of students still enroll in private sections of public universities (KlemenČič, & Zgaga, 2014).

In Western Europe, privatization was mainly about introducing changes to the financing and management of public HEIs. Most of the PHEIs have been peripheral. Countries as Belgium and the Netherlands have a large share of PHE but with rules and finance adopting public models. Exceptions to the region are Portugal with 26% share for PHE and Spain with academically prominent PHEIs (Bjarnason, et al., 2009).
PHE in SubSahara and Africa expanded largely during the 1980s and 1990s. Historically, and like other developing regions, after the independence from European colonization, countries were taken pride in having public universities as a symbol of nationalism. The situation changed during the 1990s similarly to other regions also, as public funding of higher education was not only consuming financial resources but also declining access and compromising quality for the sake of equity. By the beginning of the new century, the number of private universities rapidly increased in many African countries, while the number of enrolled students remained less than those at public universities. (Otiende, 2006; Verghese, 2006, Munene, 2009). In East Africa, that has the largest PHE enrollments in the Africa, enrollments in PHE accounted for 28% in Kenya, 27% in Tanzania and 29 in Uganda by 2007 (Munene, 2009). Despite the shift towards more role of PHE in Africa interlinked quality issues are still facing higher education in Africa (Goujon, 2017).

The historical growth of higher education on was also quite similar in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. After the Second World War, and in celebration of the national ideologies for the recently independent countries, higher education was largely public dominated. After the 1980s, and in the name of the global competitiveness and the worldwide model of neoliberal economies, MENA states attempted to increase access to higher education (Romani, 2009; Buckner, 2011). Expanding higher education was considered by Arab countries which were also pressured by international donors as an important mean to integrate graduates into global economy (Kabbani and Salloum, 2009; Buckner, 2011). Jordan was the earliest to legalize private higher education in 1989 and by 2009 about third of Jordanians higher education students were enrolled in private universities (Buckner, 2011). Egypt issued the private universities act in 1992 and the number of private universities has increased from five in 2000 to 19 in 2011 (OECD & World Bank, 2010) and Syria followed in 2001 that by 2011 there was 15 private universities in Syria (Buckner, 2011). Morocco and Tunisia also legalized private higher education in the late 1980s. By 2014, there were 5 private universities in Morocco and many vocational-oriented private institutions. In Tunisia and by 2014, there were 64 PHIs operating in country (Buckner, 2016). Assaad et al., (2016) argue that the increase in PHE size in MENA does not automatically improve quality and that quality of pedagogy in both private and public higher education institutions is still problematic.
1.1.2 Typologies of Private Higher Education Institutions

PHEIs are typically categorized into Elite/Semi-Elite, Religious/Cultural and Non-Elite/Demand-absorbing typologies (Levy, 2003, 2011; Bjarnason, et al., 2009). Elite education is according to Bjarnason, et al., (2009) associated with high quality teaching and leadership, but on the same time has some correlation with socio-economic privileged students’ body. Elite private universities that comply with this definition are rarely to exist outside the United States (Levy, 2003, 2011; Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

The semi-elite private universities category is largely more present around the globe. By definition, it stands between elite and non-elite categories. In many countries, semi-elite private universities are considered nationally elite and if not competing with top public universities would probably be competing with second tier of public HEIs (Bjarnason, et al., 2009, Levy, 2003, 2011). The main features of semi-elite private universities are the entrepreneurial or market-oriented nature of courses such as Business Administration (Levy, 2011) giving priority for good practical teaching over research and attraction of students who could be high tuition fees, but also have good high school academic record (Bjarnason, et al., 2009). Semi-elite private universities also typically take pride in employing quality student-centered teaching (levy, 2011). Semi-elite institutions could seek foreign collaboration to enhance their internationalism. The ownership model is usually business related often with a role of public sector luminaries (Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

Religious institutions who were the pioneers in non-profit private education (Powell, 1987) remain an existing typology of PHEIs with two main changes. The first is the increased mix of religions with Islamic and Evangelic institutions becoming main players. The second is the decline in the focus on religious identity especially outside Muslim countries where religious motive is more to find at top ownership, but much less at professors and students levels (Levy, 2011; Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

The Non-elite/Demand-absorbing category is the fastest growing typology of PHEIs (Levy, 2011, Bjarnason, et al., 2009). This typology provides places for students who could not find place or could not be qualified for public institutions. Therefore, the students are choosing those institutions as they do not have other alternatives. The expansion of such typology has
also been encouraged by lack of regulating frameworks especially when they first appeared. This was more the case in Latin America and Africa than in the Middle East and East Asia. Non-elite PHE are usually labeled in institutions rather than universities (Levy, 2011; Bjarnason, et al., 2009).

1.1.3 Private Higher Education in Egypt

It is important to understand how and why historically PHE emerged in Egypt and expanded to provide sufficient background of the importance of the study problem of addressing the quality of teaching in those institutions, which the study covers in the below section. Although the establishment and expansion of such type of institutions during the 1990s was largely associated with quality issues faced by higher education sector including teaching quality issues, the higher education system of Egypt is still facing major quality issues and falling late in global ranking (OECD & World Bank, 2010; Buckner, 2017; Assaad, et al., 2016). There is still a gap in the literature that assess quality at PHEIs in Egypt as current major players in the sector who should be contributing to its development agenda.

1.1.3.1 Development of Higher Education and Emergence of Private Higher Education in Egypt

Egypt was not isolated from the global changes and approaches that led to the emergence and development of PHE. The Egyptian higher education system is the largest and oldest in the MENA region. In 1952, there were only three public universities in Egypt: Cairo University, Ain Shams University and Alexandria University in addition to the American University in Egypt as a non-profit University and AlAzhar University as a religious affiliated university. The Nasser regime then introduced major legislative reforms that serve the goals of the revolution of social justice and equality. The new law guaranteed free access to higher education to all graduates of secondary schools instituting “Thanwayya Amma” as national secondary education exam for higher education. Same year, another policy guaranteed the right
for employment for higher education graduates (Buckner, 2013; Barsoum, 2017; Cupito & Langsten, 2011).

The nationalist government policies of higher education in Nasser era made it necessary to expand in access to higher education. Assuit University was established in 1957 and seven more universities were opened between 1972 and 1976. During the same era, a system of higher education institutes (two, four and five years of study) was introduced with the aim of reducing the pressure on the public universities. After the middle 1970s, many other universities were introduced to reach 17 in 2006. Also, the number of higher education institutes increased to 52 by 2000 (Cupito & Langsten, 2011). According to SCU (2017), the number of public universities has now reached 24. Enrollments in public universities also highly increased over the second half of the 20th century, from 35,000 in 1951 to almost the double in 1958 and then dramatically increased to reach 508,000 in 1980/1981, then slowed to 700,000 by 1989 and 1,175,000 by the end of the century. It then reached 1,386,000 by 2008 (Cupito & Langsten, 2011).

Despite the increased access to higher education, during the 1970s and 1980s, the quality of higher education deteriorated fast (OECD & World Bank, 2010). This was due to high density of classes, low incentives for teachers of whom many moved to Gulf countries and the rest being highly demotivated. Moreover, curriculums depended on memorizing and did not stimulate any problem-solving or creative-thinking skills. By the 1980s, the job guaranteed regulations were also suspended. Skills of higher education graduates were on the same time not responding to the changing needs of the job market (Richards, 1992; Tyler & Holmes, 2008). The challenging situation of quality of higher education and the policies of the 1990s associated with new public management theories and promoted by major international donors as the World Bank and the IMF supported the government decision to regulate private higher education. In 1992, Law 101 allowed the establishment of private universities (Buckner, 2013; Barsoum, 2017). After the law, four new universities were established in the 1990s, five in 2000 and six other in 2006. In addition to the existing non-elite demand absorbing institutions, the new regulation introduced the semi-elite ranked-universities (OECD & World Bank, 2010).

The number of PHEIs and enrolled students has been increasing over the past two decades. According to IDSC (2017), the number of private universities increased from 4 in the
year 2000 to nineteen in the year 2011 with total enrolled students increasing from 19,056 to 76,243 (almost 3 times) in private universities and by 76% in the American University in Cairo (AUC) as a non-profit university (see figures 1 & 2). Those universities are charging high tuition fees and perceived to target elite and upper-middle classes of the society (Buckner, 2013).

Figure 1: Increased enrollments in private universities in Egypt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000/01</td>
<td>19,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/02</td>
<td>29,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002/03</td>
<td>33,733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>41,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004/05</td>
<td>45,812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/06</td>
<td>48,448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006/07</td>
<td>63,668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>61,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>76,243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: General Administration of Private Universities, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Figure 2: Increased enrollements in the American University in Cairo

Increased number of enrolled students in the American University in Cairo between 2001/2002 - 2011/2012

Source: Annual statistics of HE, Information and Documentation Center, Minister’s Office, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
1.1.3.2 Current Structure and Governance of the Egyptian Education System

The education system of Egypt is divided into basic education, secondary education and higher education in addition to technical and vocational education. Basic education includes six years of primary education and three years of preparatory education guaranteed for all children. Secondary education is designed for preparing students for further studies and for work. Based on their results in preparatory education students either join general secondary schools or technical secondary schools. Study in General schools last for three years and ends with the national exam of Thanwayya Amma which qualifies students for higher education. Technical secondary schools also offer three years of study, and are mainly divided into commercial, agriculture and industrial schools in addition to other types of specialized technical and vocational secondary schools affiliated to multiple entities (OECD & World Bank, 2010).

Higher education is provided in universities and higher and middle institutions. Institutions are divided according to the number years of study into middle institutions that offer 2-year study programmes and higher institutions that offer 4-5 years of study. Colleges affiliated to public and private universities offer 4-6 years of study. Graduates of technical secondary schools join also technical colleges which are affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE). AlAzhar education provides national curriculum, but with further religious Islamic studies and is also divided into basic education of basic and preparatory schools, secondary institutions and AlAzhar university (OECD & World Bank, 2010; EACEA, 2006).

The higher education system in Egypt is very centralized with president of the state enjoying significant roles including the appointment of university heads and the heads of principle entities (OECD & World Bank, 2010). The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) supervises the whole higher education system including public and private universities through planning, policy formulation and quality control. Two entities are outside the authority of MoHE which are AlAzhar University that is affiliated to the Supreme Council of Alzhar and the American University in Cairo that is regulated by a special act as a private non-profit university outside act 101 of 1992 (OECD & World Bank, 2010; EACEA, 2006; Cupito & Langsten, 2011).
Although public and private higher education institutions are under MoHE, their work is organized by different legal frameworks. All public universities are working under act 49 of 1972 and Private universities are regulated under act 101 of 1992. Both public and private universities operate under the Supreme Council for Universities (SCU, 2017).

1.1.4 Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization of higher education is a complex subject that gets more complex with forms of internationalization varying and expanding around the world especially through the three past decades (OECD & World Bank 2010; Altbach and Knight, 2007). The global economy has for the first time invested in knowledge related industries as higher education and training which led to the emergence of the “knowledge society” and how nations are increasingly depending on knowledge products and educated human capital to achieve economic growth (Altbach and Knight, 2007).

While traditionally international efforts of higher education included allowing students to attend university programmes in other countries and being exposed to new culture, the three past decades have witnessed other forms of cross-border education arrangements that involve new, innovative and continuously developing forms of collaboration between educational bodies (OECD & World Bank 2010; Altbach and Knight, 2007). Although traditional internationalization was rarely profit-making focused, the recent trends include economic-interest in increasing profit and maximizing share of student market (Wadhwa, 2016).

Increasing number of universities are establishing links, branches and multiple forms of collaboration with other universities internationally. Example forms of collaboration are offering certain programmes or degrees and having academic centers or branches internationally, franchising degrees and curricula, collaborative ventures and distance learning. The direction of travel is usually from Southern to Northern universities, while more recently South to South initiatives are increasing especially in Asia and Africa (Altbach, 1999; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012; Altbach and Knight, 2007). Private universities around the world take advantage of the internationalization trend to quickly offer imported courses and benefit from best practices. Despite the questions around how quality is measured for such international collaborated programmes and that there is little effort spent on creating new curricula, such
programmes allow private universities to be more responsive to job market needs (Altbach, 1999; OECD & World Bank, 2010; Levy, 2011).

Although HEIs in Egypt have historically been involved in internationalization initiatives, internationalization in Egypt is still marginal. It is more considered as mainstream business and has different types of initiatives in different types of institutions (OECD & World Bank, 2010). The American University in Cairo (AUC) has been operating for over 90 years (Altbach & Knight, 2007; AUC, 2017). The number of foreign collaborated universities have increased after the 1992 law. The Modern Sciences and Arts University (MSA) was established in 1996 in partnership with British Universities (MSA, 2017). The German University in Cairo (GUC) was established in 2002 as a private university in cooperation with the State Universities of Ulm and Stuttgart and under the patronage between MoHE and other governmental Egyptian and German entities (Altbach & Knight, 2007, GUC, 2017). The number of enrolled students has grown from 928 in the academic year 2003/2004 to 10,000 in 2016/2017 (GUC, 2017). The British University in Egypt (BUE) was established in 2004 under 1998 Memorandum of Cooperation between the UK and the Egyptian Government. Number of enrolled students increased from 200 in 2005/2006 to 7763 in 2015/2016 (BUE, 2017). Further foreign affiliated private universities followed such as Ahram Canadian University (ACU) established in 2005 in collaboration with the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) and agreements with other international universities (ACU, 2017). According to the OECD & World Bank report (2010) those different initiatives are mainly driven from the bottom-up through individuals and institutions, while on the government side there appears to be no integrated policy towards internationalization of higher education.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The Egyptian public higher education system has long suffered from rigid teaching approaches that stimulate no problem solving or critical thinking techniques. In such system, students are typically memorizing for the exam and graduate not ready for the job market (OECD & World Bank, 2010; Tyler & Holmes, 2008). According to The Global Competition report of 2014-2015 the quality of higher education is still challenging with Egypt ranking 111 out of 144 on higher education and training (Assaad, et al., 2016; Shwab, 2014). In this study, I attempt to explore the perceptions of the students of PHIs in Egypt on the teaching approaches
in their faculties. This is to review the quality of teaching and assess to what extent the teaching approach in such private universities is different from the challenging situation in public universities. The study focuses on the element of student-centered teaching that should support the development of the students’ skills. Many factors support applying student-centered approach at private universities including: 1) the increased students’ enrollments (Altbach & Levy, 2005, Bjarnason et al., 2009); 2) the smaller student’s body in comparison to public universities (Levy, 2011); 3) the global trend towards supporting the establishment of this typology of institutions to overcome the quality challenges in higher education (OECD & World Bank, 2010; Varghese, 2006, Assaad, et al., 2014).

This study also focuses under private universities on universities that are foreign affiliated. Although this typology of private universities applies more fees, it increasingly attracts a larger number of students. This appears to be a trend and needs therefore to be examined. Bjarnason et al., (2009) explain also that this typology of institutions have the potential for innovation in teaching models, since they need to attract and maintain students who are willing to pay high tuition fees. Additionally, private universities around the world take advantage of the internationalization trend to benefit from best international practices (Altbach, 1999; Levy; 2011). This study aims to understand more about the competitiveness of those universities in the Egyptian higher education market, and in particular, how the teaching there is aligned with the global trend of student-centered learning. This should build the perception on how far those universities are aligning with Egypt vision to develop the higher education sector and provide graduates who are responsible learners and equipped with problem solving and critical thinking skills, which feeds into meeting the needs of the labor market.

