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Learner-Centered Education Across Asia

Dr. Rajendra Kumar Shah^{1*}, Samjhana Basnyat²

^{1*}Associate Professor Tribhuvan University Sanothimi Campus Faculty of Education Head of the Department (HOD) Department of Foundation of Education drrajendrakumarshah@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-0533-1338

²Assistant Professor Tribhuvan University Sanothimi Campus Faculty of Education Head of the Department (HOD) Department of Education Planning and Management basnyatsamjhana@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0009-1328-2717

***Corresponding Author:** - Dr. Rajendra Kumar Shah

*Associate Professor Tribhuvan University Sanothimi Campus Faculty of Education Head of the Department (HOD) Department of Foundation of Education drrajendrakumarshah@gmail.com ORCID: 0000-0003-0533-1338

Abstract

Pedagogical reform is essential to equip the workforce to meet the requirements of a global knowledge-based economy, which demands that students become lifelong learners who are self-directed, adaptable, and innovative. Recognizing the significance of learner-centered teaching, numerous reforms have been initiated across Asia. To assess these developments, systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses have been conducted, focusing on policies and practices of learner-centered teaching in selected Asian countries. These reviews, encompassing studies published since 1950 AD, integrate findings from various sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation and impact of learner-centered teaching across the region. Learner-centered teaching has emerged as the most rapidly advancing and prominently emphasized component of curriculum development and pedagogical reform throughout Asia. Despite its increasing prominence, the implementation and resultant impact of learner-centered teaching exhibit considerable variation across different regions within Asia. This article first discusses findings from five East Asian countries - Nepal, India, China, Japan, and Korea - followed by results from Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore in Southeast Asia. This study indicates that although learner-centered learning originated in Western countries, its impact is progressively increasing throughout Asia. Despite the long-standing presence of philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism in the region, many Asian countries are now showing a strong influence of Western educational frameworks. This shift reflects a broader adoption of learner-centered principles in Asian education systems. The integration of these principles signifies a move towards modern educational practices within the context of longstanding cultural traditions.

Keyword: Learner-centred teaching, teacher-centred teaching, pedagogy, national curriculum framework, education commission

Context of the Study

In many parts of Asia, people see education as the main way to achieve success. Parents have high expectations, students fear failing, competition is strong, and society values academic achievements (Breitenstein, 2013). Countries like China, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam, which follow Confucian traditions, focus on working together and maintaining harmony. They also place great importance on education and respect teachers. In these cultures, teachers are not only seen as instructors but also as mentors, gurus, and authority figures (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). Teachers play a bigger mentorship role here compared to teachers in Western countries (Levinsohn, 2007). In Asia, especially in China, teachers are highly respected and given top status in society (Coughlan, 2013). Accordingly, Nepal and India are also important of Asia. Nepal and India are important countries in Asia. Both countries have unique philosophical traditions and education systems, different from other Asian nations. Philosophies like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Charvaka are widely practiced in these countries. These traditions influence their education systems and cultural values. While distinct, these philosophies also share some similarities with Confucianism.

In many parts of Asia, people believe that education is the only way to achieve success. Parents have high expectations, students are afraid of failing, and there is a lot of competition and pride driving the rise in academic achievements (Breitenstein, 2013). Countries like China, Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam, which follow Confucian traditions, value working together and keeping peace in society. They also highly respect education and teachers. In these cultures, the teacher is seen as a mentor, a guru, and an authority figure (Biggs & Watkins, 2001). Teachers take on the role of a mentor more often than teachers in Western countries (Levinsohn, 2007). In Asia, especially in China, teachers are given the highest level of respect by the public (Coughlan, 2013).

There are generally two main views on how Asian students learn. The first view says that Asian students focus on rote learning, meaning they memorize information without truly understanding it (Ballard & Clancy, 1994; Robertson et al., 2000). In this view, students are seen as "containers" that teachers fill with knowledge. Teachers and textbooks are seen as the main sources

of information, and students are passive, quiet, and do not participate much in class. This way of learning is considered ineffective (Robertson et al., 2000). The second view argues that Asian students are very good at learning because they consistently perform better than their Western peers in international exams (Jensen et al., 2012).

A number of Asian students have performed extremely well in PISA reading, math, and science tests. Pham and Pham argue that if these students only used rote memorization to prepare for PISA, their scores would have been lower. This contradiction has led many researchers, from different viewpoints (Cheng, 2000; Watkins & Biggs, 2001), to rethink the stereotypical ideas about Asian learners. Researchers aim to understand how students from Confucian backgrounds achieved such impressive results on international tests (Cheng & Wan, 2016). To do this, it is important to understand the philosophy behind Asian teaching and learning. Confucius, a revolutionary in education and politics in ancient China around 500 BC (Chuang, 2007), is believed by many scholars to have played a key role in shaping society, influencing many generations, eras, and regions (Cho & Lee, 2001; Pun, 2001). The Confucian education tradition, which has developed over 2,000 years, is highly valued in East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea) and Southeast Asia.

In this article, I have conducted a comprehensive study of the educational reforms occurring in various Asian countries, with a particular focus on the shift towards student-centered pedagogy. I have examined the growing emphasis on fostering active student engagement in the learning process, a core principle of learner-centered teaching. Additionally, I have analyzed the current status and implementation of learner-centered teaching across different educational systems in Asia.

Nepal

With the introduction of modern education in Nepal, new teaching methods began to emerge, although religious education remained prevalent during the Rana rule. The 1956 report by the Nepal National Education Planning Commission highlighted that the curriculum was predominantly academic, which posed challenges for many qualified students who struggled within this rigid system (Acharya, 2002; Singh, 2012). Teaching methods were largely dependent on rote memorization and lectures, creating difficulties for students unable to excel in such an environment, leading to high dropout rates (Shah, 2013).

