

Research Article

Examination of Students' Engagement and Teaching - Learning Style at Norbuling Rigter College Using the Grasha - Reichmann Model

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the correlation between the teaching and learning styles of the students and their involvement in the Norbuling Rigter College (NRC), as per the Grasha-Reichmann Model. The research design was descriptive and correlational, and the data obtained were measured with structured questionnaires consisting of variables of teaching style, learning style, and student engagement variables. The results indicate that the emotional and cognitive engagement of the students is high in NRC, while behavioural engagement is medium in NRC. The collaborative learning style is predominant among the students, followed by dependent and participant styles, respectively, which shows that students like reading and participating in interactive and group-based learning activities. On the other hand, the teaching styles most often applied by tutors are Expert and Formal Authority, and little use of Facilitator styles. This reflects a very teacher-centred style of learning with new practices of student-centred learning. The correlation analysis shows that the more positive, the higher the level of student engagement in the learning process, while the more negative the result, the lower the level of student active participation. The result of the correlation analysis shows that the teaching style of facilitators is positively correlated with the level of student engagement in the learning process in the classroom. The researchers found it agreeable that if there is a match between the teaching style and learning preference, it will have a positive influence on the improvement of the student's involvement. It recommends improving student-centred teaching techniques, improving interactive learning and improving faculty development to make the overall teaching more effective at NRC.

Keywords: Student engagement, teaching style, learning style, Grasha-Reichmann model, collaborative learning.

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INTRODUCTION:

Student engagement has emerged as a key concern in higher education due to the fact that it is directly related to academic achievement, quality of learning, and student retention. It reflects the degree of involvement the students are displaying in learning processes through their conduct, emotions and thoughts. Students have always been known to learn better through active participation in the learning process as opposed to passively receiving information (Fredricks et al., 2004). Engagement is, therefore, not only a student-based factor but also very much influenced by the classroom teaching environment and classroom instructional practices. In Norbuling Rigter College (NRC), student participation in courses, tutors and academic programs varies, indicating that the engagement level varies. Some like to talk, group work, class

activities, but there are few that are passive or minimally engaged. The difference indicates that classroom practices, particularly classroom teaching methods play an important role in shaping students' attitude towards learning. The quality of teaching is one of the crucial factors which influences student engagement. Teaching style is a combination of behaviours, strategies and approaches that a teacher consistently employs when teaching as well as the way that the teacher interacts with the students. As Grasha (1996) suggests, there are five styles of teaching: Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator, and Delegator. These styles are divided into teacher centred and student centred styles of teaching wherein in the teacher put in the knowledge systematically and the teacher interacts with the students through interaction, independence and active learning. The type of teaching style adopted in the classroom may therefore have a great

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influence on the responsiveness, participation and involvement of the learners in the learning activities. Different teaching styles are also different in terms of students' learning preferences. The Grasha Reichmann model classifies the styles of learning into six categories: Independent, Dependent, Collaborative, Competitive, Participant and Avoidant (Grasha, 1996). These styles reflect the approach students would take to content, their teachers, and other students. As indicative examples, collaborative learners enjoy learning in groups, while dependent learners require a lot of teacher instructions and guided learning. It is important to learn these learning preferences, as learning is best achieved when there is agreement between teaching and the needs of the students. It is a well-known fact that student engagement is a multidimensional concept that comprises behavioural, emotional and cognitive aspects (Fredricks et al., 2004). The behavioural engagement can be conceptualized as engagement in academic activities, emotional as interest and belonging, and cognitive as effortful thinking and SRL strategies. It has been found that involving more people leads to improvement in their academic performance and learning experience in higher education (Appleton et al., 2008; Sukor et al., 2021). Although there is an increasing body of research on teaching and learning styles, student engagement, and learning styles around the world, there is a paucity of empirical research in the Bhutanese context of higher education. In particular, there are no studies to be found at Norbuling Rigter College that involve the interaction of teaching styles and learning styles and how that influences student engagement. The existing difference indicates the need for systematic research to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics within the classroom and improve the effectiveness of teaching. Hence, this research uses the Grasha-Reichmann model to investigate the connection between the teaching styles, learning styles, and student engagement at NRC. The results are expected to provide informed data for informing practice in student-focused ways more effective in higher education.