1.2.1 Research Question

1.2.1.1 Main Research Question

The research question of this study is “To which extent private universities in Egypt are employing student-centered teaching approach?”

1.2.1.2 Specific Research Questions
Guided by Weimer (2002, 2013) framework for identifying the five key dimensions for student-centered teaching, the sub-questions of this study include:

1. To what extent has the teacher role in such universities changed into a facilitator?
2. What steps do teachers take towards sharing the control of the classroom with their students?
3. What function does the content play in those teachers’ classes?
4. Can the students at those universities be described as responsible learners?
5. To what extent is the evaluation system student-centered?

1.3 Organization of the Study

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides a brief introduction of the purpose and the scope of the study through elaborating on the global and local contexts of PHE and the statement of the problem,

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter aims at exploring the existing literature on student-centered teaching approach and its main dimensions and challenges.

Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

This chapter explains the main conceptual frameworks that guided the researcher in exploring the literature and in data collection and analysis

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter informs of the selected methodology of the study, which is the qualitative methodology, and how it was used by the researcher to design and conduct the research.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter provides the data analysis of the five main themes of student-centered teaching.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations
This chapter provides a summary of the discussed findings and presents recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Student-Centered Teaching: Main Characteristics

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the existing literature on student-centered teaching. The researcher starts by introducing the main advantages of using such an approach versus teacher-centered approach. This is followed by explaining the five key dimensions of Weimer (2002, 2013) framework on student-centered teaching. Then, a brief review of how each of the five dimensions is tackled in the literature is provided. The next subtheme of the chapter discusses the main challenges for implementing such teaching approach. A review of the literature on the perceptions of students of the student-centered teaching is then provided. Finally, the chapter discusses briefly the existing literature on teaching quality in private universities, as the category of higher education institutes discussed in this study and provides a summary of the discussed literature.

Student-centered or Learner-centered approach is a paradigm shift in teaching that has been advocated for in literature as a favorable approach against teaching entered approach. Student-centered has become the trend in guiding teachers’ practices in academia as a best-practice (Levy, 2011, OECD & World Bank, 2010) and that was advocated by new educational reform agendas (Ha, 2014). If properly used, it is perceived to increase the students’ motivation to learn, their ability to retain knowledge, their deep understanding as well as appreciation of the taught courses. It is also designed to support students develop problem solving and critical thinking skills that support their life-long learning. This should all support the positive learning outcomes of the higher education graduates (see for example, Felder & Brent, 1996; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Sierra, 2010; Lea, et al., 2003; Dolye, 2011).

This model of teaching is advocated against the traditional conventional or teaching-centered approach, which is basically defined as an approach of teaching, that requires the teacher to be at the centre of the classroom, transmitting information to students without real input from their side and decides the goals for the learning based on an external criteria. The
teacher is then the sole source of information and the learning is focused on his expertise rather than grouping and collaborating student learning (Crumley, et al., 2015). This traditional approach is perceived to stimulate no problem solving or critical thinking skills and to encourage students to memorize or mechanically learn content and acquire surface knowledge with negative impact on the learning outcome (Barsoum, 2017; Baeten, et al., 2016).

There have been many attempts to define the student-centered approach. For example, Doyle (2011) provides a general definition for student-centered teaching as which procedures teachers choose to use to optimize the students learning and skills development:

“making decisions about what and how students will learn based on one question. Given the context of your teaching (number of students, time of day, classroom configuration, and so on), how will your instructional decisions optimize the opportunity for students to learn the skills and content of the course?” (Doyle, 2011: 2)

This definition could be used as a starting point of what goal teachers are aiming to achieve through using student-centered teaching. Crumley, et al., (2015) confirm this goal of student-centered approach, but also provide more details on what role the teacher needs to play through summarizing historical definitions:

“.instructors to see learners as distinct and unique, which affords students the responsibility of what topics to study and how and why those topics might be of interest and relevant to their lives, needs, and interests. Teachers in this role are facilitators and encourage students to make decisions by working with their peers to create, understand, and connect knowledge to authentic, real-life situations and/or events, ultimately motivating their involvement and participation” (Crumley, et al., 2015: 9)

This definition highlights the change in the way teachers perceive students and see them as unique and responsible individuals. The teacher is no more an instructor that comes with a ready set of knowledge, but rather a facilitator who guides students in making choices about what they need and desire to study and accordingly be responsible for their learning. It explains
unique features of such approach as working with peers and using real life examples and inclusion of students.

The previous definition of Crumley et al., (2015) could provide good introduction for the framework of student-centered teaching developed by Weimer (2002, 2013), and which is employed by this study for conceptual clarity. Despite earlier works such as Meyers and Jones (1993) provide a range of very useful strategies to support teachers to shift to this approach, it lacks a conceptualization of the broad themes of student-centered teaching that need to be employed for this study for structuring a clear conceptual framework and feasibility of data collection and analysis. Other guides focused on one element of the student-centered teaching such as as Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005) focusing on the function of content or on assessment and evaluation such as the work of Fraser (1998). The framework of Weimer, 2002; 2013), however, was found by this study very comprehensive as it discusses and organizes the main characteristics of the learner-centered approach into five broad key elements. Through those main elements as well the framework was found also combining analysis of the issues and alternative practical solutions to respond to those issues. The five themes are: 1) The role of the teacher in learner centered approach changes from telling students what and how they should gain knowledge, to facilitating acquisition of knowledge, while all the hard work is done by students. This concept might look simple, but in practice it involves many challenges for the teacher; 2) Changing the balance of power in the classroom, explaining that teachers mostly take control over the classroom and the learning process for granted as their main role. The learner-centered theory requires teachers to give some of the control for the students so they could develop as self-directed. The challenge is then in finding the strategies that give the students this control; 3) The function of content, as it represents the great challenge to learner-centered approach that still contains lots of content, but it needs to be used by the teacher rather than covered both to create a knowledge base and to equip students with learning skills; 4) Students being responsible for learning, supporting them to change the mentality of studying to exam to experiencing the results of the decisions they make about learning; 5) Learner-centered teachers revisit the purpose and process of evaluation, shifting to evaluate what students know with the goal of maximizing the learning. Teachers develop strategies that increase students’ ability to acquire skills and on the same time don’t compromise grading integrity. A further advantage of this framework that motivated the researcher to adopt it in this study is that the
author as an experienced teacher and researcher combines the theory and practice in clear harmony which encouraged both teachers and reasearchers in the field to use this framework (Blumberg; 2009, 2016; Wohlfarth et al., 2008; Wright, 2011; Doyle, 2011).

Those five key concepts were further discussed in the literature to guide faculty in shifting towards this approach. In her ten steps guidance Doyle (2011) discusses the role of the teacher a facilitator. The author starts by defining a facilitator as someone who facilitates a learning environment for students that provides room for engagement and discussion through resources as case studies, research findings, readings and assessment tools that enable students to gain meaningful feedback. The role of teachers as a facilitator requires promotion of participation and full inclusion of students, critical thinking and shared responsibility, as highlighted also by Kaner et al (2014). Reeve (2016) develops a framework that divides the aspects of this facilitator role into four main components: 1) Attunement or sensitivity that occurs when teachers are able to sense the students state of being and employs their instruction accordingly; 2) Relatedness, that occurs when the teachers support students to feel special and important to them and are then more engaged; 3) Supportiveness that happens when the teachers believe in the students capacity to have self-direction and support them in achieving the goals they decide for themselves; 4) Gentle discipline, when the teachers explain to the students and guide them on understanding why one thinking or other is right or wrong rather than enforcing certain explanations. Those four approaches are perceived to support the desired results of teachers’ role as a facilitator of motivating and engaging students. Dolye (2011) focuses on the practical day to day activities to perform this role including the main steps of planning, preparing an action plan, gaining additional practice, and giving meaningful feedback to students that allows improved learning.

The second dimension discussed by Weimer (2002, 2013) is the balance of power between teachers and students. Blumberg (2009) elaborates that learner-centered teachers seek sharing the governance of the course and the control of classroom with their students. The amount of power sharing depends still on the type of course and level of students. This includes allowing learners multiple ways of acquiring information and expressing themselves and multiple levels of engagement (Ferry, et al., 2007). The sharing involves the policies and procedures used in the course and more control over what they will learn and how (Dolye,
Blumberg (2009) identifies six components of sharing control including four sub-levels of sharing (employs teacher centered, low and high levels of transitioning, learner-centered, employs learner-centered). The six components are: 1) determination of course content; 2) expressions of alternatives perspectives; 3) deciding on how students earn grades; 4) using open-ended assignments; 5) flexible course assessment and learning methods and deadlines; 6) opportunities to learn. As Weimer (2002, 2013) notes although most faculty are comfortable with the change of role to a facilitator, this concept of sharing control is still new and facing large resistance, as teachers take control over classroom for granted and do not trust students are mature enough for such type of decision over learning. The learner-centered approach argues, however, that students need to feel empowered and also autonomous for them to be motivated and able to proceed with life-long self-learning (Singham, 2007, Weimer, 2002, 2013). Based on her experience of gradually sharing some control with students, Weimer (2002, 2013) found that they became more engaged to the course and eventually learn more.

Regarding the function of content, in a traditional approach the teacher will aim to cover the content more likely in the form of a textbook that all the assignments and lectures will be built around. The teacher’s aim is to cover this material and use it to help students build their knowledge base and solve problems. This will still not sufficiently help students to understand why they are learning this content in particular and how they will use it in the future. In contracts, in the learner-centered approach, the teacher will support the students to engage with the material and apply it more flexibly that should help them to understand the purpose of learning this content, develop an appreciation for its value and then become able to critically analyze and solve problems within the context and learn more about the content in the future. Rather than emphasizing students to reproduce the content provided by a textbook, students are supported to develop research tools and independently acquire deep understanding of the subject (Blumberg, 2009; Weimer, 2002, 2013). Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005) identify the key principles for developing learner-centered content as: 1) Providing explicit and accessible documentation of the outcomes required for the students to master the content and develop desired skills; 2) Explicit and ongoing reference to the documented evidence of the experiences of students, their personal development and learning processes; 3) Flexible delivery of content that involves allowing choices and leads to blended learning; 4) Setting clear expectations for the role of the students and clarity on required students behaviors to develop life-long skills.
Cullen et al., (2012) went beyond describing the function of content in a learner-centered approach and how to familiarize students with the desired outcome, to provide guidance on how to extend content outside campus and how to capitalize on technology to achieve that with clear focus on how to develop students’ skills through the process. They also provide step by step guidance on how to provide such content that stimulates skills and goes beyond an assigned textbook.

Regarding the fourth aspect of learner responsibility, Weimer (2002, 2013) explains that students, who often go to universities unprepared for such learner-centered approach in terms of skills and level of knowledge, need to be motivated to accept the responsibility for learning. The teachers are still held accountable for leading this change through implementing five changes: 1) supporting students realize the consequences for their actions. Weimer (2002, 2013) gives the example of a teacher who allows the assignment on board only for minutes at the beginning of the lecture. Students then realize that they need to commit to attend early to be able to get the assignment procedures or be responsible to find another student to ask about it. Such simple procedures could either support students develop habits of being responsible or the opposite depending on what the teacher promotes through his/her actions (Coffman, 2003). This also resists stereo-typing student-centered learning as easy learning. 2) Consistency in what the teachers announces and commits to do. This is important for being a role model for students who are expected then to commit to their responsibilities. 3) Maintaining high standards, as the learner-centered teaches believe that their students could work according to high standards and support them to do so. Marsh and Roche (2000) confirm that students highly evaluate courses that required hard work over those they found easy. 4) Caring teachers, or those who are able to provide one-to-one support for students and show genuine interests in helping them even with actions that are very small in nature. Such caring attitude was found to positively influence students’ perceptions of their teachers and their effective learning (Teven & McCroskey, 1997). On the opposite, non-caring negatively affected the students perceptions of teacher’s competence and trustworthiness (Teven, 2007). 5) Commitment to learning that is driven by the passion about the subject they teach. When students perceive how their teachers are passionate about the content and appreciate it they also start engaging with this content and appreciate its value (Weimer, 2002, 2013).
The creation of an active and inductive learning environment and promotion of active versus passive learner is as Weimer (2002, 2013) explains the main tool to promote the students responsibility for learning. Active classroom environment is a quite researched topic in the literature to identify characteristics of such environment that promotes active learning in contrast to passive learning. Early guides were developed in the 1990s trying to connect the basics of active learning approach with ICT technologies. An early comprehensive guide was for example developed by Bonwell and Eison (1991) who provide a guidance on the conditions and techniques needed for such approach and ways to promote it including visual learning, in-class writing, problem solving, computer-based instruction, cooperative learning, drama and role plays, debates, games, simulations, and peer teaching. Meyers and Jones (1993) provided examples on different active learner techniques but focused on main strategies including informal small group work, cooperative student projects, simulations, and case studies have also attempted to explore how those strategies could be blended with human resources as well as ICT technologies outside the classroom. Fraser (1998) added a very valuable insight by surveying nine major questioners to assess students perceptions of active classroom environment, outlining important developments in classroom environment, discussing the validation of classroom environment and finally overviewing various lines of classroom environment research combining qualitative and quantitative methods. More recent studies highlight the significance increase in using learner-centered active classroom environment among faculties and provide more guidance on specific elements of active environments and how to overcome challenges. For example, Bean (2011) second edition of a detailed guide supports faculty on using writing to promote critical thinking, designing problem based assignments and how to coach students on critical thinking. Poore (2015) attempts to capitalize on the recent revolution of social media to enhance active classroom environment through interesting practical guidelines on using items as blogs, Wikis, social networks, audio materials, Twitter, Skype and chatting.

On the fifth key step identified by Weimer (2002, 2013) which is a more leaner-centered student evaluation, the author highlights that both the purpose and the process of evaluation need to change. On the purpose, the idea of how far the students have mastered the material has dominated both teachers and students that much less focus exists on how this evaluation promotes learning and development skills. It is then the grades not the learning that matters. The
author recognizes, however, that the existing evaluation system in most universities still emphasizes grades. Learner-centered teachers are then encouraged to balance the learning and grading first through procedures that support students to be less stressed about exams such as holding review sessions prior to exams to familiarize students with the exams procedures and allowing them to use brief notes in the exams. Secondly, Weimer (2002, 2013) calls for more use of feedback as a main student-centered approach that helps students to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and then work on self-development. Providing feedback for students is highlighted in the literature as essential for the improvement of higher education students and a key element of best practice in teaching undergraduates (see for example Robinson, et al., 2013; Price, et al., 2010).

On the process of evaluation, learner-centered approach requires more involvement of the students in the evaluation process that allow them to develop self-and peer-assessment skills. The literature on learner-centered student evaluation provides suggested frameworks to develop such self- and peer-assessment. An early guide by Dochy and Sluijsmans (1999) assesses the main findings from research on self- and peer-assessment attempting to find common themes to bring those studies together and developing guidelines for faculty. Their findings confirm that there is much evidence that student self- and peer-assessment could be consistent with that assessment performed by staff and by peer students. Many empirical data according to the authors’ analysis provide evidence for positive impact of such assessment procedures on students gained skills. They therefore perceive self and peer-assessment as valid, reliable, and fair and contribute to developing students’ competence.