At Durbar School, students underwent half-yearly and annual exams in English, with oral tests up to grade four and written assessments from grade five, where passing all subjects was mandatory for promotion (Shah, 2019a). In contrast, at Ranipokhari Pathshala, a Sanskrit school, no formal examinations or certificates were issued, but students were evaluated based on comprehension and discipline (Shah, 2013). After 1901, exams were introduced to select clerks, and those passing two subjects were designated as "Dui Passe." By 1910, a dedicated office was established to oversee these exams.

Table-1: Overview of learner-centred learning practices in Nepal

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Nepal	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Singh (2012) Shah (2013) Shah, (2019a) Shah, (2019b) Shah, (2019c) Shah, (2020a) Shah, (2020b) Shah, (2020c) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democracy facilitated the establishment of schools and the advancement of educational development in Nepal. The first education commission, the National Nepal Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) of 1954, signified the commencement of structured development within Nepal's education sector. Since 1984, the curriculum and textbooks in Nepal have undergone multiple revisions. Key features include clear objectives for each grade, organized subject content, and optional subjects. The focus has been on making the curriculum practical, relevant to daily life, and supportive of gender equity while being child-friendly. Pedagogical practices largely rely on rote learning, whole class teaching, and TCT, despite a growing emphasis on LCT, individualized instruction and continuous assessment.

To understand the pedagogical policies and practices of the modern era, it is essential to review the educational commissions formed during this period, the policies developed, and the educational plans implemented (Shah, 2019b; Parajuli, 1999). Following the political change in 1951 AD, democracy was established in Nepal. With the advent of democracy, Nepal underwent significant political, economic, social, and educational transformations (Shah, 2020b; Singh, 2012). This shift brought about substantial changes in the strategies for teaching and learning in the country. In the wake of the political change in 1951 AD, six educational commissions and a comprehensive educational plan were developed and implemented in Nepal (Shah, 2020c). These educational commissions and the educational plan are explained sequentially below (Table-2):

Table-2: Major educational commissions and plans

S. N.	Name of the Educational Commissions	Short Name	Years (AD)
1.	Nepal National Education Planning Commission	NNEPC	1956
2.	All-round National Education Commission	ARNEC	1961
3.	National Education System Plan	NESP	1971
4.	Curriculum Implementation Plan	CIP	1981
5.	National Education Commission	NEC	1992
6.	Higher Level National Education Commission	HLNEC	1999

The All-round National Education Commission 1961 (ARNEC) was established in Nepal in 1961 to create a comprehensive educational framework for the country. Its primary objective was to evaluate and reform the existing educational system, ensuring it met the diverse needs of the population (Shah, 2019a; Parajuli, 1999). ARNEC aimed to promote universal access to education and enhance quality by focusing on curriculum development, teacher training, and resource allocation. The commission recognized the importance of integrating local culture and values into education to foster national identity. Its recommendations led to significant policy changes and laid the foundation for future educational reforms in Nepal (Shah, 2020c, Sharma, 1980).

In 1971, Nepal introduced a new education system aimed at modernizing its educational framework. Key features included a comprehensive curriculum that integrated traditional subjects with practical and vocational training, preparing students for real-world challenges (Shah, 2019b). The reform emphasized decentralization, allowing local communities to take part in educational management, making education more relevant to regional needs (Shah, 2019c; Sharma, 1980). The system focused on access and equity, increasing opportunities for marginalized groups, especially girls and rural children, to create an inclusive environment. Quality improvement was a priority, with better teacher training and effective teaching methods. The curriculum also incorporated local languages and cultural studies to foster national identity and respect for diversity (Sharma, 1987). Overall, these reforms aimed to build a more equitable, relevant, and high-quality education system in Nepal.

The political change in Nepal in 1990 AD led to the re-establishment of a multiparty system in the country. This shift necessitated corresponding changes in the education system to align with the multiparty framework. Consequently, national curriculum framework for the school-level curriculum has been developed and implemented, with periodic revisions made to improve the school-level education system (CDC, 2007; Shah, 2020b; Sharma, 1990). Similarly, changes have been made to the education policies over time. The following sections present an overview of the school education national curriculum frameworks and the related education policies (Table-3):

Table-3: Major educational policies in Nepal

Educational Policies	Short Name	Years (AD)
National Curriculum Framework	NCF	2005
National Curriculum Framework	NCF	2007
Framework of Child Friendly School	FCFS	2010
National Policy on Children	NPC	2012
National Curriculum Framework	NCF	2019
National Education Policy	NEP	2019

The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-2005) in Nepal, encompassing Pre-primary to Grade 12, was developed for the first time in 2005. This framework articulated the necessity for a national curriculum structure, addressed the broader context and curricular concerns, and established visions, goals, and guiding principles for curriculum development. It also set forth the objectives of school education, proposed the curriculum structure, and defined student assessment policies, while outlining strategies for the framework's implementation (CDC, 2005). It was revised in 2007.

The Child Friendly School (CFS) framework was approved on November 9, 2010. It defines a CFS as a place where children can learn happily at their own pace and ability (DOE, 2010). The framework emphasizes that schools should respect each child's interests and skills, creating a supportive environment. CFS should ensure that children feel safe - physically, mentally, and emotionally. This includes providing a learning environment tailored to their interests, promoting equality, caring for their health and safety, and maintaining a no-punishment approach. The focus is on improving existing schools instead of starting new programs. To make schools better, plans should involve school management, community engagement, and teaching methods that prioritize children. The framework provides clear goals to help create child-friendly environments and encourages interactive and innovative teaching methods.