Problem Statement

Norbuling Rigter College (NRC) is experiencing a constant drive to improve teaching quality and

learning, and in some classrooms, students are not consistently engaged in learning. Most students have positive attitudes towards learning and have interest in learning activities but this is not always so in terms of regular attendance, concentration and participation in learning activities in class. Thus, it is evident that there is a significant gap between attitudes of students towards learning and the attitudes of students in educational institutions. One of the reasons for this difference may be that there might be a mismatch between the students' learning preferences and the students' teacher's style of teaching. In other classrooms, teaching and learning might be highly directive and teacher-controlled, with an emphasis on imparting content and on the teacher's authority. If not, more interactive and student centred approaches can be employed. These differences in the kinds of instruction may influence students' responses to learning activities, with some students being very active and others being passive or not interested in the form of instruction used. Although Grasha-Reichmann model is an effective model to explain relationships between teaching style, learning style and engagement, little empirical evidence of the model has been found in Bhutanese higher education particularly NRC. Without systematic investigation, it is difficult to determine if teaching methods are aligned with students' learning styles and how the learning styles relate to each other in relation to engagement level. Therefore, the problem of the study is identified that the researcher faces in the present study is that there is a lack of empirical knowledge about the interaction between teaching style and learning style in order to influence student engagement in the learning process at Norbuling Rigter College. This separation was a limitation for teachers and institutional directors in designing quality pedagogical designs that would be student-centred, with a focus on interaction, and would enhance the overall learning process. The study aims to identify certain objectives that will be achieved.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to analyse the engagement of students and the teaching and learning styles in Norbuling Rigter College (NRC) with the Grasha-Reichmann model. Particularly, the study aims to:

- (i) determine the most common teaching styles used by teachers at NRC.
- (ii) Identify the students' top three learning styles at NRC.
- (iii) Examine the relationships between modes of instruction and participation.

Research Questions

The following research questions are used to guide this study:

- (i) What are the most frequently adopted teaching styles by the teachers at Norbuling Rigter College?
- (ii) What are the advantages and disadvantages of using each of the learning styles identified in NRC?
- (iii) Is there a significant relationship between 3. Teaching style and engagement in students?

Scope of the Study

This research is conducted on the undergraduate students and lecturers from the college of Norbuling Rigter. It introduces the style of teaching, learning and interaction with students based on the work of Grasha-Reichmann. The research covers the NRC only and cannot be adopted in other colleges/institutions in Bhutan, but the results can be generalised into other higher education contexts. The study is also limited to three major dimensions: teaching style (perceived and implemented by the teachers), learning style (reported by students), and student engagement (behavioural, emotional and cognitive).

Literature Review

There is considerable literature that relates teaching styles, learning styles and student engagement to how students learn in the context of higher education. This paper is based on the Grasha Reichmann model that provides a systematic approach to the interpretation of the interactions between student learning preferences and teaching behaviours. The Grasha-Reichmann model identified five teaching styles: Expert, Formal Authority, Personal Model, Facilitator and Delegator (Grasha, 1996). These styles lie in the continuum between teacher-centred and student-centred teaching. Expert style is based on mastery of

content and transmission of knowledge, whereas the Formal Authority style is based on structure, rules and clear expectations. Personal Model style is taught by demonstration, and the facilitator style teaches by allowing the student to participate, discuss and think independently. Delegator style encourages student independence and self-directed learning. It is possible that a mixture of these styles in the learning context would be the most effective for teaching (Grasha, 1996). At the same time, the model has identified six student learning styles: Independent, Dependent, Collaborative, Competitive, Participant and Avoidant learning styles. Such styles indicate the ways students like to interact with learning resources, teachers and classmates. An example is that collaborative learners like to work in groups and interact with each other, whereas dependent learners need to be guided by the instructor. The importance of learning about these differences is that learning outcomes are not only influenced by what is being taught but also by the method in which learners, such as students, prefer to learn. The concept of student engagement is widely agreed to be a multidimensional concept consisting of behavioural, emotional and cognitive factors (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioural engagement is defined as the involvement in academic exercises, i.e. attendance, effort and participation in discussions. Emotional engagement demonstrates the interest, enjoyment and belonging of students in the learning environment. Cognitive engagement involves deep learning strategies, self-regulated and purposeful efforts to engage with the content of the academic program. The teaching practices demonstrated here have strong evidence of impacting student engagement. Inayat and Ali (2020) found a positive correlation between styles of teaching that foster autonomy and interaction and student engagement, curiosity and exploration.