Further guides used the terminology of student centered assessment. According to Blumberg (2009) and Suskie (2015), the evaluation terminology could indicate more control by the teacher over the assessment process and it could also convey a judgmental approach of the teachers. Example study that addresses student-centered assessment is provided by Huba and Freed (2000). According to Parsons (2000), this study has several areas of strengths as it provides a clear definition and practical tools and indicators for implementing student-centered assessment tools. Authors also provide an overview of assessment techniques of a classroom with rules to implement them and various examples. Another comprehensive guide is developed by Driscoll and Wood (2007) to support faculty on developing outcome-based assessment for
learner-centered education. The book provides an overview of writing learning outcomes with several examples of learning outcomes and outlines how to effectively develop them. Understanding that learners are diverse, the authors then focus on guiding faculties on how to be aware of different types of learners in their classrooms and then on developing more inclusive assessment tools. The authors then move to align learning outcomes and teaching decisions followed by example alignment grids that could help faculty in acknowledging that a course has achieved all aimed goals.

2.2 Challenges to Student-Centered Approach

The literature on learner-centered approach in teaching involves a wide discussion on challenges and issues to achieve the critical mission of bringing the concept from theory to reality. Normand, et al., (2008) differentiate between three levels of challenges institutional, operational and teaching and learning management. On the institutional level, decisions are typically made by top management as deans who draw the objectives usually based on governmental levels, but such ambitious objectives provide little detail on implementation by faculty or how to turn those broad objectives. For example, how to shift from subject-focused learning to long-life learning, or how to increase inclusion and diversity. Those high level objectives are complex and not necessarily clearly perceived by lower level stakeholders as low-management, teachers and learners. The second level or the operational management is when one of programmes directors and academic managers try to convert the strategic top level objectives into operational ones and are usually faced by challenges in resources as budgets, infrastructure and ICT availability. The author also highlights that the contradictions that may exist between institutional and teaching and learning level objectives could be mediated at this stage, which requires clear effort for the operational management in transmitting clear and focused messages from the strategic objective to the teaching staff engaging them and helping them find common ground. At the third level of teaching and learning management arises the challenge of such stakeholders putting the learner-centered approach into practice without necessarily being fully aware of higher level strategic objectives. Teachers who in many cases come from the culture of teaching-centered approach may not share the same vision as top management. On how to respond to those challenges, the model stresses the importance of a coherent strategy that combines the three levels of institutional, operational and teaching
ensuring that activity level is linked to high level strategies. Based on existing research, the study also provides costing models that should support operational managers in responding to the challenges of implementing learner-centered programmes. From those models they recommend the model provided by Nicol and Coen (2003) that classifies cost as infrastructure, such as ICT costs, value added, as teaching and learning activities and support costs including admin and academic.

Many studies agree with the previously illustrated view by Normand et al (2003) on the issue of the fundamental conceptions and beliefs of teachers or the deeply rooted beliefs and cultural conceptions of teaching that were developed largely around traditional teaching focused approach. Such conceptions could have learner-centered approaches as shocking and provoking for such teachers (see for example Chiang, et al., 2010, Weimer, 2002, 2013, Kember, 1997). Another aspect of this challenge is that students are also not prepared for this role. Doyle (2011) explains that students are poorly equipped for such model due to their previous learning experiences that largely employs teaching centered approach which make them naturally resistant to the new contradicting approach at university level. The author suggests responding to those challenges first by helping the students to establish the link between why this approach is introduced and the advantages it could bring to their life-long learning skills and secondly by establishing the fact that shifting to such approach is based on years of sound research with lots of evidence on its effectiveness.

Another fundamental challenge discussed especially at early literature during 1980s and 1990s is around the simple fact that shifting to a learner-centered approach takes a lot of effort (see for example Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Felder & Brent, 1996). Moreover, there is often the risk of the gap between rhetoric and reality, as many organizations as well as educators claim to apply learner-centered approach while practically they are not (Lea, et al., 2003).

To elaborate on how the effort towards learner-centered approach entail day-to-day challenges to teachers, further studies tackled those challenges usually with step-by-step guide. For example Felder and Brent (1996) respond to a list of teachers concerns around student-centered at this era. They discuss issues as the time management of student-centered activities with practical tips on how to organize tasks timely, teachers fear of losing control in class, supporting them to look at the issue of a different perspective and considering the excitement.
and engagement the approach could bring, how to make students more responsible for assignments, the challenge that students are only searching for the “right answer” and how to support them on developing critical skills instead and how to use constructive feedback, students’ resistance and how to tackle it by testing new techniques when negative feedback on a task is provided and the difficulties of team working and inclusion of minority students.

A more recent work by Robinson (2005) describes challenges of learner-centered approach as a paradox in which teachers find themselves responding to somehow contradicting requirements. This entails the challenge of controlling the discipline of the classroom, but being able to go with the flow and allow the increased participation of controlling the class. Teachers are also challenged to maintain the facilitator role which requires gaining the students trust but on the same time being responsible for acting as external judges and evaluation the students’ performance, while students are not really ready for this change of role. Another challenge arises from combining the passion of the subject as master learners and being committed to their students learning and their passion of the subject. In addition, teachers are required to master the subject of knowledge and on the same time facilitate the learning for a diverse range of students. This is related to another issue that resulted from the changes in the students’ body in higher education due to the increase in size and demand on higher education. Consequently, students attending higher education are increasingly diverse in backgrounds and associated needs. For example, the inclusion of disabled students requires a set of changes to the teaching approach, which emphasizes the need for learner-centered teaching but also in parallel also increases the challenges (Lea et al., 2003; Biggs, 1999). Lastly, the teacher is required to combine the caring for self and for students, and to serve the whole group of students as a leader, and in parallel to serve individual students as a mentor (Robinson, 2005).

2.3 Students’ Perceptions of Student-Centered Approach

Aligning with the key characteristic of student-centered approach that seeks to put the students at the center of the learning process, scholars attempted to study students’ perceptions of such model to gain more empirical evidence on its effectiveness and to figure out implications and ways to respond to them. For example, Wohlfarth, et al., (2008) examined students perception of learner-centered approach based on Weimer (2002, 2013) framework, conducting interviews with 21 students enrolled in a physiology programme who are taught on
learner-centered model. The findings showed that the students perceived their classes to a large degree as learner-centered and felt the importance of this approach in supporting their learning. They, however, expressed concerns about not being involved in discussions around assignments and not being held accountable for assignments which for them represent a needed important skill. They also preferred if teachers gain a bit more control over classroom environment so that critical concepts do not get lost. Some of those results were confirmed by further studies such as the work of Lea et al. (2003) who used a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection. Students who were not completely sure about what student centered learning mean, provided overall positive opinions about the learner-centered approach. On the other hand, they expressed teacher-centered approach to be less motivating and less effective. Students also expressed concerns about students-centered approach could be associated with lack of resources or lack of guidance for the students. Some students also expressed concerns about a political agenda that could be driving this concept rather than it being genuinely aimed at improving the learning experience. They explain that for example universities are under pressure to increase enrollments or to increase the research produced by staff, so they fear that learning-centered approach could be just another imposed policy on universities, without them having the real intention or capacity to efficiently apply it.

Rather than surveying the whole concept of the student-centered learning as in the previous examples, further studies were more focused on one or more key elements of the approach and how students perceive it. For example, on the learner-centered function of content, Harpe and Phipps (2008) surveyed students on a course that was redesigned to become more learner-centered through including optional assignments, self- reflection opportunities and a point-based grading system. Results showed that students highly rated being able to more control the grading system which supported the learning experience to be less stressful. They also found that completing optional assignments supported them in reflecting on the materials they have learnt in class. Overall students were according to the study positive about the learner-centered approach. Similar positive findings were found by a study that compared the effectiveness of converting the content into a more flexible learner-centered one. It concluded that students although have faced at the beginning struggled with the new format, they adopted fast and found it satisfactory and effective (Mason, 2013)
On the element of the increased students’ responsibility, some studies discussed the students’ perceptions of such approach. For example, Sierra (2010) developed two studies on the subject. The first found a positive relation between increased students responsibility for learning and their attitudes and emotions towards the learning experience. The second found a positive relationship between the shared responsibility and the earned course grade. Based on the perceptions of students as well, Elen, et al., (2007) called for transitional learning environment that see the responsibility should not be radically transferred to students but more a joint-responsibility model should be sought. To decide on who takes the lead and who does which tasks, this theory recommends more monitoring to the students, their capabilities and willingness.

Further studies assessed the perceptions of students of student-centered evaluation tools as self- and peer assessment. Hanrahan and Isaacs (2010) analyzed perceptions of self-and peer assessment through a qualitative study with a large number of students (N 233). Results showed that students faced some difficulty in using this model of assessment but which the authors believe could be addressed through practice and training. Students highlighted as beneficial their increased ability of self-critique they practiced in marking their own assignments and being able to reflect on their weaknesses and strengths, a skill that was also enhanced when they marked other students assignments. The study concluded that self-and peer assessment are feasible, but this could require more admin load. Similar results were confirmed by Ratminingsih, et al., (2017) who assessed students perceptions of self-and peer-assessment though a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The results showed that students had a very positive perception of such assessment approach and it supported them have a “deep” view of their performance, weaknesses and strengths. Also working on peer-assessment they were able to learn collaboratively through peers’ feedback. A study by Lladó, et al., (2014) highlighted also the positive perception of students for self-and peer-assessment tools as students found it motivating and recommended for acquiring knowledge at different levels of learning, although they expressed some concerns around the responsibility that comes with this approach of evaluation and some distrust in other students doing peer-assessment.
Although some literature as illustrated has addressed perceptions of students of student-centered teaching, this study tries to fill in the gap about how this approach is implemented in the Egyptian context and more specifically in private universities in Egypt.

2.4 Teaching Challenges in Private Higher Education Institutions

The literature on teaching in private higher education institutions discusses mainly the challenging position of teaching at this typology of institutions. Many report the lack of qualified teachers and dependence on either young teachers with low experience or retired faculty from public universities who lack energy and commitment (see for example Lei, 2012; Ashraf, et al., 2016; Angom, 2015; Ramírez and Haque, 2016; Lin et al; 2005). It is also highlighted as a characteristic of PHEIs to depend on part timers which affects the quality of teaching by those de-motivated staff due to lack of benefits, job insecurity and poor training provided (Varghese, 2006; Bjarnason, 2009; Lei, 2012; Shah, et al., 2013).

Limited literature has attempted to analyze the use of engaging learner-centered teaching at PHEIs. Through a case study assessing quality at a private university in Bangladesh, Ramírez and Haque (2016) highlight that despite the institutional efforts to promote active learning, the teaching staff expressed concerns and disappointments about the interactions with students. Faculty explain that when they try to provide active learning principles to students, the latter become confused about what they should do after they received 12 years of teacher-centered education that heavily relied on memorization. In the Egyptian context, Barsoum (2017) analyzed the results of a national survey comparing quality, pedagogy and governance in public and private universities in Egypt with case studies from two private universities. Focusing on teaching approach, the article found no significance difference between public and private students, as in both institutions teaching continued to rely heavily on teacher-centered pedagogy in which lecturing is dominant and the teacher is the main source of information. Also learner-centered activities as group and research projects were not common in both types of institutions although they were more used in private universities. Similar results were reported regarding using oral presentations and research projects that despite being more used by PHI students were not a regular practice in both groups of institutions. The study justifies this trend towards teaching-centered learning in PHEIs by recruiting senior faculties from the public
universities and junior faculties who have also graduated from public universities and are all committed to teaching-centered pedagogies.

2.5 Summary of the Literature Review

In this chapter, the researcher discussed and analyzed the available literature on student-centered teaching approach. The themes discussed under this chapter are the five dimensions of learner centered teaching as classified by Weimer (2002, 2013), the challenges of learner-centered approach, the perceptions of students of such approach and the challenges of teaching in private universities.

The first theme focused on explaining the concept of learner-centered teaching based on the selected framework of Weimer (2002, 2013). The five dimensions provided by Weimer (2002, 2013) for such approach are the role of the teacher, the balance of power in classroom between teachers and students, the function of content, the increased students’ responsibility for learning and the student-centered evaluation. On the role of teacher there was agreement in the literature on the need for learner-centered teaching to be more facilitators and guide students through their learning process (see for example Weimer 2002, 2013, Blumberg, 2013, Doyle, 2011, Kaner et al., 2014, Reeve, 2016). While some scholars as Doyle (2011) focused on providing step by step guidance on how a teacher could gradually shift to a facilitator, other as Reeve (2016) were concerned more with identifying the characteristics of a facilitator such as attunement, relatedness, supportiveness and gentle discipline.

Regarding the balance of power between students and teachers, the literature highlights the need for sharing some, but definitely not all of the control of the classroom to students. This includes more inclusion of students in selection of the course content and on the procedures to deliver this content. Further studies as Blumberg (2009) refer to flexible grading and assessment systems and employing of open-ended assignments. An empowered student should consequently be more engaged and value the studied content.

On the function of content in a learner-centered approach, the literature refers to a key change in how a teacher perceives and uses content. Rather than covering the content, the
teacher in this approach is expected to support students realize the desired outcome of learning this content and develop the required skills to learn more about the subject and apply what they learn to external contexts. Similar to other student-centered teaching dimensions, scholars attempted to provide guidance on bringing this concept into action. While scholars as Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005) focus on documenting the outcome and referring back to it and setting clear expectations for the students, other as Collen, et al., (2012) provide practical guidance on how to develop this content and in addition go beyond what is taught and how it is taught to where it could be taught outside campus and involved technologies.

Regarding the following aspect of students being more responsible for learning, Weimer (2002, 2013) stresses that teachers are still accountable to support students realize this responsibility. For this to happen, teachers should help students to realize the logical consequences for their actions, be consistent, maintain high standards, be caring and committed to learning. Such characteristics still need to be enhanced through an active learning environment highly advocated for in the literature through promoting techniques as in-class writing, debates, simulations, role plays (See for example Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Meyers and Jones, 1993; Bean, 2011).

The final dimension of student-centered approach discussed is on student centered evaluation that according to Weimer (2002, 2013) should seek more balance between studying for the grade and gaining the actual learning and embed a system of constructive feedback to students that support their ongoing development. On the process of evaluation Weimer (2002, 2013) also advocates for using the self- and peer-assessment as she perceives them as essential skills to be acquired at this stage. Others as Blumberg (2009) and Huba and Freed (2000) prefer to use the terminology student-centered assessment rather than evaluation. This is justified by Blumberg (2009) as evaluation according to the author could convey judgment and more control of the teacher over the process.

The following theme of the literature focuses on the challenges that face the implementation of student-centered approach. The chapter first provides distinction between institutional, operational and teaching levels of challenges and the importance of a comprehensive strategy that brings all the stakeholders together and links the activity level to the top objectives and vision. After that, further challenges include the rooted beliefs of the
teachers on teaching approach that are usually teacher-focused. In parallel, the students who experienced rigid teaching techniques at school level are poorly prepared for this type of teaching when they enroll in universities (see for example, Chiang et al., 2010, Kember, 1997; Doyle, 2011). Furthermore, the challenges of some roles of the teachers may seem contradicting or a paradox, such as maintaining the discipline and on the same time allowing participation, and being a leader for the group and a mentor for each individual (Robinson, 2005). Besides, challenges associated with diverse students’ body and resulted diverse needs is discussed.

The chapter then focuses on the discussed perceptions of students of learner-centered teaching in the literature. While some studies surveyed the whole concept of student-centered approach, others focused on one element as active environment or student-centered assessment. In general, the discussed studies inform of positive perceptions of students towards such approach that they found engaging and support their learning objectives (see for example Wohlfarth et al., 2008, Harpe and Phipps, 2008; Sierra, 2010). There were still some concerns highlighted by the students as the lack of resources necessary for such technique, the need for more practice on these student-centered activities and the lack of trust in the universities serious intentions and capacities to provide this approach (Lea., et al, 2003; Hanrahan and Isaacs, 2010).