On April 6, 2012, the Government of Nepal approved the National Policy on Children (2012) to protect children's rights and ensure their safety and well-being (Ministry of Women, Children, Social Welfare, (2012). The policy aims to safeguard children from violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation while providing necessary care and nutrition. It emphasizes the importance of education for children's physical, mental, and educational development and encourages their participation in decision-making (Shah, 2019c). The policy also seeks to strengthen the juvenile justice system and prohibits political and armed conflict activities in schools. It requires organizations to create child protection policies and aims to foster child-friendly learning environments by revising educational materials with a focus on children's rights. Additionally, the policy highlights the need to teach about child rights and outlines actions against teachers who harm students. It designates areas with many children as "Zones of Peace" and aims to incorporate child rights topics into training programs for various educational and professional institutions.

The National Curriculum Framework of 2019 in Nepal sets the guidelines for education in the country. Its main goals are to provide a high-quality education for all students and to help them develop skills for life (CDC, 2019). The framework emphasizes LCT, meaning that teaching should focus on the needs and interests of the students (Shah, 2019a; Shah, 2020a). It encourages active learning, where students engage with the material and participate in their education. The framework also aims to promote critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration among students. It includes guidelines for teaching different

subjects and stresses the importance of including local culture and values in the curriculum. Overall, the National Curriculum Framework is designed to create a more effective and relevant education system that prepares students for the future.

The National Education Policy (NEP) of 2019 in Nepal aims to provide quality education accessible to all, regardless of background. A key focus is inclusive education, ensuring that children from all communities, including those with disabilities, can attend school and receive quality education. The policy emphasizes improving teaching quality through better teacher training and updated materials (Shah, 2019b; Shah, 2020b). It also promotes lifelong learning, encouraging individuals to continue acquiring new skills throughout their lives. Additionally, the NEP aims to equip students with practical skills relevant to the job market. Finally, the policy incorporates local culture and languages into the curriculum to foster a sense of identity and belonging. Overall, the NEP seeks to create an education system that meets the diverse needs of all students and supports their future success.

India

The first National Policy on Education (NPE) introduced in 1968 sought to reform the education system to enhance economic and cultural growth, foster national unity, and support a socialistic society. However, this initial policy predominantly focused on broad objectives and largely overlooked the importance of teaching methods tailored to children's individual needs (MHRD, 1968). The shift towards LCT in Indian education commenced with the NPE of 1986, marking a significant policy shift that underscored the government's recognition of the importance of addressing each child's unique needs and experiences in education. This evolution reflects a broader understanding of educational efficacy and student engagement. To fully appreciate this change, it is essential to examine the historical context and foundational policies that preceded it. The earlier policy's emphasis on macro-level goals without addressing pedagogical methods highlights a critical gap that the 1986 NPE aimed to address.

The NPE 1986 marked a transformative shift towards LCT, prioritizing the needs, experiences, and well-being of each child. It aimed to achieve universal access to primary education, increase enrollment and retention, and enhance educational quality, ensuring all children attain essential learning levels. The policy emphasized a supportive and nurturing environment to motivate children, aligning with LCT that value each learner's unique potential. By focusing on emotional and psychological well-being, the NPE 1986 underscored that education should foster a space where children feel valued and inspired to learn.

Table-4: Overview of learner-centred learning practices in India

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
India	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCF (2005) Sriprakash (2012) Suzana Brinkmann (2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first National Policy on Education (NPE) introduced in 1968 sought to reform the education system to enhance economic and cultural growth, foster national unity, and support a socialistic society The NPE 1986 was important because it recognized the government's duty to provide free and compulsory primary education. It aimed to move away from rote learning and promote a holistic education that addresses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. LCT is being promoted under the curriculum reform Still faces significant challenges due to the nation's examination-oriented evaluation system Participation of students is not equal; some are dominant while others are passive Trainings of teachers are crucial

The NPE 1986 marked a significant turning point in Indian education policy by officially embracing learner-centred ideals. The policy's emphasis on creating a nurturing and supportive educational environment, promoting activity-based learning, and safeguarding the well-being of children reflects a deep commitment to the principles of LCT. This approach, which prioritizes the individual needs and experiences of each child, represents a fundamental shift towards an education system that is designed to help every child reach their full potential. Moreover, the NPE laid the groundwork for subsequent reforms aimed at embedding learner-centred practices across various levels of the Indian education system.

In the decade following the 1968 policy, India encountered significant political instability, sluggish economic growth, and challenges within primary education. These issues highlighted the shortcomings of the earlier policy and underscored the necessity for a more effective approach to educational reform. In response, the government introduced the National Policy on Education (NPE) in 1986. This policy marked a departure from its predecessor by placing greater emphasis on teaching methodologies and the role of the child in the learning process. The NPE 1986 was pivotal in affirming the government's commitment to providing free and compulsory primary education, recognizing that achieving this objective required education to be not only accessible but also meaningful for each child. By adopting LCT principles, the policy shifted away from a uniform approach and began to address the distinct needs of every learner.