Similarly, a study conducted by Shaari et al. (2014) revealed that the teaching approach by the lecturers plays a significant role in the academic involvement of students, which indicates that the teaching approach is a big determinant of the learning outcomes. Research on engagement has also found that engagement is directly linked to academic performance. Sukor et al. (2021) found that student engagement has a positive correlation with academic performance, especially in terms of

students' interest and enjoyment in learning, which is referred to as emotional engagement. As it is further highlighted by Amerstorfer and Freiin von Münster-Kistner (2021), a supportive relationship between the student and the teacher and interactive learning settings contribute to increased engagement and motivation. The results of learning styles and academic performance are, however, contradictory. Other research has shown that teaching strategies which match the students' learning styles can improve learning (Malacapay, 2024), while others have not shown any significant correlations between learning styles and academic achievement (Garraway-Lashley, 2022). Even Newton and Miah (2017) agreed that there is little empirical evidence for the learning styles hypothesis and that the quality of teaching and learning might be more effective than the learning styles classification.

The literature suggests that learning styles provide information on students' preferences and that the teaching style and classroom interaction are more directly related to student engagement. Nevertheless, the recent studies that implement the Grasha-Reichmann model in the situation in Bhutanese higher education are few. This makes the study relevant and necessary as it has left a gap in the knowledge of the interaction between teaching and learning styles as experienced in institutions like Norbuling Rigter College.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research approach was used in this study. The descriptive design helped to abstract the pattern of teaching styles, learning styles and the level of engagement for the respondents. The correlational design was used to determine the relationship between teaching styles and students' involvement in an NRC context.

Sample

The population of the study was the undergraduate students and teaching staff of NRC. There were 278 students and 31 tutors participating in the study. The student sample was varied in terms of academic programs and year levels, and there was a variety of responses from the student group. Inclusion of both students and instructors has made it possible to have a more detailed insight into the dynamics of teaching and learning.

Data Collection Instruments

Structured questionnaires were used to gather the data. Three main instruments were used:

- (i) A behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement scale (Student Engagement Scale).
- (ii) A Learning Style Inventory based on the Grasha-Reichmann model.
- (iii) A teaching style questionnaire for the detection of the main teaching styles of the teachers was designed.

All items were rated on a Likert scale, which gave the degree of agreement of the respondents to each of the items.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to interpret the data in order to identify the most frequently used teaching styles, learning styles and engagement rates. Moreover, the correlation analysis was conducted to analyse the correlation between teaching style and student involvement. The findings were analysed in the context of the Grasha-Reichmann model.

Descriptive Analysis of Student Engagement

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of student engagement across behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

Table 1: Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level
Behavioral Engagement	2.78	0.64	Moderate
Emotional Engagement	4.21	0.58	High
Cognitive Engagement	4.05	0.61	High

Source: Author's compilation

The results suggest that emotional engagement is the highest dimension and cognitive engagement is the next significant dimension. Pupils' attitudes towards learning are generally good and they can learn independently, for example, by revising their work and grasping concepts not covered by classroom teaching. Behavioural engagement is comparatively

low, however, suggesting the extent to which students are actively involved in classroom activities, including in discussions and assignments.

Learning Style Profile of Students

Table 2 presents the distribution of learning styles among students based on the Grasha–Reichmann model.

Table 2: Learning Styles of Students

Learning Style	Mean	Rank
Collaborative	4.18	1
Dependent	3.92	2
Participant	3.85	3
Independent	3.72	4
Competitive	3.40	5
Avoidant	2.45	6

Source: Author's compilation

The results indicate that NRC students' learning style is dominant collab learning. This means a favourable attitude towards learning in groups, interaction with peers and joint academic work. Also fairly salient are dependent and participant styles, indicating that students appreciate the guidance of

the instructor and are willing to participate. Minimal Avoidant learning behaviours, generally positive engagement tendencies.