Lastly, the chapter explores the existing literature on teaching characteristics in private higher education intuitions. A number of studies addressed issues as lack of quality teachers at this type of institutions and the tendencies towards depending on part timers and inexperienced faculty (see for example Altbach et al., 2009, Varghese, 2006; Lei, 2012). There is, however, a literature gap in assessing teaching approach according to the type of higher education institutions, in particular in private higher education. This study is therefore aiming to contribute to filling this gap by investigating the teaching approach in private universities in Egypt. This is timely considering the increased enrolments in those institutions and the emphasis on the teaching innovation they could bring to the higher education sector (OECD & World Bank, 2010). In particular, this is important as the Egyptian higher education system in general is still facing quality issues and it needs to be understood weather the private universities face same quality issues that still exist in public university as depending on traditional teaching approach.
Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

This chapter is aimed at describing the conceptual framework that guided the researcher in exploring the research topic and addressing the main and sub-research questions.

The question on teaching quality in higher education institutions is at the centre of the issue of quality in higher education. This study borrows the description by Krause (2012) for quality in higher education as a “wicked” problem that is poorly defined and under-theorized. This is considering the difficulty in defining it and the association with high stakes of policy making and funding especially at the macro-national level. To provide more conceptual clarity, Krause (2012) designs two models of quality review, the quality assessment and the quality improvement. The quality assessment is concerned with quality assurance and control of organizational processes and outcomes. The improvement model is focused on the learning theories, teaching and learning activities, curriculum development and the use of feedback to evaluate teaching. This study refers to this concept of quality improvement with focus on student-centered teaching activities. This approach of teaching is increasingly encouraged in higher education (Weimer, 2002, 2013; Blumberg, 2009; Doyle, 2011, Levy, 2011).

Summarizing the large amount of literature on how to help students to learn better, Suskie (2015) concludes two main themes that need to be employed in students’ learning: 1) engagement of students in the learning process 2) having both the teachers and students responsible for the learning process. Student-centered teaching is seen to provide these two functions as it both engages the students in the learning and requires the students and teachers to share the responsibility of learning (Blumberg, 2009; Weimer, 2002, 2013). Student-centered teaching is therefore currently perceived as an evidence-based best-practice in higher education (Blumberg, 2009; Blumberg, 2016; Suskie, 2015, Weimer, 2002, 2013; Doyle, 2011).

The student-centered teaching (also referred to as learner-centered teaching), although it was quite widely researched, there is still ambiguity around the concept in addition to synonyms as flexible learning and active learning being used in the literature. Therefore, and for conceptual clarity, is study adopts the framework developed by Weimer in 2002 and republished with updates in 2013. The classical work was employed by this study as firstly, it does not only provides the theory on “what” does it mean to be student or learner-centered, but it also brings the theory into an applied focus through elaborating on “how” it is practiced, what
issues this could involve and what steps to take to respond to those issues. Despite the widespread literature on teaching and learning, there is a limitation in the literature translating the theories into practices and policies which Weimer (2002, 2013) attempts to develop in her book. Secondly, it serves the purpose of the study of assessing the whole concept of student-centered teaching, as many studies were focused on a specific dimension of the student-centered approach such as how to change the assessment system to be student-focused as for example Huba & Fred (2000) and Driscoll and Wood (2007) or on how to shift the content to be more learner-centered such as the works of Nielson (1996), Brown (2003), and Cleveland-Innes and Emes (2005). Other scholars as Doyle (2011) attempted to comprehensively provide guidance on shifting to student-centered approach, but despite highlighting the impact of this approach on improving the learning process through evidence from the psychology literature, it lacked a clear construction of the key elements of such approach which this study was mainly seeking. Weimer (2002, 2013) provides a comprehensive model that combines the broad concepts of student-centered teaching into five key elements which was highly needed in this study to respond to the research question and practically guide the researcher in data collection and analysis according to specific themes. The five key elements include: 1) role of the teacher as a facilitator; 2) changing the balance of the power in the classroom enabling some control for the students; 3) the function of content that enables students to acquire more skills; 4) students being more responsible for learning; 5) student-centered evaluation (see figure 3). Thirdly, the book of Weimer (2002, 2013) builds on her experience of teaching as a higher education professor for 30 years and bridges a gap between research and practice, as it provides real life challenges and practical solutions. This was also highlighted by a number of scholars who built their studies guided by this approach such as Blumberg (2009, 2016), Wohlfarth et al., (2008), Wright, (2011) and Doyle, (2011), who described Weimer (2002, 2013) work as popular and influential among faculty. In this study, I employ Weimer (2002, 2013) model to examine the implementation of student-centered approach at PHEIs in Egypt.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs qualitative methodology to understand the perceptions of students of teaching in private universities in Egypt and to which extent the teaching approach in such institutions is engaging and student-focused. The reason for choosing a qualitative approach is to gain in-depth knowledge of the subject. The study seeks to get the students’ voice as they are the primary recipient of teaching and who consequently could best inform of its characteristics and how far it supports their learning. As highlighted by Ambert et al., (1995) the main characteristic of the qualitative research lies in its focus on depth rather than breadth. The research depends on understanding the experience of the humans studied who are the main informants about the problem studied. Rather than focusing on a large representative sample of the population, the qualitative research seeks acquiring in-depth information about a small sample of relative stakeholders. It is not concerned with what those people do, but rather with how and why they behave, think and make meaning of this action or behavior. A good
qualitative research creates connections with individuals and celebrates the fact that human-related issues should be complex and that it is necessary in qualitative research to dig beyond the obvious to understand how one aspect of something adds meaning to some other aspect. Furthermore, qualitative research falls within the context of discovery of a particular phenomenon rather the context of verification, so the researcher doesn’t attempt to test a hypothesis but to create new concepts (Ambert et al, 1995; Marshall & Rossman, 2011, Neuman, 2006; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

A small sample of undergraduate and graduate students from three private universities is therefore recruited in this study to provide deep understanding of the teaching experience at such institutions. Individual experiences were celebrated and deeply analyzed to provide the meanings that could not be generated through close-ended questions in a large surveyed sample. The researcher did not start with a hypothesis about the situation but rather was open to explore realities and form the big picture through comparing and linking the different experiences.

The researcher in a qualitative approach is a learner, who continuously takes conscious decisions about the questions and the direction of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The process of designing research, collecting and analyzing data is not linear, but takes place simultaneously as the researcher goes back and forth between those steps (Neuman, 2006). The researcher refines the process of conceptualization through creating conceptual images of the setting and then re-generating those images as the process of data collection and analysis goes which enhances the validity of the generated conceptualization (Ambert, et al., 1995). The researcher in this study followed this non-linear approach through revisiting the research main and specific questions after reviewing the literature and through and after collecting data, analyzing it and linking it to exiting literature.

The timeline for this study is between March and December 2017. The researcher started reviewing the literature on the topic and developing the proposal during spring 2017. Proposal was approved by the thesis adviser and the committee in September 2017. Data collection took place starting 10 October (after obtaining IRB approval) till 1 December 2017.

4.2 Overall Strategy in Data collection
4.2.1 In-depth Interviews

According to Punch (2006), the research strategy is at the centre of the research design to inform of how the study proceeds and using which rationale. Marshall and Rossman (2011) explain that a study focusing on understanding a human experience of a particular problem or situation typically applies in-depth interviews as an overall strategy. This approach assumes that the knowledge is inside the participants and the researcher role is to dig this knowledge out though the interview (Berg, 2009). One of the most important characteristics of in-depth interviews is that it recognizes the participant views as valuable and useful, whereas the generation of the interviews largely depends on the interviewees and them willing to engage in deep conversation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Through in-depth interviews, the researcher gathers information, facts and stories to understand and learn more about emotions, relationships and perceptions that are not easily understood from observations (Babie, 2007). This study uses in-depth interviews to explore the perceptions, feelings and needs of students of the teaching at their private universities.

There are common types of qualitative interviews used in social research such as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews that include open-ended questions which allowed a deep understanding for the subject and probing and gaining further information as needed (Paton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Stuckey, 2013; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Semi-structured format is conversational in nature and meanwhile, the interviewer refers to a guide to make sure main themes and subthemes are addressed. Consequently, the researcher here developed the questions following the five main themes of learner-centered teaching specified in the conceptual framework, but also enjoyed the flexibility to modify questions according to the responses of the interviewee to be able to capture the unique nature of each participant experience (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

4.2.2 Advantages and Limitations of In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews use open-ended responses that provide the researcher with many advantages such as acquiring answers that are meaningful, reflect the culture of the participant, unanticipated by the researcher and are rich and explanatory in nature (Mack, 2005). In contrast to the structured interviews that put the researcher in full responsibility for what will and will
not be covered in the interview, the semi-structured in-depth interviews are more of a shared experience between the interviewer and the interviewee. The relatively closeness of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is seen to increase the credibility of the collected data by reducing biases. For example, the interviewee in quantitative research tends to use “I don’t know” to avoid deep thinking of what is asked, but this could be avoided in qualitative in-depth interviews. Furthermore, it provides the researcher with the flexibility to conduct a back and forth dialogue with participants (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Adopting this technique, the researcher in this study had the flexibility to interact with the interviewee responses by modifying the question or by changing the wording or the order of the questions. The researcher was accordingly enabled to clarify on certain points of interest and probe or add more questions according to the circumstances the interviewee faced and his/her unique experience. A further advantage of in-depth interviews is that it is rich in details participants (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015) that allowed the researcher in this study to identify whether she agrees or disagrees with the meanings of codes associated with specific responses.

To gain the advantage of in-depth semi-structured interviews, the researcher should demonstrate a set of interviewing skills (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this research, the researcher was keen to build the rapport with participants through a friendly attitude, showing interest in what they say and compassion to how they feel especially when they spoke of moments of frustration or demotivating experiences. The researcher was also actively listening to interviewees and providing appropriate follow up questions and using appropriate tone and body language. The researcher as well maintained high sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues as hesitation, change in tone of voice, etc that add meaning and value to the data.

There are some limitations for in-depth interviews. For example, a limitation could result from “a one way” dialogue where the interviewer is more likely to control the interview (Kvale, 2006). On this study, participants were given the space to speak freely of how they perceive the situation. Sometimes the researcher faced the challenge of the interviewees thinking that for them to help the research they need to provide “the right answer”. This might be due to the young age of some participants or to the educational background as highlighted further in data analysis that creates a culture of one sole right answer for each inquiry. They
were therefore clearly ensured by the researcher in more than one occasion that she is not after a right answer for the questions, but is seeking to understand what the interviewee believes to be true and how he/she feels about it.

Another limitation to in-depth interviews could result from access to interviewees (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Although the researcher in this study was able to gain access to the targeted participants in the identified institutions, there was a challenge to have access to existing students in one of the three students. The researcher was however able to speak to a number of fresh graduates who completed their study in 2016 and were able to provide updated data.

A further limitation for this study is that it does not include the perceptions of teachers in those universities, as it focused on giving voice for the students and deeply understand about their experiences.

4.3 Sampling

The sampling strategy followed in this study is a mixed approach of purposive (non-probability) sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-probability strategy that ensures certain categories are represented in the final sampling. The rationale for using such strategy is that the researcher assumes based on a prior-theoretical understanding of the studied problem that those categories would have unique, different or important experiences of the phenomenon that should be ensured to exit in the study (Robinson, 2014). The researcher used purposive sampling as she identified students attending private universities in Egypt as the main informants of the research question. As the recipients of the studied teaching approach, the students could best speak of their experiences and needs. The literature on the studied learner-focused teaching also highlights the importance of seeking to explore students’ perceptions of this teaching approach which is consistent with what this approach calls for of having the students at the centre of the education process.(see for example Wohlfarth et al., 2008; Harpe and Phipps, 2008; Lea et al., 2003)

The second used sampling strategy is Snowball sampling that was explained by Marshall and Rossman (2011) as identifying people of interest who then can introduce the researcher to other people who similarly introduce him/her to people and so on. This was useful as sample
students supported the researcher by introducing her to their colleagues falling under the sample.

Three private foreign affiliated universities in Cairo, Egypt were selected for this study. The three universities were established after the private universities act of 1992. The three of them have partnerships with international universities and have been attracting an increasing number of students over the past two decades.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private University 1 (PU1)</th>
<th>Private University 2 (PU2)</th>
<th>Private University 3 (PU3)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age group</td>
<td>22-28</td>
<td>19-22</td>
<td>20-27</td>
<td>19-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>5 females</td>
<td>3 females and 2 male</td>
<td>3 females and 2 males</td>
<td>12 females, 3 males</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculties</td>
<td>1 Economics and Business Administration</td>
<td>3 Business Administration, 1 Mass-Communications, 1 Political Science</td>
<td>4 Mass-Communications, 1 business Administration</td>
<td>1 Economics &amp; Business, 1 Political Science, 5 mass-Communications, 8 Business Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of students who participated in this study is as elaborated in the above table a total of fifteen students, five from PU1, five from PU2 and five from PU3 in addition to one pilot interview. The age group of participants is between 19 and 28 years old. The youngest student in the study (19 years old) is currently attending year one in undergraduate studies and
the oldest has graduated in 2010. The sample is divided into seven graduates and eight undergraduate from different years between 2010 and 2017. Both genders are represented in the study, but due to the nature of the question which has no gender aspect, a balance in gender representation was not of a priority for the researcher. The majors studied by those students are Business Administration, Mass-Communication and Economics and Political Sciences, which are of the most popular programmes in private universities in Egypt.

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopts the Grounded Theory, as one of the most commonly used theories in data collection and analysis (Punch, 2006). The Grounded Theory has emerged by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and became widely used among sociologists. The uniqueness of the Grounded Theory is derived from starting from data to explore and possibly generate new conceptions of a studied problem or phenomenon (Corbin, 2017; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Secondly, researchers do not start their research based on a specific theoretical hypothesis as this contradicts with reaching new concepts through data. Thirdly, data collection and analysis are inter-related, which means after the first set of data are collected, they are analyzed and the concepts that emerge influence the collection of the next set of data. Fourthly, individual cases are not treated separately, each concept derives the analysis and contributes to the development of other concepts and all concepts are then accumulating anonymity and confidentiality, to form the findings. Lastly, as the design is evolving throughout the research to respond to the new findings and is not strictly set prior to the research (Corbin, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

Prior to data collection, a pilot interview was conducted with a graduate student of private university 3 (PU3). The interview took place in October 2017 after obtaining IRB. The main purpose of the interview was to probe the research questions developed by the researcher and how far they could support her in addressing the research questions. After this pilot interview, some interview questions were modified to better support in exploring the topic. At this stage, the researcher also went back to the literature to understand more about the dimensions of the studied teaching approach. As interviews proceeded, the researcher was going back and forth between literature and data and modified some questions to better conceptualize some themes. The students who participated in this study were generally very flexible to provide their contact details and allow the researcher to call in case she needed extra
information. In some cases, the researcher called the interviewees to acquire further information on specific themes to validate the interview account.

Interviews lasted between 25 and 35 minutes. Through data collection, field notes were taken and transcribed immediately after the interview. Data were coded and analyzed systematically as informed by the Grounded Theory. As some students seemed uncomfortable with using audio-taping, the researcher depended mainly on taking comprehensive written notes during the interviews.