Table-5: Major educational education commission and curriculum framework in India

Educational Commission and Curriculum Framework	Years (AD)
Kothari Commission (1964-66)	1966
National Education Policy 1968	1968
The National Curriculum Framework 1988	1988
National Curriculum Framework, 2000	2000
National Curriculum Framework 2005	2005

The Kothari Commission (1964-66) proposed significant reforms in school education to address systemic issues and enhance educational quality in India. It advocated for a common school system to provide equitable access to education across different social and economic strata. The Commission emphasized the need for a more integrated and coherent curriculum, focusing on both academic and vocational skills. Additionally, it recommended reforms in teacher training and professional development to improve teaching standards and educational outcomes. Accordingly, The National Education Policy (NEP) 1968 marked a significant shift in Indian education by emphasizing the need for a more unified and integrated educational system. It aimed to address educational disparities by promoting regional language instruction and expanding access to primary and secondary education. The policy laid the groundwork for future reforms, focusing on improving educational quality and fostering national integration.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 1988 introduced a comprehensive approach to educational reform in India by emphasizing a more flexible and relevant curriculum. It aimed to move away from rote learning and promote a holistic education that addresses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. The framework encouraged the integration of diverse subjects and the use of innovative teaching methods to enhance student engagement. Additionally, it sought to align the curriculum with national goals and socio-economic needs, marking a pivotal shift towards more LCT. The 1992 revision of the National Policy on Education (NPE) built upon the LCT framework established in 1986, refining and enhancing the strategies of the earlier policy. This revision underscored the government's commitment to continuously adapting the educational system to address the evolving needs of children. The NPE 1986 marked a crucial shift towards LCT, focusing on the individual needs of each learner. The 1992 revision reinforced this approach, reflecting a sustained effort to create a more responsive and effective educational framework.

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2000 represented a significant advancement in Indian education reform by emphasizing a LCT and greater curricular flexibility. It sought to move beyond rote memorization by integrating conceptual understanding and critical thinking into the curriculum. The framework advocated for a more inclusive and relevant education system that reflects contemporary socio-economic contexts and fosters holistic development. Additionally, it highlighted the importance of teacher autonomy and professional development in implementing the revised curriculum effectively. Accordingly, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005 marked a transformative step in Indian education reform by promoting a learner-centred pedagogy that focuses on experiential learning and critical thinking. It emphasized reducing the academic burden on students, encouraging learning that is both enjoyable and meaningful. The framework advocated for the inclusion of local knowledge and real-life experiences in the curriculum to make education more relevant and contextually appropriate. Furthermore, it highlighted the importance of continuous and comprehensive evaluation, moving away from exam-centric assessments towards a more holistic understanding of student progress.

Sriprakash (2012) critically examines the political motivations underlying discourse introduced in the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1986. While the ideals of solicitude and self-paced learning appear to prioritize the well-being of the child, they were also strategically framed to address broader educational challenges (NCERT, 1988). Specifically, these concepts were linked to improving school attendance, participation, and retention, particularly among first-generation learners. Thus, the LCT aimed not only to enhance individual learning experiences but also to expand access to education, ensuring that more children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, remained in school (MHRD, 1986). Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Despite these underlying political agendas, the NPE 1986 marked a significant shift in Indian educational discourse by prioritizing the child's affective needs and developmental pace. For the first time, Indian education policy recognized the importance of accommodating varying learning speeds and providing a nurturing, supportive educational environment (Bhattacharjee, Wadhwa & Banerjee, 2011; Cenker, 1994). This shift moved away from traditional, authoritarian teacher-student relationships, as the policy explicitly prohibited corporal punishment, challenging existing power dynamics within the classroom.

China

In China, learner-centered pedagogical practices are rarely implemented in elementary and lower secondary schools on a national scale (Chen, 2015; Tao et al., 2013). While there has been encouragement from education administrators and some small-scale initiatives by Chinese educators promoting learner-centered pedagogy - such as group work in higher education (Chen, 2015) - the actual adoption of these practices remains limited. This is partly due to a strong adherence to traditional teaching philosophies and the influence of Confucian educational principles (Li & Wegerif, 2014). Additionally, China's success in PISA assessments has led some educators to resist changes to the current intensive study routines and workloads, thereby limiting the willingness to adopt effective practices from high-performing countries (Zhao, 2013).

Table-6: Overview of learner-centred learning practices in China

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
China	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Ministry of Education (2002) •Ministry of Education, China (1993) •Watkins, D., & Biggs, J. B. (2001). •Chan, C. K., & Rao, N. (Eds.). (2010). •Wang (2007) •Wang (2010) •Tsegay (2015) •Lu and Liu (2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China initiated its quality education reform policy at the turn of the century • LCT is being promoted as part of the curriculum reform initiative • China continues to face significant challenges due to its examination-oriented evaluation system • Many teachers exhibit a conservative stance regarding student autonomy • Student participation is uneven, with some students being dominant while others remain passive • Student interactions are significantly influenced by lecturers' experiences and perceptions of LCT • Training for lecturers is essential to effectively implement learner-centered practices.

According to Chen (2000), ancient Chinese culture is characterized by two main schools of thought: one focused on society and the other on individuals. Pre-Qin Confucianism, Mohism, and Buddhism emphasize societal values and have significantly shaped Chinese cultural tradition. In contrast, Daoism, particularly Zhuangzi, prioritizes the individual and serves to balance societal ideals. The former school begins with the ideal society, establishing standards for the individual to serve societal needs, while the latter starts with the ideal individual, advocating for a society that meets individual needs. Despite both schools stressing the importance of harmony between society and individuals, the former has exerted a much stronger influence on Chinese society and education.

For thousands of years, societal authorities have wielded significant power over individuals. Confucius viewed society as a hierarchical structure where each person has a designated role, necessitating respect for those higher in the hierarchy. This includes children respecting parents, wives being submissive to husbands, students obeying teachers, and civilians deferring to authorities. According to Nisbett (2003), individuals exist within specific social contexts, and their actions are influenced by their relationships with others. Thus, personal actions cannot be seen in isolation; they must be understood in terms of their impact on others. Harmony in relationships becomes a primary goal in this collective culture, characterized by interdependence and shared mutual obligations among group members. In collectivistic cultures, a child's academic success is a significant source of pride for the entire family, as well as for their class, school, and country (Salili, 1996). Additionally, Confucian values emphasize the importance of education in promoting peace and harmony. Education is seen as a means to achieve universal harmony - fostering positive relationships with nature, society, others, oneself, and between different nations and cultures (Jin and Dan, 2004).