Teaching Style Distribution Among Instructors

Table 3 summarises the teaching styles of instructors.

Table 3: Teaching Styles of Instructors

Teaching Style	Mean	Level
Expert	4.32	Very High
Formal Authority	4.10	High
Personal Model	3.85	Moderate
Facilitator	3.78	Moderate
Delegator	3.21	Low

Source: Author's compilation

The results show that teaching style in NRC is teacher-centred, which is shown by the highest percentage of the teacher style is Expert and Formal Authority. While it is present, Facilitator style is not yet the predominant instruction style. Delegator style is the least preferred style because it shows that students' learning processes are less autonomous.

Relationship Between Teaching Style and Student Engagement

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between teaching styles and student engagement as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Correlation Between Teaching Style and Student Engagement

Teaching Style	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
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Facilitator	0.62**	0.000	Strong positive relationship
Personal Model	0.48**	0.001	Moderate positive relationship
Expert	0.21*	0.045	Weak positive relationship
Formal Authority	0.18	0.082	Not significant
Delegator	0.12	0.110	Not significant

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Source: Author's compilation

The results show that Facilitator teaching style has the strongest and most significant relationship with student engagement. This suggests that the use of a student-centred approach to teaching has a significant impact on participation, interaction and engagement. Conversely, teacher-centred strategies like those of Formal Authority and Expert reveal weak or non-significant links with engagement.

DISCUSSION:

The results show that NRC student engagement is mainly emotional and cognitive as opposed to behavioural. This means that students are being encouraged and stimulated intellectually, but not in their participation, while in class. The majority of students' learning styles are collaborative learning, which conforms with the theory of Grasha (1996) that learners are more effective in learning through interaction. However, the majority of the teaching styles were Expert and Formal Authority, indicating the teacher-centred approach, which can lead to poor active engagement. The closest connection between the teaching style that the facilitator should use and engagement favours Inayat and Ali (2020), who concluded that supportive and interactive teaching boosts student engagement. This incongruency between the teaching and learning styles justifies the moderate behavioural engagement witnessed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests that Norbuling Rigter College (NRC) should continue to develop student-centered teaching pedagogies, especially using the Facilitator style, because it is the one teaching style that demonstrated a positive relationship with student engagement. Teachers are encouraged to go beyond the traditional classroom lecture format and use more interactive formats of instruction, including group discussions, collaborative projects, problem solving activities, and classroom discussion to engage student in the learning process. It is important to design and use active learning techniques e.g., quiz, debates, case studies, and presentations on a regular basis in lessons to overcome the relatively low level of behavioural engagement. Participation-based assessment can

also be used to encourage students to participate more regularly in classroom activities. Furthermore, the faculty development programmes should be enhanced to provide support to the teachers to use modern pedagogy. Student-centred learning, engagement strategies and effective facilitation of the classroom will be trained to enhance teaching effectiveness in different departments. Pupils should also build up their ability to learn independently in addition to working effectively in groups. Assignments that will involve self-study, research and critical thinking can provide balance to collaborative and independent learning. Last but not least, the institution should set up regular feedback and assessment systems to continuously evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and students' engagement in learning and teaching, and improve the teaching-learning processes continuously.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study suggest that the level of student engagement in the college of Norbuling Rigter is relatively high both in emotional and cognitive aspects, which indicates that in this college, students are motivated and intellectually involved in learning. Overall, behavior engagement is moderate, indicating that active participation in the classroom is still insufficient. The results also indicate that the student learning style that is used is collaborative learning and the teaching style used is mainly in the direction of Expert and Formal Authority. This results in some disconnection between student learning style and teaching style. Importantly, it validates the Facilitator teaching style as the teaching style that has the most positive effect on student engagement. This demonstrates that effective learning and participation are enhanced through the use of teaching strategies that are interactive and focused on the learner. The overall finding of the study indicates that there is a need for better alignment in teaching/learning between teaching styles and learning preferences. By slowly moving towards more participative, engaging and student-centered pedagogies, student engagement at NRC will improve greatly.

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