4.5 Research Ethics

4.5.1 Institutional Review Board (IRB)

As per Babie (2007), the issue of research ethics in studies dealing with human subjects is currently organized by federal law. Organizations as universities that seek to receive federal research support create Institutional Review Boards that review and approve the research proposals of any study aiming to deal with human subjects (Babie, 2007). As a graduate student in the American University in Cairo, the researcher sought approval from the university IRB and gained it on 5 October 2017. Approval letter is enclosed to the study. Interviews took place after the approval during October, November and December 2017.

Interviews were conducted using a mixture of English and Arabic languages as preferred by the students. English and Arabic consent were created and approved as part of the IRB process and written consent was gained from participants prior to participation.

4.5.2 Considerations

Berg (2009) summarizes the main agreements on ethics of social research in voluntary participation, commitment to doing no harm to the participants, anonymity and confidentiality and avoiding deception. In this study, the researcher ensured voluntary participation of all interviewees. During the planning phase and deciding on the sampling, it was ensured that no harm or conflict of interest would result from students’ participation in this study. They were assured prior to participation that their data is being treated by the researcher as confidential. Pseudonym names were used to refer to all participants. Additionally, names of the private institutions were also kept confidential and they are referred to as: Private University 1 (PU1);
Private University 2 (PU2); Private University 3 (PU3). This is because the data involve some critique for the policies of those universities and the researcher aims to ensure no harm is done to the reputation of those institutions,

Data were typed and kept in a password locked computer and only the researcher has access to the data and is aware of the participants’ identity. It was also highlighted to participants that being part of this study does not entail any direct benefit for them, but the findings of the research shall be important for the stakeholders concerned of teaching quality in private universities in Egypt.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study on how far the interviewed students perceive the teaching approach in private universities in Egypt. The results are divided into five main themes following the chosen framework of Weimer (2002, 2013) to assess how far the teaching in those institutions is student-focused. Data are systematically analyzed and discussed.

5.1 The Role of the Teacher

The literature on student-centered approach discusses the required shift in the teacher’s role into a facilitator. While in a teacher-centered approach the teacher will be the main source of information, in a learner-centered approach the teacher will engage students in discussions about the subject and promotes inclusion and participation (Weimer, 2002, 2013; Doyle, 2011; Blumberg, 2009). Participants in this study highlighted that most teachers in the selected private universities are still relying on traditional teaching techniques. Teaching relies highly on lecturing with limited room for discussion. A minority of teachers however used a more inclusive teaching technique and encouraged students to discuss topics and exchange ideas which was favored and appreciated by the students.

For example, an undergraduate student expresses her dissatisfaction with the teaching approach for being very traditional:
“Very traditional system of lecturing using a PowerPoint presentation that they mostly read from {...}. The teacher might ask some questions, but they don’t depend on discussions{...}. Surely not satisfied with that teaching approach” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October 2017)

As highlighted in the quotation, many teachers still depend on transmitting the information to students through lecturing. This also sometimes means that the lecture would be no more than reading a pre-prepared presentation. Students who are given minimum room for discussion, do not feel engaged through this technique. The negative impact such style has on students’ engagement and overall learning experience was highlighted by many students for example:

“But I don’t learn anything in the courses that are all about lecturing. I don’t feel the benefit” (Maggie, 2nd year Mass-communications student, PU2, October 2017)

The student as elaborated in the quotation did not feel that such approach which places the teacher at the centre of the learning process supports her learning, but rather found it not useful. This dissatisfaction and lack of engagement with that style could also affect the student motivation to attend classes, which is elaborated in the below example quote, but was confirmed by other participant students:

“I would say 70% of teachers depend on lecturing and the rest would facilitate discussions between students, but I only attended those 30% that I felt were useful. Attendance was only recorded in tutorials, but not in lectures {...}. Lecturing was very boring when the professor starts to read from the presentation, I feel like I can get the book at home and read this, why do I need to attend the lecture? {...}. The funny fact is that I attended about only 30% of the courses that had more active learning, but I had a high GPA still and I was able to learn from the courses I attended”

(Nermine, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, October 2017)

Feeling bored and failure to realize the importance of the class was the result of the used teaching approach. The role of the teacher in such case, when he/she not only fails to engage the students through active techniques, but also more or less repeats what is written in the literature
and reflected in the presentations becomes highly questionable by students. The student provides evidence of herself being able to achieve high grades regardless of attending lectures, which was a special characteristic of that particular university system in which attendance was not recorded in lectures, but only in tutorials.

When asked if the teaching style was in their opinion related to the educational and professional background of the teacher and whether they have come from a public university, most students thought it was not relevant. In their perception, it was more related to personal traits and conceptions of the teacher on learning. For example, a student relates the teaching style to the personal perceptions of faculty regardless of their background:

“I don’t think it is related to their background, most of teachers are from public and as well Azhar universities, and others from private universities, but it is more about the mentality of the teacher who thinks that discussions are consuming time, while there are other teachers who are concerned with the outcome and facilitate discussions…”
(Salma. 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The student sees no significant difference among faculty based on their background, whether they previously worked in public or private universities. She believes it is related to their personal conceptions of teaching, highlighting that it could be the case of the teacher more concerned with covering the content which leaves no time for discussions. This is consistent with literature highlighting that in a teaching-centered approach teachers would be mostly concerned with covering the content and see it as their main role. They get pressured with covering this content which not necessarily helps students to understand this content (Brown 2003; Weimer, 2002, 2013; Blumberg, 2009). Other students confirm this point of view explaining more about how they perceive the teacher mentality:

“No, most of the teachers even those who originally graduated and worked in public universities are coming with Ph.D. from abroad, but they think they know more about the subject and that if we ask questions, we waste their time, they just want to cover the content”

(Sherine, a Business Administration graduate in 2017, PU2)
The quoted student believes that following a teacher-centered approach is more due to the teacher’s seeing themselves better aware and experienced in the subject and so it should be delivered from their point of view, rather than wasting their time listening to students arguments. This is again at the heart of the teacher-centered characteristics as elaborated on in the literature. For example, Crumley et al. (2015), explain that in a teacher-centered approach, the teacher is the keeper of all knowledge and expertise, while in a learner-centered the teacher admits that he/she just cannot “have it all” and are keen to exchange knowledge with students and also learn from them not only give them knowledge.

Participant students continue to express their perceptions of why teachers take this approach, highlighting that it could also be to teachers enjoying authority. For example, a student criticizes the authority practiced by teachers:

“I think it is related to their culture and that they believe in authority, they are not here to transfer knowledge but to show off with who they are and what knowledge they have; they are not genuinely into supporting the learning of a student. I was made fun of because I challenged a teacher on some theories he presented in a math lecture based on the information I had from high school, but he didn’t like that...”

(Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3, November, 2017)

The student clearly feels disappointed and angry about how one of the teachers made fun of him before other students because he was expressing his point of view in the content based on his school knowledge. He has a very negative perception about some teachers with a traditional teaching approach. He believes it relates to them celebrating authority and showing off with their knowledge rather than having the “genuine” interest in supporting students’ learning. This reflects an issue with mistrust and strong lack of engagement that could be partially relevant to teachers insisting to ignore the importance of the inclusion of students and partially to the misbehaviors practices by some teachers in being sarcastic about students’ opinions rather than showing empathy, attunement and gentle discipline as recommended by the literature on learner-centered teaching (Reeve, 2016).
On the contrary, the teachers who aimed to facilitate a more active class and provided room for students’ discussions, engaged students to their classes, for example Nermine continues to say:

“I only attended those 30% that I felt were useful and were very useful some professors for example would provide us with cases from real life and from work life that were very interesting and useful to know” (Nermine, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, October 2017).

The student accounts some of the techniques used by student-centered teachers such as having discussions on real life examples as valuable and that they supported her to relate to the theory and know how to apply and benefit from it. It is clear that she felt engaged and that although as per her previous quote the university didn’t grade much on attendance, she willingly attended those courses as she enjoyed them.

Other students explained why they engaged more to a facilitated class highlighting that the teacher’s role and approach could be affected by the type of courses:

“The nature of some courses requires discussion, for example, we are studying public opinion, so we choose a topic and debate on it and according to the debate quality we are being graded. So, in each course, there has to be debate, and you need to justify your answer with sources {...}. Yes, this is something I’m happy about that I’m now motivated to become a teacher at a university. I will then be engaging students; they will be responsible for exerting the effort to learn, if I teach you every info you will forget everything, I think this is the only way to develop...”

(Nesma, 4th year Mass-communication Student, PU2, November 2017)

The student believes that the type of course could enforce the type of teaching. For example, a course on public debating is more logically to be taught through facilitating discussions and debates, which the student speaks very highly of. Such type of courses and facilitation was for her a valuable experience that engaged her and supported her develop critical thinking skills through viewing and justifying different opinions. Her appreciation let her hope to be a teacher to be able to benefit others students through such approach. She is
clearly aware that for the learning to happen, the students need to put more effort and take the responsibility for their learning.

Other students also confirm that the teaching approach is more relevant to the type of course and have highlighted some courses that involve minimum discussion. For example:

“Lecturing is more in courses with complicated theories’ as economics that the teacher needs to explain” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

She thinks that in such type of courses as economics where the theories are not easily understood by students, more lecturing is provided by the teacher and less discussion. Others highlighted this point of view:

"Of course there were some courses as math and computer where there was no discussion, in other courses there were life examples and discussions”

(Radwa, graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

In this quotation, the student believes that in courses in which the student learns to deal with certain problems or apply certain technical steps, it is normal to have the teacher providing more lecturing and involving less or no discussions. Blumberg (2009) discusses that most science teachers for undergraduate courses believe that students need to learn many facts; there is no room for different perspectives to be discussed at this stage. The author comments, however, that new controversial topics in science encourage students to discuss different perspectives of a theory.

Balancing the accounts of the interviewed students on the teacher’s role in their institutions, students regardless of their major or study year found that most of teachers tend to depend on traditional centered approach. They provide more lecturing and less discussions. This according to the students is due to the teachers’ personal culture and conceptions of teaching. Such teachers consider themselves the owners of knowledge and are more interested or busy with covering the content than to listen to the students’ opinions. This was demotivating for students that some of them were not attending such lectures when possible and they felt not engaged. In contrast, fewer teachers were applying more active approach, facilitating more
discussions and providing life examples, which supported students to engage with the content and feel the benefit of what they learn.

5.2 The Balance of Power

The literature on student-centered approach informs of a change of balance of the classroom to allow some space of control for students that does not normally exist in a teacher-centered class. Such balance did not seem to exist in most of the teaching experiences of the participants. However, students enjoyed some control over topics and procedures in open-ended assignments and some other class activities.

Regarding the possibility of some involvement of students in selection of course content and delivery strategies, many students confirmed that it is typically controlled by teachers. For example, a student declines the existence of such approach:

“No, I can’t recall being involved in suggestions about the content choice nor on the methods and strategies to be used in classes” (Nermine, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, October 2017)

The student does not think she was requested or encouraged by her teachers to be included in suggestions about the content nor on how it was studied. A finding confirmed by the majority of students, for example:

“Of course no. We did not have a choice; the teachers decided what we study. I wish we had a choice, but we never did, It would have definitely been more interesting to study what we really like”

(Malak, Mass-Communication graduate in 2010, PU3, October 2017)

The quoted student also confirms that there was never a room for inclusion or suggestions when it comes to studied content, but she wishes she had that choice. She believes that would have made the content more enjoyable as they would choose to focus on topics they are more interested in. This is consistent with what other students expressed about the few courses when they were for a percentage involved on the selection of the content of the course, for example:
“A few teachers would do so who are interested in this method of flexible teaching. For example, one teacher involved us in choosing the topics from the beginning, and I enjoyed it, as it was something we agreed on and on how we will work on it, so we felt satisfied when we were working on it. We were like part of the process and realized why we did it. It was easier for us and we enjoyed it more”

(Maggie, 2nd year Mass-communications student, PU2, October 2017)

The student explains an example of a positive experience, when she and her colleagues were involved by the teacher in the selection of the topics they studied and the procedures. She expresses how comfortable she felt with that and that it made it easier to learn when she was involved from the beginning on the “how”. As a result, she felt she valued what she was doing and was engaged to the course and appreciated it. This is consistent with the literature on sharing some control with students and how it highly supports their engagement (Weimer, 2002, 2013, Singham, 2007).

The same results were found in relation to both assessment and grading systems that were decided by teachers. For example:

“No, the assessment and grading systems were fixed and decided by the professors, there was no room for discussing how we will be tested or the percentage of the grade will be on which assessment”

(Radwa, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

The student confirms that the teachers followed a fully teacher-centered approach on taking the responsibility for how students will be tested and graded and no discussions were allowed on that. Other students confirm this finding and explain more about how they were tested and graded:

“Yes, it was decided by the teachers, we usually had 40% on midterm, 40% on final exam and 20% on course work and participation”

(Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3, November, 2017)
On the account of the quoted student, it was again teachers who decide how to assess students with fixed percentage of the grade decided from the beginning of the year. Some students mentioned some flexibility could exist in deadlines:

“No there wasn’t such thing as flexible testing or grading procedures. Deadlines would be flexible according to the professor; some professors agree to be flexible with deadlines, they check with us if they are contradicting with deadlines of other subjects and agree to change accordingly, it was very helpful”

(Maggie, 2nd year Mass-Communications student, PU2, November, 2017)

The above quote informs of some teachers who considered the workload students are facing with other subjects and accordingly planned their assessment deadlines, which the students appreciated. This is at the heart of student-centered learning that when students enjoy more control over class procedures, they are more satisfied with the course. When students are involved in decision on course policies, they are more likely to accept those policies (Weimer, 2002, 2013; Ferry, et al., 2007).

Despite the lack of sharing control with students, students gave some examples of using open-ended assignments that supported their participation and inclusion. The sharing did not really involve selection of assignments and the percentage of grade for each assignment, but was more in using open-ended assignments in terms of topics’ choice or flexible procedures. The open-ended nature of the assignments was appreciated by students and they felt it engaged them to the content. For example, a student discusses the benefit he had from working on open-ended research papers:

“The system is different from Cairo University. We have 50 % of the grade on research paper in most courses and 50 % on the exam. The research paper is most useful. We are asked to write 3000 words on a topic from our point of view that we research. Of course, it helps a lot when you read about a topic and develop your opinion. It’s a very special system and supports creativity”

(Ramy, 3rd year Political Science student, PU2, November, 2017)
The interviewee explains that they have 50% of the grades dedicated to a research paper that the student takes the responsibility for in terms of deciding on the topic and how to research it. This is again an area where limited control is shared, as the number of assignments and the dedicated grade is fixed. However, the amount of control enjoyed by the student even when limited made him feel it greatly supported his creativity as well as research skills. He compares that to public universities that are known for much more rigid techniques and feels he is advantaged. This is consistent with what Weimer (2002, 2013) informs that even when only a limited percentage of control is shared with students, it highly engages them and increases their commitment to complete the assignments. Another student confirms this result and the benefit of choosing the topic:

“We are free to choose people and the topic to discuss, even if the topic is a cultural taboo, it could be accepted and professors are open-minded to allow us discuss such topics as part of the assignment. I design an awareness campaign to raise awareness on such topic [...] . Yes, it is very useful. I feel I’m on ground, as I go to the field and speak to people about the topic and learn about it. I don’t think this exists in other universities who apply only traditional assessment on what you have studied. I can remember what I have learnt” (Nesma, 4th year Mass-communication Student, PU2, November 2017)

The Mass-Communication student appreciates the availability of choosing the topic she is interested to discuss in the assignment and that the teachers are open-minded enough to allow her to discuss topics that are considered a taboo and start raising awareness around it. Complementing what the previous quotation explained about gaining research tools, this student discusses the value of field research. As part of the open-ended assignment, she has field interviews and seems to enjoy being in the field and exploring how people perceive this topic. Choosing a taboo topic, discussing it and then designing an awareness campaign over it is a sign of tackling critical thinking skills as part of the assignment.