For Confucianism, education significantly shapes individuals: "By nature, men are nearly alike, but through experience, they grow wide apart." The Confucian tradition emphasizes the virtues of effort, perseverance, and filial piety, highlighting respect for knowledgeable teachers. It also underscores human perfectibility and educability, suggesting that educational success can lead to self-actualization and the wisdom to serve the public, ultimately resulting in personal fame and family wealth. In this view, intelligence is less important than the willingness to work hard and overcome challenges. Thus, values such as discipline, personal effort, and perseverance take precedence over critical thinking and creativity. While memorization is a key aspect of learning, it is not the sole focus. Confucian tradition recognizes memorization, understanding, reflection, and questioning as interrelated components of learning. Additionally, repetition in learning can serve both mechanical and meaningful purposes, enhancing understanding rather than being purely rote (Marton, Dall'Alba, and Kun, 1996).

While formal Confucian teachings are absent in modern schools, Chinese education, rooted in Confucian values, emphasizes hard work, self-determination, and respect for knowledge, authority, and elders. These principles lead to a TCT in classrooms (Agelasto, 1996) and strongly influence child-rearing practices (Au and Entwistle, 1999). From an early age, children are trained to memorize and recite poetry, believed to aid future learning and cognitive development. Biggs (1996) highlighted that experiences before formal schooling significantly affect learning outcomes. This upbringing fosters a strong work ethic and respect for teachers and elders, encouraging collaborative learning and repetition with Chinese characters and multiplication tables. In a society that highly values educational achievement, memorization and hard work are prioritized in preparation for various exams.

Chinese perspectives on life have been significantly influenced by Daoist thinking, which shapes how people perceive the world and address contradictions. Nisbett (2003) notes that Daoist thought reflects a fundamental Eastern approach to life. The dichotomy of LCT and TCT can be illustrated through the Daoist yin-yang symbol, where yin and yang coexist and define each other, each holding varying degrees of truth. While the balance of yin and yang is a key principle of harmony, it does not imply that both sides are always equal; one may dominate at times (Nisbett, 2003). This yin-yang balance serves as a dynamic feature applicable across various contexts.

Kim, (2001) by applying some key aspects of the yin-yang dynamics, describes four major aspects of the yin-yang concepts: (i) duality and plurality, (ii) both-and in contradiction and paradox, (iii) reciprocity and change, and (iv) harmony and balance. A key aspect of yin-yang dynamics is the concept of duality and plurality, where one source encompasses two aspects that together form a multi-dimensional whole. This framework emphasizes a "both-and" mutuality rather than an "either-or" approach, allowing contradictory ideas to coexist in a dynamic correlation. This relationship is fluid and continuously evolving, with opposite entities not only standing side by side but also challenging and correcting each other through ongoing interaction. Such mutual interaction is purposeful, aimed at maintaining a balance at the core of this dynamic process.

Discussing the relationship between yin and yang does not mean we should let things unfold on their own. Instead, we should recognize the nature of opposing components within a complex system and actively manage these different forces through our decisions to achieve a balance that harmonizes these seemingly conflicting sides. Similarly, the balance between TCT and LCT should not happen by chance. Teachers must make intentional choices about which approach to use and for what purposes. These decisions are crucial for meeting the goals of the subject and for effectively educating each child within the specific context that shapes their learning possibilities (MOE, 2002; MOE,1993).

In the 1990s, concerns about Chinese education grew, highlighting that the exam-focused system was detrimental to students' psychological well-being and ineffective in developing necessary skills for the global information society (Ministry of Education, 2002; Tan & Hairon, 2016). This led to a curriculum reform aimed at transitioning from traditional exam-oriented education to LCT, initiated with the quality education reform policy at the turn of the century (Ministry of Education, 2002). The reform emphasizes reducing student workload, fostering higher-order thinking skills, and promoting holistic development (Feng, 2004). Pedagogically, it seeks to replace traditional lecturing and rote learning with learner-centred approaches that enhance learner autonomy (Wang, 2010; Lu & Liu, 2016).

However, significant challenges remain. Despite some collaborative learning and real-world application of knowledge, issues of unequal participation persist, with some students dominating discussions while others remain passive (Tsegay, 2015). Teachers' experiences and perceptions heavily influence student interaction, and while they recognize the value of LCT, many still prefer direct guidance and maintain conservative views on student autonomy. To successfully implement LCT, prioritizing professional development and providing adequate training for lecturers is essential (Zhong, 2010).

Japan

In the late 1990s, the University Council of Japan presented a report titled "A Vision for the University of the 21st Century and Future Reform Measures", which advanced the progress of university reform. The report advocated for a shift towards a more LCT in teaching and learning, addressing concerns that Japanese education had become excessively rigid, uniform, and exam-focused. The Ministry of Education (MOE) supported these reforms by promoting LCT and active learning.

Table-7: Overview of learner-centered learning practices in selected Asian countries

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Japan	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ito (2017) LeTendre (2017) Mizokami (2014) The Japan Times (2013) Yamada and Yamada (2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active learning began to gain recognition in Japanese higher education around 2010, with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) emphasizing its importance through the Transformation of Undergraduate Education and National Project (2012-2015) The concept of active learning remains poorly defined Most university lecturers lack a deep understanding of LCT and continue to rely on traditional TCT Nonetheless, there is a gradual shift towards adopting active learning approaches The education system lacks coherence and systemic transformation across all levels, including elementary, middle, and higher education.