Some teachers provided specific topics to be searched in assignments, but the students had the opportunity to be creative in how to handle the topic:

“Very specific topic, but we have the freedom to be creative, and they are problem-based assignments, all assignments are so. Yes, this was very useful, as they ask us for example to go to companies and speak about marketing in specific in a company, so we
see how they are working on marketing and write recommendations” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October 2017)

In this case, although the teachers decide on the topic of the assignments, the students have the freedom to discuss the topic from different aspects. The type of assignments as well is very empirical and learning also goes beyond the classroom to the field. So, the students have the opportunity to practice the theory they have learnt in classroom and also analyze case studies and come up with recommendations which support problem solving and critical thinking skills. The focus on practical learning is a unique feature of private universities which aim to provide students with market-oriented skills (Levy, 2011, Varghese, 2006).

The empirical nature of the assignment was celebrated in the words of other students:

“It was all practical, for example we apply the theory on a particular company. Yes, that was useful and I felt it when I started working and had such information and skills”
(Radwa, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

The graduate student felt that empirical assignments that included case studies of corporations for example were very useful. She confirms that the skills and knowledge she had from this experience supported her when she started working.

An undergraduate student explains the difference why she valued assignments with flexible guidelines:

“Sometimes, I enjoyed the task, when I was allowed to choose the topic and there is flexibility in the guidelines, and I’m passionate about what I’m doing. But there are other times when I was doing the assignment just to get the grade. That is really irritating, because I don’t have a chance to learn what I enjoy and want to learn”

(Maggie, 2nd year Mass-communications student, PU2, October 2017)

The student highlights the importance of having the passion about the discussed topic to be able to learn and enjoy while learning. She relates fixed assignments with the very common theme in teacher-centered learning that students are following strict rules just to be able to pass
the exam. The grade not the learning becomes the end goal as Weimer (2002, 2013) explains. This was also confirmed by students who had less open-ended assignments:

“But not as many as I expected, it's only briefing for what I have in the lecture. I don't need to research that much, I could do some research to add value, but it's not mandatory” (Hend, 1st year Mass-Communications student, PU3, November, 2017)

The quoted student thinks that the assignments didn’t stimulate her thinking, as they were more or less about briefing what has been taught in the lecture without much input from her side. She is not required as part of the assignment to do research. She believes that doing research would add value to the assignment, but she doesn’t seem to assume the responsibility for doing so without being asked. It is highlighted in the literature on teacher-centered learning that students taught by this approach are more following what they are asked to do rather than being responsible for learning (see for example Weimer, 2002, 2013; Lea et al, 2002; Crumley et al., 2015).

The findings of this theme on the balance of power in classroom confirm that most courses were controlled by teachers in terms of selecting content, delivery strategies and course procedures with no or minimum signs of inclusion of students. The assessment and grading was also fixed and decided by faculty without any consultation with students, though a few teachers showed some flexibility in deadlines. Assignments frequency and grading were also largely decided by faculty, but it was quite common for teachers to use open-ended assignments where students chose the topic or the procedures to handle it, which students perceived to support their research, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Those assignments also included real world case studies that students found very useful and which is a typical feature of teaching at private universities globally.

5.3 The Function of Content

In a learner-centered approach, the teacher should support students to understand the desired outcome of the content. Students are to engage with material and value it, rather than mechanically memorize it to get high grades in the exam. The teacher provides students with opportunities to learn new or additional content and apply the knowledge to it (Blumberg, 2009; Weimer, 2002, 2013). There were different approaches by faculty on using the content. Some
teachers provided opportunities for students to learn and apply extra content, while others were very traditionally committed to a fixed content. While some teachers as well attempted to promote critical thinking through the exams, others wanted students only to reflect the teacher’s opinion.

Asked about how far they were aware of the learning outcome, most students referred to the syllabus indicating the outcome and them fairly aware of that outcome:

“Yes, this is in each subject, at the beginning of the course we know the outline and the outcome and that is written, and then after you study the module you start to link everything” (Ramy, 3rd year Political Science student, PU2, November, 2017)

On the student’s account, it was part of the introduction to courses that students know about the outlines of what they will study in the course and the desired learning outcome. He explains further that during the course he starts to link the material with the purpose of studying it. Another student for example confirms that she thinks the courses will be useful for her career:

“Yes, I was aware of the learning outcome for example in the fourth year I knew what I will use for work” (Sherine, Business Administration graduate in 2017, PU2, November, 2017).

The student, who confirms she was aware of the desired outcome of the courses she studied, believes that she is able to identify what she will use in her career from her studies.

Other students, although they were informed why they study such courses, they didn’t relate to all of it:

“But I only found the practical part more relevant, the theory, I think won’t be useful in my career” (Karim, 4th year Mass-Communication student, PU3, November, 2017)

As elaborated in the quote, the student could not relate to the theoretical part of the courses and only found the empirical part useful for his future career. This could be a problem of teaching not creating the appropriate link between the theory and its application and supporting students to see this link. The literature on learner-centered teaching provides
guidance for teachers in using techniques as asking students to write reflection notes on assigned readings, helping them to relate and react to those readings (Moulds, 2005).

Other students expressed concerns about the rationale for studying some courses:

“The outcome is in the syllabus and I think yes I’m aware of it, but not necessarily convinced. We are not on credit hours and there is core for each major and electives, but sometimes, I think the core is not beneficial. For example, my major is HR and we study international business which is useful to know, but I don’t think it relates to my major” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The student here expresses an issue discussed in the literature when students fail to relate why they study certain courses that seem irrelevant to their study focus. Blumberg (2009) notes that this is common when students are asked to take advanced courses outside their major as in this student’s case. A learner-centered instructor is then recommended to support students see the value of such courses and provide clear explanations of why they should study them, which does not seem to be the case here.

One of the core functions of content in learner-centered teaching is to provide learners with the opportunity to learn new or additional content and apply the knowledge to it. Some teachers in the selected universities provided students with optional content that supported their knowledge and helped them to develop research skills. For example, a student speaks of the flexibility of the content she studies:

“We have a text book that comes from the university abroad that we partner with, but we don’t cover it all. We are given a list of readings and we can get the info from any relevant reference. It is quite flexible. We can always choose between books and use external sources as long as they fall within the topic. And it is part of the marking criteria to get external sources, but time wise it could be challenging; if the content is not big load, I try and get external sources” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The Business student highlights that she is not obliged to study from a textbook only, but she is provided with a list of optional readings. She is also asked to search and use extra
readings relevant to the topic of study. Using extra sources is part of the grading criteria in the exam, which she explains she tries to do, but it could be challenging if the workload is high. Other students also confirmed this finding and link it to research tools:

“It is more open, the book is for guidance, but we surely use content outside the book. We search and get our sources, we have online library with access to many readings that we often use for assignments” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October 2017)

The student confirms that she was not limited to using a text book, but she was encouraged to use more references and do research using the sources available in the library. This informs of tendency towards student-centered approach in covering content that also introduces students to information literacy skills (Blumberg, 2009).

This brings another important factor discussed in the literature on the function of content in a student-centered approach that students should be engaged to the content and able to reflect on it. They should be able to conclude meaning out of the content rather than just memorizing it. Exams should be testing their knowledge in the subject and provide room for self-reflection, rather than asking students to reproduce ideas of teachers and studied content. Many of the interviewed students in this study did not feel they had to memorize to pass exams. For example, one of the students explains that using a project-based content supported her to engage with such content:

“Although the course and work load is big, but because of the project, I did not need to memorize. We work on projects all year and I get back to the textbooks for reference, as it is covered already in the project, so I learn as it goes” (Nesma, 4th year Mass-Communications student, PU3, November, 2017).

Having the opportunity to apply the content through activities as a project was appreciated by the student, as it supported her to engage with the content and understand more about it. Therefore, she did not feel the need to memorize or just repeat what is in a textbook. This is one of the goals of the content in a student-centered approach (Cullen et al., 2012). Asking about how they were tested on the content, some students confirmed they were able to use the self-accessed readings to pass the exam:
“No, it’s more about the knowledge, it is never about memorizing. I search for knowledge online and get scores in the exam even when I find a reading that is not in the syllabus and use it in the exam. I still get the grade” (Ramy, 3rd year Political Science student, PU2, November, 2017)

The Political Science student confirms that the knowledge he gains through researching extra sources during the course is what he uses for exams, so he does not need to memorize. He does not feel he is limited to one source of information that he needs to echo, but he can search for more and build his own knowledge of the subject.

There was, however, other teachers who seemed to focus on covering a textbook without enough room for students to search and gain more knowledge from optional readings:

“I study from the slides of the professors, but the curricula is not difficult. External sources are useful, but not encouraged enough; we are only blamed for using external sources when many students get a bad grade in the exam” (Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3)

The quoted student felt that although using external sources is useful, he is not encouraged enough to use them. He depends on the lecture notes provided by the professor, who seems to be the main source for information. He mentions also that students could be blamed for using less sources in the exam, which indicates a lack of clarity on the learning outcome by the students. Learners here do not seem to be well informed of what they are expected to learn through the course and how to reach further information. Other students informed of a more fixed approach in learning the content:

“No we only study from text book and lecture notes, no flexibility” (Radwa, graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

In this case, the student did not feel there was any flexibility in using the content, and that they were only studying from textbooks and lectures prepared by teachers. Such approach leads students to feel they are more or less repeating what the teachers say:

“Yes, we had textbooks and typed lecture notes while teachers were lecturing, and sometimes used external resources, but the textbook is more important; we are judged in
the exam on the book whether we use it or not.” (Sherine, Business Administration graduate in 2017, PU2, November, 2017)

Despite using external sources sometimes, the Business student still felt that the learning was not focused on gaining the knowledge. She felt she is just echoing the assigned textbook in the exam. Another student links that approach to some teachers’ attitudes:

“Not all teachers are so, but the style of some teachers is very traditional and they only want to see their opinions on paper” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October, 2017)

The student reflects here an extreme case of teaching-centered learning imposed by some teachers, as she has no room for expressing her own views or reflection, but rather just echoes the teacher’s opinion.

The main finding of this theme is that there were differences in teachers’ attitudes towards using content. While many participant students were informed of the learning outcome of the studied content and realize its benefit to their future, others could not relate to some courses. Some teachers also supported students to go beyond the assigned textbooks and read extra sources on the subject, which supported their engagement to the content and their research skills. Those teachers also tested students in a way that measures how far they are informed on the topic and promoted critical thinking rather than memorizing. There were still other teachers who were very traditional in providing the content through lecture notes and assigned textbooks that students were limited to with less opportunity to research and more tendencies towards mechanically reproducing the teachers’ views in the exams.

5.4 The Responsibility for Learning

The student-centered teaching seeks to empower students to take more responsibility for their learning. Weimer (2002, 2013) describes dimensions of teachers-students relationships that promote active learning and students taking the responsibility for learning as: Students able to see logical consequences for their actions, consistency in what teachers say and do, high standards maintained by teachers, caring teachers and teachers committed to learning. Such active environment is also enhanced through class activities that engage learners as cooperative
learning, debates, simulations, games. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are accordingly developed by students. While generally teachers in this study helped students assume responsibility through consistency, maintaining high standards and commitment to learning, they were still perceived by students as less caring. Cooperative learning was quite common, but more practiced with teaching assistants than with teachers.

Logical consequences seemed to be fairly realized by most participants, who could see the consequences for their actions. For example, when asked about how teachers handle coming late to class, the policy was different from one institution to the other, but students generally felt the responsibility for their actions:

“If you arrive after the teacher you won’t be allowed in class and in tutorials we have 10 minutes tolerance at the beginning of the lecture, but if we arrive after that we will be counted absent for that day, and we are allowed only to be absent for three times in the semester, so we made sure to be there on time. For the lectures, attendance was not taken. This was the policy in our university. So, to be honest, we attended the lectures that we felt were useful for us and in which teachers were giving us many real world examples” (Hadeer, Business Administration graduate, 2016, PU1, December, 2017)

The graduate business student seems to be taking rational decision based on realizing the policies of the class. So, she attends the tutorials on time as she knows she will be counted absent if late for more than 10 minutes, but she also realized the benefit of those classes and was keen to attend. She was selective in lectures as there was no policy to commit her to attend, but again she was keen to attend the lectures that added value to her learning. Similar responses were received when students were asked if they do the assigned readings, which is the other example suggested by Weimer (2002, 2013) for testing how students see the consequences of their actions:

“I had to prepare the readings for tutorials as they were discussed and we should take part in the discussion, especially that sometimes the readings were assigned by groups and I’m part of a group, so others depend on me. And there was a quite big percentage of the grade for participation. We were working all through the semester to get the
grade not only before the exam” (Yasmine, a graduate of Economics and Business in 2011, PU1, December, 2017)

Student was motivated by the grade for participation, but the teaching was successful in making her realize the responsibility for doing the readings as advised by Weimer (2002, 2013). She knows that she cannot just get away without doing the reading and she also realizes that as a member of a group, she has responsibility towards her colleagues, as they depend on each other’s in completing the reading assigned for the group. Another student, although she was very committed to attend the lectures, she did not assume responsibility to do the readings:

“`We had attendance in lectures and we were not allowed to miss many classes. I don’t think it was counted absent if I go late, but I was keen to go on time to write notes as I didn’t want to miss information, it wasn’t about memorizing it was about understanding the real life examples that were elaborated in the lecture that I could not find if I use the book only. For example, in advertising the teacher would show a video of an ad and start analyzing it, if it has appeal for example. I can’t get this on my own if I do not attend {...}. For readings, it was not really emphasized in our faculty, sometimes yes they ask for it, they would recommend us to read but we don’t do, when the teacher asked questions and we didn’t have the answers, they just continued to present” (Malak, Mass-Communications graduate in 2010, PU3, December, 2017)

The quoted student gives two examples that relate to assuming responsibility for actions, she was attending the lectures on time as she knew she would miss information she would not be able to find somewhere else. However, as teachers did not emphasis the readings and continued to lecture when students were unprepared, the student assumed that it was the responsibility of the teacher to explain the reading, which is quite consistent with what Weimer (2002, 2013) discusses regarding responsibility. According to the author, the actions of teachers are key in supporting the students to assume more responsibility for their learning.

Regarding consistency, most teachers seemed consistent in their actions and students could realize that:
“To a large extent teachers were doing what they commit to, I think it was an advantage that the system was strictly followed in our university” (Hadeer, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1, December, 2017)

The business graduate thinks that in her university, the system was generally strictly followed and she sees that as an advantage. Teachers as main players in this community were committed to do what they say or promise to do. Another student confirms that this was the case at her university too and she related it to the strict grading system:

“I think they were consistent and have to commit to what we have been told, because it is all graded. I mean, they inform us in advance that all activities are graded and then deadlines are communicated, any paper or course work is graded, so you have to do it to get the grade {...}. Grade was my objective yes, but at the end it was very beneficial for me, for my character development at least. For example, searching tools and reading. I have benefited from the reading process a lot, and I was able to reflect my personal opinion and it made a difference to my writing style and the way I think. This was the benefit I felt when I graduated and started to work” (Malak, a graduate of Mass-Communications in 2010, PU3, December, 2017)

The student accounted teachers as consistent, as at the end they graded all activities and committed to that. For her getting the grade was an objective, but she informs also that this did not stop her from getting the benefit of learning. She mentions that readings and searching tools supported her develop personal skills as she was more able to think critically and reflect her opinion, and it also improved her writing style. She felt the benefit of developing those skills after graduation and pursuing her career.

With regard to keeping high standards, many students thought their teachers were aiming at high standards for their courses and encouraged students to commit to those standards. The result was reflected in the skills they developed:

“Yes, they kept high standards, because the learning was based on your efforts with their guidance. For example, you go to a company and the field and see the empirical part of the theory. There was no course without projects. There were always readings
and optional readings and teachers pushed for the readings. I also gained skills that I found particularly important for my career afterwards. The skill of searching for data and for interview participants and also preparing surveys at that age and presentation skills, all that was useful for my job afterwards” (Yasmine, Economics and Management graduate in 2011, PU1, November, 2017)

The Economics graduate highlights that she could feel that teachers were keen to keep high standards. For her that was clear in students taking the responsibility for learning through exerting the effort and being guided by teachers. She valued that projects and going to the field were an essential part of all courses and for her that was a strong sign of maintaining high standards by teachers. This was a common theme among the participant students who particularly appreciated working on projects in most or all courses, that it is not simply about theoretically studying content, but to have the chance to implement and practice the theory. This also highlights a set of skills she developed consequently as team working, research skills, communication skills and presentation skills. This empirical nature of the assignments and the developed skills were stressed by other students:

“I think for sure I have developed skills. When we interview people outside and do projects this is considered in my CV and will help me to get a job as per feedback from my graduate friends. For example, because I’m studying media, we are asked to interview celebrity as the grade is on both the interview quality and how you were able to reach this person. And interviewing a celebrity is counted in my CV as well. I also get a sponsor for my project and if I don’t have the communication skills, I won’t be able to get that. If don’t have the skills why would someone consider sponsoring my project. I need to have such skills to be able to convince the sponsor” (Nesma, 4th year Mass-Communication student, PU3)

The student believes she was able to develop communication skills through the projects. As media student, she was trained on interviewing celebrities. She also had to seek a sponsor for her project and use effective communication to convince sponsors in addition to ensuring the quality of her work. She believes those skills are important for her career.
All students appreciated that presentations were an essential part of the learning at their faculties:

“We do presentations in most subjects and some of the presentations have a large percentage of the grade. Yes, it is very useful. At school, I was very shy. Now I want to go up and speak and express my point of view. I can handle public speaking.” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The student assures that presentations are required in most courses and that it supported her to develop her personal skills. She explains that she was shy at school, but she is now able to do public speaking and to express her opinions.

Another Business student highlights further skills developed through presentations:

“Yes, in most courses we present, so for example, I present in English to a big audience and the presentation skills made me outspoken. I'm also judged on creativity and on managing my time, which was all very beneficial” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October, 2017)

In this quote, the student appreciates being able to practice English in presenting to a big number of audiences and that this supported her to be outspoken. She also appreciates that she was judged on creativity and time management which supported her in developing those skills.

Graduates expressed that practicing presentations in undergraduate courses was very useful in their career:

“We had many individual and group presentations, and creativity was one of the criteria and sure I developed the skill. I felt that when I started to work; I learnt to use body language, tone of voice and how to engage people. Other people at work would be astonished that as a fresh grad I’m very good in presentations which was not the case for others. It was very interesting, as we sometimes had a full project with all its stages including marketing and finance” (Maha, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1. November, 2017)
The business graduate student explains that as undergraduate she was doing presentations and she was encouraged to be creative as this was main criteria. She also details how her presentations and communications skills developed in terms of effectively using her body language, tone of voice and building rapport with people. She highlights that these skills were then very useful for her career and that she felt privileged to have those skills at early age in comparison to her peers at work environment which was also noticed by her co-workers.

A few students thought the standards of the courses needed to be pushed higher by teachers. For example, a Business undergraduate student thinks that courses although beneficial were too easy:

“Yes, I know the learning outcome and yes sure, I think the courses are very useful and relevant, but I think it could be more. I’m an IG student. I think the workload is much less than what I had in high school, it is not even compared to Pre-IG” (Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3, November, 2017)

The student, although considers the courses very useful, he does not see them enough. He compares the workload to his high school studies as a student of international curricula and thinks that the load is much less in university and that there is room to cover much useful content.

Unlike most of the students, a student thought that the amount of empirical projects in the courses he studies is not enough:

“Yes, we have projects but it doesn’t tackle the element of being in a studio. I am a Mass-Communication student, and I think being exposed to the environment in a real life studio is very important for us at this stage and it is not enough to discuss that in lectures” (Karim, 4th year Mass-Communication student, PU3, November, 2017)

On the account of this student, although he is assigned to projects, he needs to be exposed to real life studios. He thinks this is an important skill to be developed as part of his Mass-Communications studies that could not be covered in lectures.

Another student highlights also that in some cases teachers used non-academic references at her faculty and did not encourage research:
“In lectures, usually teachers use presentations and I take notes and use them to study. I sometimes research more materials, but it is not necessary for all teachers. Also sometimes the slides are not based on a textbook or so, there was a case when I researched open sources on the internet and the teacher’s slides were copied from that” (Hend, 1st year Mass-Communications student, PU3, November, 2017)

In this case, the student was in some courses largely depending on lecture notes and not enough encouraged to use research skills and search extra materials. But she highlights also that in one incident she found that the teacher’s slides were copied from non-academic open sources in the internet, which draws a question mark on the standards at her faculty and how they are being monitored.

Weimer (2002, 2013) also highlights caring as an essential attribute to learner-centered teachers who encourage students to be responsible. Building rapport with students and one-to-one interactions are essential to reflect this caring. Interviewed students did not seem to have enough opportunity for direct interactions with teachers. They spoke more positively of the relationship with teaching assistants. While most teachers lectured with general guidance on studied topics, tutorials were facilitated by teaching assistants who provided more one-to-one support for students:

“Discussions were happening in tutorials with teaching assistants, I wasn’t attending much lectures as it depended largely on lecturing, and I did not feel I benefited from that. I was attending tutorials, teaching assistants were more facilitating discussions and debates and they were very supportive” (Maha, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1)

The quoted student preferred to attend tutorials as teaching assistants were facilitating more discussions with students and supporting students with in class activities as debating and the student found them very supportive. Another student who actually attended lectures still did not feel there was room for enough interactions with teachers:

“No, I think there was sort of disconnection between students and teachers. Teachers were not very supportive and they were not involved in any students’ activities. I could only recall one example of a teacher who had passion to one-to-one relations with
students and was very popular, we felt she was a friend and she organized activities for students as she was also the founder of an NGO, but this was her. For most teachers, office hours were very limited and I couldn’t approach them out of office hours. But teaching assistants were supportive. There were also foreign teachers who travel a lot inside semester time and it is not very easy to reach them” (Yasmine, a graduate of Economics and Business in 2011, PU1, December, 2017)

In her account of the relationship with teachers, the student explains how interactions between teachers and students were to the minimum and that teachers were not providing enough one to one support for students nor participating in any student activity. She recalls one example of a caring teacher who was on her own organizing activities for students and engaging with them and they considered her a friend. The student believes that it was more about the character of this teacher who cared for youth. She also highlights that office hours were limited and teachers were not approachable outside those hours. She adds another element of the university hiring foreign teachers who were according to her travelling frequently through the semester so it was difficult to reach them. She confirms as other students that teaching assistants were more supportive.

Another graduate student thinks that this lack of interactions was more due to the teachers’ ego:

“Some teachers were supportive, but not really all of them. Some of them may provide one to one support, but if he is busy, the assistant would sit with you. Especially if he/she is an experienced teacher and has that ego” (Malak, graduate of Mass-Communications in 2010, PU3, December, 2017)

Although she thinks some teachers were supportive, the student does not think this was the norm. It is clear from her quote that she felt disconnected from some teachers and she feels that this was due to the teachers having ego and feeling too important and busy to have time for the students, that they would just delegate this sort of interactions to the assistants.

Other students also expressed how they relied more on teaching assistants in understanding the subject:
“Teaching assistants were more supportive, what I didn’t like about teaching in my faculty is that we weren’t trained enough on some subjects, teachers just lectured and we learn more in tutorials. For example, the math problems we are taught in accounting are very challenging and the way the teachers address such part of the content didn’t help me to get it clearly or to be enough trained on it. But it was better in tutorials. Maybe this is the system, I’m not quite sure, that we get more training in tutorials. But overall, I didn’t always find teaching in lectures useful” (Sherine, Business Administration graduate in 2017, PU2, November, 2017)

The student explains that the system was that she gets more practical training in tutorials on the studied subjects. She found teaching assistants more supportive, but she did not feel the benefit of the lectures and didn’t seem to have built enough relationship with teachers as she did with assistants. Another student mentions an issue in the relationship with assistants:

“Very few teachers interact with us and allow us to ask questions {…}. I think I need to do informal relations with teaching assistants to learn and gain their support. But other students who can’t build such relations wouldn’t not be able to get the support they need. And teachers don’t offer such support willingly; I need to ask for it” (Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3)

The student is not only dissatisfied with the lack of interactions with teachers, but also believes that he needs to build informal relations with assistants to gain their support. He mentions that such informal relations should not be the norm, as not each student would do that.

The commitment of teachers to learning or the passion they had for the content they teach was a further dimension identified by Weimer (2002, 2013) for learner-centered teachers. Generally, participants of this study although not necessarily satisfied with teaching approach, but they felt that their teachers were passionate about the subjects. They mainly related that to the level of experience and deep knowledge of the subjects that their teachers had:

“Our professors are experienced and are famous names and understand about their subjects. For example, a teacher will ask you “have you seen this ad?” and starts adding his points of view about it and what each shot would indicate of hidden messages and then you realize that there is much you haven’t noticed about the ad when you
originally saw it” (Nesma, 4th year Mass-Communications student, PU3, November, 2017)

The student felt that her teachers, who were famous names in the field, were experienced and have the passion for the subject. She gives an example when she seems impressed by the teacher during an advertising course, as the teacher starts explaining hidden messages in the ad that she did not realize at all when she first saw the ad. Other students confirm that finding:

“I did not attend all lectures {...}. The teachers I attended for and who left a mark on me were very experienced in the subject and also came with professional experience. They start giving you real life examples they faced and I found that very interesting and engaging and helped me to know what it is like at real world” (Nermine, a graduate of Business Administration in 2017, PU1, October, 2017)

The student seems to appreciate the experience and passion some teachers had that she felt they left a mark on her. She seems to relate positive teaching experience with practitioners who could provide real world examples and that made the lectures very engaging for her.

Another student found that in majors the teachers were more experienced and committed to learning than in general introductory courses:

“I felt indeed that our teachers had the passion for their subjects. It was more in majors than in general introductory courses that we have those teachers who are very much into the subject, that we feel what they teach us is only the headlines from the deep knowledge they have” (Radwa. A graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

The student confirms that she accounted her teachers for passionate about the subjects they teach. She still felt those teachers were assigned to major courses rather than the introductory courses attended by students from all majors.

In addition to the discussed characteristics of teachers, the literature on student-centered teaching highlighted the importance of in-class activities that support creating such environment as cooperative learning or using more debates, role plays, drama and in-class writings for

In this regard, all participant students informed that they engaged in group work and group projects as part of their undergraduate studies. They highlighted the skills developed as a result of using such techniques:

“Group projects were part of all our courses {…}. I believe it made a difference and I learnt something especially when I’m not in the group with my friends. I learnt more when I dealt with people from different mentalities. Of course, I learnt from that also how to respond to deadlines, how to understand about others better and deal with them accordingly” (Maha, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1, November, 2017)

In this quote, the graduate student confirms that group projects were part of all the courses she studied. She mentions that she thought dealing with new students who are not her friends in a group was more beneficial as she learnt how to deal with people with different mentalities and personalities’ types. She also believes her time management skills or learning how to respond to deadlines was developed. An undergraduate student adds to the skills she acquired as a result of group projects:

“Yes, it provides me with skills, because I see the topic from different points of views especially people from different majors. But when I work alone, I don’t get these skills. I also developed leadership skills as sometimes I needed to be the leader of the group. For example, sometimes you need to be more firm with some people” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The student appreciated working in groups with people from different majors, as she believes each one of them brings different knowledge. In addition, she values also developing leadership skills when she was a leader for a group and how she had to be more firm with some people to commit them to work.

Other techniques as role plays, debates and simulations were less used:
“It depends on the subject and the module, for example in international law we had a simulation for a court, but that’s the only simulation, and of course it was useful as it was a new experience and involved practice.” (Ramy, 3rd year Political Science student, PU2, November, 2017)

This student similarly to others confirmed that such techniques are more used in some types of courses, but not in all courses. He provides an example of an international law course were students had a simulation for a court which he found useful and learnt from. Other students also informed that such activities were more common in tutorials facilitated by assistants:

“That was happening in tutorials with teaching assistants who liked discussion and debates, in marketing for example we sometimes used debates” (Maha, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1)

This student informs that debates and role plays were more available in tutorials facilitated by teaching assistants. Other students expressed there was generally a lack of this type of in-class activities:

“No, we didn’t have these activities, but in English yes there was debate” (Sherine, a graduate of Business Administration in 2017, PU2, November, 2017)

As assured by other students, the graduate informs that those activities were not used in her courses. She recalls debate was once used in a language course.

In this theme on the responsibility of learning, the main characteristics of teachers who could facilitate active learning environment were discussed. The findings indicate that students realized the logical consequences to their actions. They felt that their teachers were consistent or usually apply what they say. Most of the students believed that their teachers were keen to keep high standards of the courses. The students particularly related this to the commitment to using projects and case studies of empirical nature that supported them developing qualitative and quantitative research skills in addition to developing problem-solving, critical thinking and communication skills. It was also very common among participant students that they use presentations in most or all courses, which largely supported their presentation skills and
graduate students found that very useful in their jobs. The majority of participants also perceived their teachers as passionate about the subjects they taught and they linked that to their experience. Students, however, did not perceive their teachers as caring, as they thought there was disconnection between them and that they were more likely to get individual support from teaching assistants who were much more approachable. The teaching assistants seemed to act as mediators between students and teachers and most of the active learning was practiced in tutorials rather than lectures. Among the most common student-activating techniques were cooperative learning and the use of group projects which was widely used in all faculties of the participant students. Such activities were supervised by teachers, but also practiced in tutorials with teaching assistants. The availability of those activities supported the students to develop team working and leadership skills. Other class activities recommended by literature for an active environment as debates, simulations and role plays were less used and were more to exist in some courses than others. They similarly were more to exist in tutorials than in lectures.

5.5 Student-Centered Evaluation

Weimer (2002, 2013) defines two issues that need to be dealt with to promote a more student-centered evaluation. The first is purpose-related, or that students have long been grade-oriented and in a learner-centered approach teachers should support the balance between grading and learning. This is through employing techniques to motivate students for exams and promoting exams that require more thinking and provide more formative feedback. The second is process-related, which is the involvement of students in the evaluation process through self and peer-assessment.

Participant students in this research have informed of being largely grade-oriented although teachers used a few techniques to reduce the exams stress. Feedback was given to students but was more available upon request than being embedded in the system. There was also a clear lack of using self and peer-assessment.