The concept of "active learning" proved challenging to translate into Japanese. Although the term "noudouteki/syutaiteki na gakusyū" exists, it does not fully capture the nuance of "active learning," leading to the adoption of the borrowed term "akutibu laningu." This suggests that active learning was not a traditional norm in Japanese education. However, it began to gain recognition in Japanese higher education around 2010 (Mizokami, 2014) and gained further prominence following its inclusion in the 2012 comprehensive report, Qualitative Transformation of Undergraduate Education by the Central Council for Education. The approach was again emphasized in the national project Improving Higher Education for Industrial Needs (IHEN) (2012-2015), funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (Ito, 2017). Despite these policy endorsements, the implementation of active learning has faced challenges. Many university lecturers, who are not trained in educational theory but are discipline-specific experts, view LCT and active learning merely as instructional methods rather than a comprehensive pedagogical framework (Ito, 2017).

Many Japanese universities and colleges have gradually begun to implement active learning methods (Yamada & Yamada, 2018). For example, the Center for Research and Development of Higher Education at the University of Tokyo has advanced

active learning through the integration of information and communication technology (ICT). However, the push for LCT appears to be insufficiently addressed at the elementary and middle school levels. LeTendre (2017) notes that the emphasis placed by MEXT on active learning is confusing for elementary and middle school teachers, thereby impeding its implementation. There is a notable lack of clarity from MEXT regarding the precise nature of "active learning." Overall, Japanese universities lag behind their international counterparts in enhancing teaching practices, as many institutions continue to rely predominantly on teacher-centered lectures. This situation reflects a broader issue of incoherence and insufficient systemic transformation within Japan's education ecosystem.

Korea

The traditional Korean classroom model is predominantly teacher-centered, a practice with deep historical roots in Confucianism. The Five-Year Plan for Educational Development, established and released by the Ministry of Education in 1999, aimed to advance LCT among other objectives (Lee, 2001). This reform plan sought to cultivate individual talents, aptitudes, and creativity to better prepare students for the demands of globalization and the knowledge economy. However, the envisioned outcomes of this plan are infrequently realized, as teacher-dominated classrooms continue to be prevalent in Korea (DeWaelche, 2015). Both lecturers and students are more accustomed to the teacher-centered paradigm, which aligns with traditional educational values and the conventional role of teachers. The transition to LCT, including group work, poses challenges for teachers not only due to the unfamiliarity of their altered role but also because, within the Confucian context of Korean culture, teachers are expected to maintain complete control over the teaching and learning processes, which is compromised when students collaborate in groups (Dailey, 2010).

Table-8: Overview of learner-centered learning practices in Korea

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Korea	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dailey (2010) Lee and Sriraman (2013) Choi and Rhee (2013) DeWaelche (2015) Kim (2015) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The education blueprint released in 1999, among other objectives, emphasized the establishment of learner-centered teaching Active learning began to receive increasing recognition. Despite these efforts, LCT is infrequently implemented in practice, as teacher-dominated classrooms remain prevalent. Korean students generally exhibit discomfort in non-traditional classroom settings. The teacher is traditionally expected to maintain complete control over the teaching and learning processes. Some degree of TCT continues to be necessary in large class settings. LCT is likely to encounter significant resistance, particularly during the initial stages of implementation.

Korean students generally exhibit discomfort with communicative tasks that require critical thinking and the sharing of original ideas in nontraditional classroom settings (Choi & Rhee, 2013). Research indicates that students often feel "burdened and anxious" due to the substantial amount of group work involved. Consequently, when implementing LCT, particularly in large classes, it is necessary to incorporate some degree of TCT to help students adjust to the new approach (Kim, 2015). The implementation of LCT in Korean higher education faces cultural barriers rooted in Confucian philosophies, which emphasize rote learning for exam preparation, TCT, and a culture of reverence for authority (Cho, 2004). As a result, shifting to LCT presents a significant challenge for both lecturers and students, and is likely to encounter considerable resistance, especially during the initial stages.

Vietnam

A number of factors such as didactic instructional methods, inadequate professional preparation of teachers and heavy teaching loads are impacting the quality of education in Vietnamese HEIs. To address these issues, reform efforts have been out line in the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), which serves as a roadmap for reform to be made by year 2020. In addition, the Vietnamese government has also introduced the Educational Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) (2014-2019) and the "Education for ALL" Action Plan (2003-2015) to revamp the country's education system (Global Partnership for Education 2018). The introduction of a LCT was considered to be a necessary reform to provide an education for all due to its aim of meeting the learning needs of all learners. However, despite the apparent influence of the LCT that the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training is trying to encourage, learning that occurs in the classroom is still very much teacher centered. The implementation of LCT in Vietnam has been impeded by significant cultural barriers and local infrastructural constraints (Pham, 2010a). Many educational reforms have failed due to the education community's resistance to LCT. Given that Vietnam is a collectivist society, the learner-centred approach is perceived as novel and radical. The entrenched traditional practices, particularly in higher education institutions (HEIs), make it difficult to replace teacher-centered pedagogy with LCT.

In Vietnam's teacher-centered culture, where deep respect for teachers as the primary source of knowledge is the norm, students rely heavily on instructors for learning. It is essential to reconcile the disparity between LCT principles and local cultural values. Furthermore, the lack of a thorough conceptual understanding has resulted in superficial adoption of LCT, limiting its impact. Professional development for lecturers is crucial to raise awareness of the limitations of traditional teaching methods (Pham, 2010a) and encourage them to embrace the initial steps towards pedagogical change.