In accordance with the literature, students confirmed that it is still the grade that matters more at the end of the day:
“Well, to be honest yes, I benefited from learning at my faculty in a way or another, but as a student, of course I focused on getting the grade more” (Maha, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1)

The graduate student explains that despite she believes she benefited from the learning she received at her faculty, but as an undergraduate she was definitely grade-oriented. Other students have expressed this aspect in different ways. For example, commenting on assignments student confirmed that her colleagues only bother taking assignments if they are graded:

“The assignment is not graded, that’s why most people don’t do it. If teachers want us to do assignments they grade it, because that’s what makes students do the assignments” (Salma, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The student quote confirms again that it is grades that motivate students to take assignments. Optional non-graded assignments were not considered by most of her colleagues, and she seems to believe that the teachers did not have those assignments as a priority; otherwise they would have graded them.

Asking if faculty attempted to use any techniques to promote the balance of learning and grading such as review sessions, students found that those sessions were common:

“We were informed of the format of the exam early enough in the semester and revision lectures were held prior to the exam. I think we had the information we needed to prepare for the exam” (Hadeer, a graduate of Business Administration in 2016, PU1, December, 2017)

On the account of this student, such review sessions were regular prior to the exam and she thought they supported her to prepare for the exam. She also mentions that they were aware of the format of the exam early in the semester. Other students had those sessions, but they focused on the content:

“They would revise the syllabus, what we studied during the semester, but not how the exam will be, I wasn’t sure about the exam format” (Malak, Mass-Communications graduate in 2010, PU3, December, 2017)
In this student case, the revision sessions were held to ensure students are aware of what content was covered during the semester and they will be tested on, but they were not advised on the format of the exam.

Regarding the possibility of using notes sheets as a sample technique advised by Weimer (2002, 2013) to help reduce the students stress over the exams, some students were allowed to use it especially in mathematical subjects but it not commonly used for most students:

“We usually were allowed to have sheets with main formulas to use in the exam, so that we do not have to memorize them, this was useful for sure” (Yasmine, a graduate of Economics and Business in 2011, PU1, December, 2017)

The Economics graduate student indicates that such notes were commonly used in her faculty to allow them include main formulas so that they do not have to memorize them for the exam which she found useful. Others mentioned it was not used:

“No, we never used that” (Hadeer, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, PU1, December, 2017).

Similarly to most students, the student informs such technique was never used.

About receiving feedback from teachers, a few students received generic collective feedback:

“We get generic feedback that is announced on the website and includes collective mistakes. Then, each group can send feedback request for the teacher, if they want more information on their work. It’s useful especially in midterm to avoid future mistakes.” (Salma. 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, November, 2017)

The teachers in this case drafted a generic collective feedback with mistakes done by different students and posted it on the online tool for everybody to use, which students found very useful to learn from their mistakes. For more feedback on their own work, students were allowed to schedule appointment with their teachers. For most of the students, teachers were able to provide feedback, but when asked to:
“There are office hours when we can go and find teachers for questions. Teachers don’t provide feedback as part of the teaching plan, but they do when we ask for it” (Nashwa, 3rd year Business Administration student, PU2, October 2017)

Teachers as per the student’s quote were available during their office hours to provide feedback for students, but it was not something they were doing regularly as part of the class procedures for assignments or other forms of evaluation. Other students expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of feedback:

“Yes, we had it but not anymore, we used to provide a draft from the research paper and get feedback on it, but now the university policy changed following a change that occurred in our partner university. For me, of course I preferred feedback as there was room for improvement” (Karim, 4th year Mass-Communication student, PU3, November, 2017)

The student informs of a change in policy on providing feedback that occurred as part of the university policy following the policy of their partner university, but the students is dissatisfied with that, as previously he had room for improving his work, 

Regarding the concept of self- and peer-assessment and how far such assessment skills were encouraged by teachers, there was a clear lack of using those methods and they were used on a very small scale usually in language courses:

“We only used it once in a language course, when we were asked to mark for each other’s a piece of writing and gave feedback, but I don’t recall it was used again” (Nermine, a graduate from Business Administration in 2016, October, 2017)

Such techniques as elaborated in the above quote were only used during a language course, but not again in her major. Other students confirmed that if used, it would be just with multiple questions quizzes:

“No. we have not used that, only in quizzes, but it is all about calculating grades not that we give each other’s feedback” (Mahmoud, 2nd year Business Administration student, PU3)
As clear in this student’s words, the peer assessment used was only a process of calculating the grades, but this did not involve giving and receiving feedback. One student informs that it could be used on a small scale during in class activities:

“No, it could only happen in in-class assignment to be trained on the final project, but I think it is useful to have. When you start to correct you realize how big the mistakes could be and I learnt that from IG” (Nesma, 4th year Mass-Communication student, PU3, November, 2017)

This student could have this type of self- and peer-assessment in few in-class assignments in preparation for the project. As she used these techniques during her high school’s studies, she realizes its importance in learning about her mistakes and wants to see more of it.

The findings of this theme on a student-centered evaluation inform that regarding the purpose of evaluation, students are still driven towards achieving grades rather than learning. Some techniques recommended by Weimer (2002, 2013) to reduce the exams stress as review sessions were common, while notes sheets to be taken to the exam were less common. Feedback was used systematically by few teachers, but the majority provided it upon request and students expressed they need more feedback to be able to improve their performance. Regarding the evaluation process, there was also lack of students’ engagement in the evaluation process through self and peer-assessment.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed at assessing to which extent the teaching approach in private universities in Egypt is student-centered from the perceptions of students. It employed Krause (2012) model for quality improvement through teaching activities to review the quality of teaching at those organizations by analyzing to what extent it is student-focused. For conceptual clarity, the study was also informed by the framework developed by Weimer (2002, 2013) that identified the key dimensions of student-centered teaching in five themes: the role of the teacher, the balance of power in the classroom, the function of content, the responsibility for learning and the student-centered evaluation. A qualitative methodology was adopted to gain
deep understanding of the unique experiences of the students who are the recipients of the teaching and who should according to this approach be at the centre of the learning process. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen graduate and undergraduate students from three private universities in Egypt. The findings inform of a lack of student-centered teaching approach as many faculty still depend on traditional lecturing that demotivates students, dominate the control of the classroom with no or minimum inclusion of students, provide minimum interactions with students and rarely include students in the evaluation process. There were, however, some areas where the teaching techniques employed some student-centered features as in providing open-ended assignments and the empirical nature of employed group projects and case studies that stimulate problem solving and critical thinking. Teachers also were perceived consistent in their promises and actions and having deep knowledge of the subjects that in some cases encouraged the students assume more responsibility for learning. This finding questions the ability of such universities to respond to the current challenging situation of higher education quality in Egypt and its ability to provide a more student-centered experience in contrast to the public universities. It is also questionable with many features of teacher-centered approach still evident, how far those universities would contribute to achieving Egypt 2030 vision for higher education development. According to the findings as well those institutions do not seem to be consistent with their visions of applying best global practices in providing quality teaching and learning.

Focusing on the elements of student-centered teaching, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is an area of clear weakness according to the perceptions of students who participated in this study. The teaching still involves long periods of ongoing lecturing that has no or minimum room for discussions. This traditional technique failed to engage the students and led them to be less motivated to participate in such lectures. They felt dissatisfied and that they get no benefit from the time spent at lectures. Students did not feel that the style of teaching was relevant to the teacher’s background and whether he/she comes from a public or private university, but more to the teacher’s personal traits and conceptions of teaching. It is therefore recommended that teaching in those universities considering their vision in applying best global practices employs more student-engaging techniques where more discussions and empowerment of students to express their voice is included. For such shift in the teacher’s role to happen, the universities’ leadership is recommended to tackle this issue on a strategic level.
by revisiting the teacher’s development scheme and embedding such model in the teacher continuous development programmes.

With regard to the element of the balance of power in the classrooms, teachers seemed to still control classes. This was evident in the lack of inclusion of students in selection of course content, the content delivery strategies and the course policies and procedures. There was also no flexibility in grading and assessment procedures. Such resistance of control sharing is still common among higher education faculty as noted by Weimer (2002, 2013). Although the frequency and grading of assignments was controlled by teachers, open-ended assignments and case studies were common and students were given more control over the choice of topics and the aspects to look at the topic. Students perceived this type of assignments positively and believed that they supported them in developing analytical thinking and problem solving skills. To be more learner-centered, teachers are recommended to allow students to express different perspectives to content that should allow them not only to be more critical and accountable, but also to engage more and value the content they study. Also, more inclusion of students in grading system is recommended so that should support them to be more accountable and motivated to learn more which also motivates them to improve their grades (Weimer, 2002, 2013; Blumberg, 2009).

Regarding the dimension of the function of content, there were individual differences between teachers regardless of their faculties or the courses they teach that determined how they used the content. While some teachers were encouraging more external and optional readings and requiring students to use and develop research skills, others were still busy with covering a fixed content that failed to engage students and where developing research tools was not emphasized. These differences were reflected in the way students were tested in the content, as the learner centered teachers supported students to be able to express their views and reflect on the knowledge they gained in exams, while the teacher-centered required students to just echo what the teacher said. Such lack of consistency in teacher’s attitudes towards using the content questions the amount those teachers are clear on their organizations visions and are supported to take them into actions. Many teachers are still recommended to work on engaging the students to content through emphasizing the desired learning and how students could gain access to
information and research skills that support their life-long learning rather than depending on the teacher as the sole source of information.

About the responsibility for learning and following Weimer (2002, 2013) model in identifying teaching characteristics that promote more student’s responsibility for learning, students seemed to realize the consequences for their actions, perceived their teachers as consistent, keeping high standards and passionate about their subjects which also helped them in realizing more responsibility. This was supported by activities of a practical nature that enhanced the engagement of students and the development of their skills. This includes group projects which existed in all courses and encouraged team-working, case studies that involved also field research and using surveys and mastery of presentation skills. There were, however, two main issues that demotivated students to be more responsible learners and more engaged to the classes. Firstly, students found their teachers less caring and did not provide individual support for their students. Although they perceived their teachers as experienced and passionate about their subject, students did not feel this interest in them as learners and felt more disconnected from their teachers who seemed too busy to provide individual support for students. Secondly, this perceived distance between teachers and students was enhanced by the teaching process set-up that placed the teaching assistants between teachers and students. It is true that the students found the assistants very supportive and approachable, but they seemed to fill in a gap that already exists between teachers and students. Students sought support from assistants, as they felt the teachers are too busy to do this. They were mostly keen to attend tutorials facilitated by assistants, while some of them whenever the policy allowed would skip lectures that they mostly perceived of less benefit. In addition, it is the tutorials where more discussions were facilitated and where the learner-centered activities of debates, group projects and case studies were more practiced and only supervised by teachers. This is another issue that is recommended to be tackled on a strategic level, assessing such gap and identifying roles and responsibilities that should guide teachers in providing more support for students and tackling human and financial resources issues that could possibly lead to such situation.

The last discussed theme of learner centered evaluation should as per Weimer (2002, 2013) tackle the purpose of evaluation through balancing grading and learning and the process of evaluation through inclusion of students in the evaluation process using techniques as self-
and peer assessment. On the purpose of evaluation, students were to a far extent driven by grades. And although teachers commonly used tools as review session to help students be less stressed in exams, the use of feedback was not systematic nor with the required frequency that should support students develop self-reflection skills and learn from their mistakes. A systematic approach of providing feedback is highly recommended to allow students to evaluate their work and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and develop these weaknesses. This is associated also with a lack of using self-and peer assessment and inclusion of students in the evaluation process. It is also highly recommended in a student-centered approach that students gain the skills of evaluation for self and others early enough in undergraduate studies. Those skills are very important in preparing the students for the work environment and for learning through life in general (Weimer, 2002, 2013; Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

As highlighted in the above discussed findings, the teaching approach in the private universities in Egypt is not consistent. It is was, yes, noted that there was consistency in some themes as in employing cooperative and practical assignments which is a typical feature of private universities in general and also stressed in the vision of those universities as announced on their websites. Thus, in many dimensions of teaching, it seemed that teaching approach was more subject to individual decisions and less linked to a higher-level objective for the university. For example, some teachers would encourage students to research and use external sources, while others insist on the text book and few assigned readings; some teachers would provide feedback, while others would not. As discussed in the literature, one of the main challenges that face student-centered teaching is that teachers who mostly come from the culture of teaching-centered learning may not share the same vision as top management. It is therefore important for those universities to develop a coherent strategy that links the institutional, operational and teaching levels (Normand, et al., 2008). Teachers as main stakeholders of the education process are highly recommended to be included in the strategic effort and express their issues and challenges. The operation level management could also play a significant role in ensuring the vision is clear to teachers and that high-level objectives are clearly translated into activities.

To sum up, the teaching approach as perceived by the students who participated in this study has a lot to do to employ a student-centered approach. Traditional lecturing involving
minimum discussions, teachers holding the power over classrooms, the tendency of some teachers to cover content rather than encouraging student to engage with this content, less supportive teachers and lack of student-centered evaluation were perceived as key features of the studied teaching approach. However, the teaching emphasized activities of practical nature as group projects and case studies and also used open-ended assignments that were appreciated by the students and perceived by them to develop their skills. Some teachers’ characteristics promoted students acquiring more responsibility for learning as consistency and deep knowledge of subjects. For those universities to be able to increase the quality of teaching which affects the learning and the increased skills acquired by graduates they are recommended to strategically plan and implement more shift towards a student-centered teaching approach. This is perceived to enhance their role in tackling the current issues of quality in the Egyptian higher education sector and contribute to the country’s higher education development goals.

Future research is recommended to tackle the challenges teachers at this typology of institutions face in implementing more student-centered teaching and how far the current strategies and resulted training schemes address this issue. It is also worth studying what role teaching assistants currently play at those universities and whether the amount of work assigned to them rather than faculty is effectively measured or is associated with human and financial resources issues or with possible profit-oriented tendencies by those institutions considering the high fees they already charge for students.


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**Annex I:**

Table 2: List of Private Universities in Egypt

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 AhamCanadian University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.acu.edu.eg/index.php/en/">http://www.acu.edu.eg/index.php/en/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>2 American University in Cairo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aucegypt.edu/">http://www.aucegypt.edu/</a></td>
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<td>4 Arab Open University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aou.edu.eg/">http://www.aou.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>5 British University in Egypt</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bue.edu.eg/">http://www.bue.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>6 Canadian International College</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cic-cairo.com/cic/">http://www.cic-cairo.com/cic/</a></td>
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<td>7 Egyptian e-Learning University</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Egyptian Russian University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.eru.edu.eg/">http://www.eru.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>9 German University in Cairo</td>
<td><a href="http://www.guc.edu.eg/">http://www.guc.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>10 Heliopolis University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hu.edu.eg/">http://www.hu.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>11 Misr International University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.miuegypt.edu.eg/">http://www.miuegypt.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Modern Academy In Maadi</td>
<td><a href="http://www.modern-academy.edu.eg/">http://www.modern-academy.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>13 Modern Sciences and Arts University</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Misr University for Science and Technology</td>
<td><a href="http://www.must.edu.eg/">http://www.must.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>15 Nahda University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nahdauniversity.org/">http://www.nahdauniversity.org/</a></td>
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<td>16 Nile University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nileu.edu.eg/">http://www.nileu.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>17 October 6 University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.o6u.edu.eg/">http://www.o6u.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>18 Sinai University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.su.edu.eg/">http://www.su.edu.eg/</a></td>
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<td>19 Université Française d’Égypte</td>
<td><a href="http://ufe.edu.eg/">http://ufe.edu.eg/</a></td>
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Source: Future University in EGYPT (FUE)