Table-9: Overview of learner-centered learning practices in Vietnam

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Vietnam	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Global Partnership for Education (2018) Pham (2010b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA), Educational Development Strategic Plan (EDSP) (2014-2019) and an Education for ALL Action Plan (2003-2015) were carried out to revamp the country's education system Many reforms have failed because an LCT approach was rejected Learner centred teaching approach is considered new and radical It appears hard to sweep away traditional practices and implant LCT at higher education institutions

Malaysia

In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Malaysia introduced the National Education Blueprint (NEB), alongside other strategic initiatives such as the National Higher Education Action Plan (2007-2010) and the National Higher Education Strategic Plan beyond 2020. These efforts aim to drive transformation within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and ensure their competitiveness in the global education market (Grapragasem et al., 2014). HEIs are currently transitioning towards LCT environments, though progress has been hindered by the absence of clear guidelines (Yap, 2016).

Table-10: Overview of learner-centered learning practices in Malaysia

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Malaysia	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chen and Chang Asia (2014) Grapragasem et al. (2014) Mahamood et al. (2009) Nurahimah et al. (2013) Siti Zuraidah et al. (2015) Tengku Sarina (2012) Yap (2016) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2012, the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced the National Education Blueprint (NEB), alongside strategic initiatives to reform higher education Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are transitioning from traditional TCT to LCT environments Progress has been slow, primarily due to a lack of clear and comprehensive guidelines Lecturers have adopted a hybrid approach, combining both TCT and LCT Overall, lecturers have made notable progress in implementing LCT.

Several studies indicated that Malaysian teachers employed various pedagogical methodologies, involving the traditional teacher-centered approaches or a mixture of TCT and LCT approaches such as direct lectures, group discussion, demonstration field trip and tutorials in their teaching learning process (Mahamood 2009). Lecturers' partial adoption of LCT may have been due to the pressure of government demand rather than as being representative of their own belief that the approach can contribute to learning among students. This led the university lecturers to integrate teacher-centered strategies together with a LCT (Tengku Sarina 2012).

Recent studies have demonstrated that university lecturers are successfully implementing LCT (Chen & Chang, 2014; Siti Zuraidah Md Osman et al., 2015). Lecturers recognize their active facilitative role in ensuring LCT occurs, avoiding rote learning and incorporating elements of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) into their approaches (Nurahimah et al., 2013). However, some lecturers still prefer to dictate the learning process rather than allowing students autonomy over their learning. Additionally, many lecturers struggle to apply LCT in large classes due to a perceived lack of experience with this approach (Siti Zuraidah Md Osman et al., 2015). Consequently, some continue to favor traditional and conventional teacher centred methods, particularly in assessment, over LCT practices such as portfolios, peer assessment, and reflective writing (Nurahimah et al., 2013).

Singapore

Singapore's education system is designed to maximize the potential of each student by fostering holistic development and cultivating lifelong learners. Our approach emphasizes the acquisition of enduring competencies essential for success in the 21st century. By offering a diverse range of educational pathways, we accommodate the varied strengths and interests of individual students, ensuring that every learner is equipped to excel in their unique capacities.

The Singaporean educational system, reflective of broader Asian paradigms, was characterized by a highly scripted and uniform approach across all levels, primarily adhering to a teacher-centered pedagogy. In response to rapid globalization, the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, and intensifying global competition, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore initiated a comprehensive curriculum review in 1997 to reassess its objectives and strategic direction for the future. Recognizing that a responsive education system necessitates systemic reform, Singapore's education framework - from preschool to university - underwent what has been termed a "big bang" transformation, encompassing a thorough review and overhaul of its structures and processes (Gopinathan, 2001).

Table-11: Overview of learner-centered learning practices in Singapore

Country	Region	Source	Key Findings
Singapore	East Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gopinathan (2001) • Maxwell (2017) • Tan et al. (2017) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive curriculum review in 1997 initiated a transformational and systemic shift towards LCT • The "Thinking Schools, Learning Nations" (TSLN) initiative marked a significant policy transition towards 21st-century education • The Model of Teacher Education for the 21st Century (TE21) underscores the critical importance of learner-centeredness in teacher training • School education has experienced a pedagogical shift, adopting new strategies to enhance student motivation and autonomy • Lecturers and tutors play a vital role in fostering a conducive environment for LCT • Professional development programs for educators are essential to support this shift • The cohesive education system promotes active participation, autonomy, and constructive learning from elementary through higher education.

A key element of this reform was the formulation and implementation of diverse initiatives designed to systematically promote and support a vision of LCT. This approach has played a central role in the successful execution of Singapore's comprehensive educational reforms. For these reforms to be meaningful, fundamental changes were necessary at both the primary and secondary levels. A major aspect of this reform effort is encapsulated in the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" (TSLN) initiative, launched in 1997. TSLN signified a significant policy shift towards a 21st-century educational framework, aimed at preparing Singaporean students to face future challenges (Tan et al., 2017). As a result, the entire education system has transitioned towards a more learner-centred approach, prioritizing the quality of learning over the quantity (Maxwell, 2017).

Singapore's education reform has introduced significant changes in teaching methods across all levels. The Ministry of Education's Model of Teacher Education for the 21st Century (TE21) emphasizes learner-centered practices, placing students at the core of education (Tan et al., 2017). A major pedagogical shift has focused on boosting student motivation and autonomy. For instance, the National University of Singapore (NUS) adopted a hybrid medical curriculum, moving from traditional TCT approaches to LCT, active learning. The use of problem-based learning (PBL) at NUS further highlights this shift towards learner-centered teaching (Gwee & Tan, 2001). Students have shown strong communication and creative thinking skills during tutorials and presentations, underscoring the need for more opportunities for self-expression and independent learning. Lecturers and tutors are key to creating a supportive environment for LCT. Therefore, specialized staff development programs are essential to effectively implement LCT at universities. Singapore has built a solid foundation for LCT across all educational levels, marking a nationwide shift toward LCT as a core of its educational success.

Singapore has taken a structured and thorough approach to implementing LCT, applying reforms across all education levels, from elementary to higher education. Since the late 1990s, these reforms have brought major changes to teaching methods, learning approaches, and curriculum design, aiming to create a more learner-centered and value-based system. The reform policy is carried out in coordination with government agencies, schools, universities, and educators, transforming Singapore's educational environment to encourage active participation, autonomy, and meaningful learning. This comprehensive support is key to the success of the reforms. Furthermore, the strength of Singapore's education system is closely tied to its highly skilled teachers, making it a leader among Asia's top educational systems.

Conclusion

Many countries in the region have undertaken educational reforms to enhance educational quality and address emerging needs, with a significant emphasis on the LCT paradigm. Despite robust policies advocating for LCT, its implementation in several Asian countries faces considerable challenges, as highlighted by previous studies (Shah, 2020c; Pham, 2011; Shin & Crookes, 2005). India and Nepal have historically adhered to diverse philosophical traditions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and others. These philosophical frameworks significantly influence educational practices, shaping pedagogical approaches and values. LCT, in particular, is affected by these traditions, as they emphasize holistic development, interconnectedness, and ethical principles in learning. The integration of such philosophies into education fosters a deeper, culturally embedded approach to teaching and learning. Particularly, in nations such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, the entrenched influence of Confucian culture complicates the transition, as Confucian values emphasize hierarchical relationships and position teachers as authoritative figures and primary knowledge sources. This cultural context may hinder students' ability to engage in intellectual discourse. To advance LCT in school education, it is crucial to promote power-sharing in the classroom, thereby encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their learning and repositioning lecturers from authoritative figures to facilitators of learning (NCERT, (1988).

In Confucian-influenced societies, the integration of LCT principles must be executed with careful cultural consideration. It is often more feasible to adapt LCT pedagogies to align with local traditions than to implement a comprehensive

transformation (Ho, 2017; Rao & Chan, 2010). For example, the practice of deep memorization, prevalent in Confucian cultures, can be harmonized with LCT through the incorporation of reflective repetition and independent projects. To foster active learning, it is crucial to strike a balance between solitary study and interactive methods, such as online discussions and group activities. Furthermore, augmenting students' communication skills through targeted soft skills training can facilitate more dynamic academic discourse. A judicious combination of didactic lectures and constructivist approaches may be particularly effective for first-year students, offering both foundational knowledge and opportunities for interactive engagement (Ghosh, 2007).

Despite ongoing challenges in implementing LCT across many Asian countries, Singapore has successfully transformed its entire education system - from elementary to higher education - to robustly support and advance LCT. The country's effective policy advocacy and comprehensive systemic reforms have been instrumental in its educational success. This underscores the necessity of implementing changes throughout the entire education ecosystem, particularly at the school level, to facilitate early adoption of LCT by both students and educators. Singapore's achievement in education reform is also significantly attributed to its high-quality teacher workforce, which is crucial in fostering a strong foundation for LCT prior to students entering tertiary education.

Despite ongoing challenges in implementing LCT across many Asian countries, Singapore has successfully transformed its entire education system to robustly support and advance LCT. The country's effective policy advocacy and comprehensive systemic reforms have been instrumental in its educational success. This underscores the necessity of implementing changes throughout the entire education ecosystem, particularly at the school level, to facilitate early adoption of LCT by both students and educators. Singapore's achievement in education reform is also significantly attributed to its high-quality teacher workforce, which is crucial in fostering a strong foundation for LCT prior to students entering tertiary education. Students will be better prepared for LCT if they have been exposed to this approach since primary education and have developed critical competencies such as communication, problem-solving, and self-regulated learning skills. To sustain LCT at the university level, it is essential for lecturers and tutors to engage in professional development activities, including training programs, workshops, and seminars focused on LCT pedagogy. Additionally, school should consider developing LCT-specific modules tailored to various disciplines - such as medical, science, engineering, social sciences, and humanities - for staff training. Infrastructure and resource development is also crucial, encompassing educational technology, classroom design, learning spaces, and necessary tools and resources (modules, online resources) to effectively support LCT.

Asian countries including India, are actively pursuing a paradigm shift towards LCT through ongoing education reforms (NCERT, 2005; NCERT, 1998). While robust advocacy and policy development signal positive progress, the pace of transformation is often impeded by both cultural and non-cultural barriers. Evidence from various case studies and literature indicates that effective reform in Asian school education requires a systemic overhaul of the entire educational ecosystem, akin to Singapore's approach. Additionally, it necessitates the implementation of hybrid pedagogies that integrate Constructivist principles with Confucian values, ongoing professional development for educators, and the advancement of infrastructure and resources (NCERT, 2000).

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Author's Bio-Sketch

Dr. Rajendra Kumar Shah is an Associate Professor at Tribhuvan University, Sanothimi Campus, where he also serves as the HOD of Department of Foundations of Education. With over two decades of academic experience, Dr. Shah has been actively engaged in teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate students across various campuses. His expertise extends to supervising scholars pursuing MPhil and PhD degrees, guiding their research in diverse areas of educational foundations. He has also contributed to academic development through curriculum design and educational policy consultation. His scholarly work has significantly impacted the field, earning him recognition within academic and professional circles.

Samjhana Basnyat is currently serving as an Assistant Professor at Tribhuvan University, Sanothimi Campus. She has been delivering teaching service at university level since last 20 years. She has previously held the position of Head of the Department of Education Planning and Management (EPM). At present, she is pursuing her doctoral studies.

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