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Students' Expectations and Their Perception of Student-Centered Learning

Experiences from the Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan

ABSTRACT

Student-Centered Learning (SCL) is a highly regarded teaching-learning approach because it provides students with the opportunity to develop graduate attributes and has the potential to meet graduate employability requirements. Higher Education Institutions are increasingly being evaluated for their direct link to student learning outcomes and workforce graduate attributes. Graduate attributes, including communication skills, technology skills, problem-solving skills, and reflection, foster independent and lifelong learning. These attributes are regarded as fundamental skills that educational institutions should instill in their students. In this study, we explored students' preferred choice of teaching methods and learning environments in higher education. The sample of the study comprised 46 students enrolled in various business programs. The data was collected using focus group discussions. Results indicated that students preferred approachable, open-minded, and knowledgeable tutors who create meaningful learning environments. Students also had a preference for student-centered teaching approaches such as case studies, role plays, group work, and quality assignments that have real-world applications. SCL approaches, including case studies, field trips, and role play are practiced at Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan (RTC). The multitude of challenges faced by first-year students and their policy implications are also discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Student-centered learning – Teaching-learning approach – Learning environment – Students' expectation

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Studierendenzentriertes Lernen ist deshalb ein so verbreiteter Lehr-Lernansatz, weil er Studierenden in die Lage versetzt, relevante akademische Kompetenzen zu entwickeln und Qualifikationen zu erlangen, die auf dem Arbeitsmarkt gefragt sind. Hochschulen werden zunehmend anhand ihrer direkten Verbindung zu den Ergebnissen der studentischen Lernprozesse und den auf den Arbeitsmarkt anwendbaren Qualifikationen der Absolvent*innen bewertet. Diese Qualifikationen, zu welchen Kompetenzen in Kommunikation, Technologie, Problemlösung und Reflektion gehören, fördern eigenständiges und lebenslanges Lernen. Sie gelten als grundlegende Kompetenzen, deren Erwerb Hochschulen ihren Studierenden ermöglichen sollten. In dieser Studie untersuchen wir die Präferenzen von 46 Studierenden, die in verschiedenen BWL-Programmen am Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan (RTC) eingeschrieben sind, bezüglich Lehrmethoden und Lernumfeld. Die Daten für die Studie wurden mithilfe von Gruppendiskussionen erhoben. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Studierende zugängliche, aufgeschlossene und kompetente Lehrende bevorzugen, die ein sinnvolles Lernumfeld schaffen. Studierende hatten außer-

dem eine Präferenz für studierendenzentrierte Lehransätze wie Fallbeispiele, Rollenspiele, Gruppearbeit und Aufgaben mit realistischen Anwendungsmöglichkeiten. Solche studierendenzentrierten Ansätze werden am RTC angewendet. Des Weiteren beschäftigt sich dieser Artikel mit der Vielzahl an Herausforderungen für Studierende im ersten Studienjahr und deren hochschulstrategischen Implikationen.

Schlagworte: Studierendenzentrierung – Lehr-Lernansatz – Lernumfeld – Erwartungen der Studierenden

Introduction

The constructive learning theory, which posits that learning is individually and socially formed, underpins the concepts of student-centered learning (SCL) and learner-centered teaching (Bada, 2015; Hein 1991; Kaput 2018; O'neill & Mcmahon 2005). SCL is designed to foster individual learning (Klemencic 2017), emphasizing student autonomy, agency, and choice as central tenets that inspire and promote independent learning abilities (Wright 2011; Treleaven & Voola 2008). Pedagogical strategies such as problem-based learning, active learning, and work-based learning have been identified as core tactics in the implementation of SCL (Treleaven & Voola 2008; Barries Et Al. 2009; Hammer Et Al. 2009; Wright, 2011). Although meaningful teaching and learning is described in various ways, a student-centered approach is increasingly recognized as an effective means of supporting students in developing the graduate attributes (Treleaven & Voola, 2008; Barries Et Al. 2009; Hammer Et Al. 2009). Students are offered the opportunity to actively engage in the acquisition of requisite skills when the curriculum is thoughtfully designed with these competencies integrated into the learning process (Treleaven & Voola 2008; Barries Et Al. 2009). Essential attributes, such as teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication, have been associated with student-centric approaches to teaching and learning (Wright 2011; Klemencic 2017).

Graduate attributes are the "core ability and values" that higher education institutions should develop in a student as a result of completing higher education (Barries Et Al. 2009; Hammer Et Al. 2009; Osmani Et Al. 2015). However, the literature suggests that the term is loosely used to mean the mere development of "a list of skills" without defining them concretely. For the current study, graduate attributes mean the development of transversal skills such as communication, technology skills, problem-solving, and reflection that foster independent and lifelong learning among students (Biggs & Tang 2011).

Implementing SCL means placing learning at the forefront of instructional design. Such a design necessitates that learning should ideally be driven, self-directed, and independent, thereby requiring students to assume responsibility and ownership of their learning process (Wright, 2011; Kaput 2018; O'neill & Mcmahon 2005). Baird (1988) described an independent learner as one "both willing and able to take responsibility for and control over, one's own learning." He emphasized that independent learners are capable of making "informed,

purposeful decisions about planning, managing, and evaluating" their own learning. However, transitioning into independent learning is not a straightforward process, especially if students were not adequately guided and encouraged during their high school and college years (Balapumi & Aitken 2012). The transition from high school to college is often difficult, particularly regarding independent learning (Thompson & Evans 2021; Cage et al., 2021). This suggests a disconnect between these two educational stages, a gap that students should not be left to bridge on their own (Money et al. 2019; Cage et al. 2021). Both, students' and teachers' acceptance of learner-centered teaching designed to enhance independent and self-directed learning, has yielded mixed results (Plessis 2020; Li 2021).

Implementing SCL in practice may prove complex due to challenges such as larger class sizes, a curriculum focused predominantly on content, and a lack of pedagogically competent tutors (Klemencic 2017; Hammer et al. 2009). Superficially, utilizing a variety of engagement strategies can appear as though SCL is being implemented. However, for SCL to translate into tangible skills development amongst students, it necessitates an all-encompassing practice integrated into every aspect of university learning, from curriculum design to teaching-learning methodologies to extracurricular activities (Hills et al. 2016). Requiring teachers to impart attribute skills through content-specific study poses a significant challenge in higher education, even more so when the teacher lacks formal training in teaching or professional development in education (Hammer et al. 2009; Harpe & David, 2012). This concern has led to a renewed emphasis on professional development opportunities for educators in higher education. These opportunities offer teachers a chance to learn effective strategies for delivering lessons and designing assessments that enable students to apply transversal skills within specific fields of content or disciplines. Moreover, the traditional teaching approach, typified by teacher-centered classrooms in which students are seen as passive learners, remains prevalent in higher education (Li 2021; Hills et al. 2016; Wright, 2011; Plessis 2020). Given the growing discourse around graduate employability, the concept of empowering learners and implementing a student-centered teaching-learning approach in higher education has risen to the forefront of contemporary discussions (Klemencic 2017; Barries et al. 2009).

While many universities offer resources on SCL and learner-centered teaching in higher education on their websites (Wright, 2011), the conceptual implementation remains unclear (Klemencic 2017; Wright, 2011; Hills et al. 2016; Weimer 2013). Weimer (2013) suggests five essential characteristics of learner-centered teaching: 1) the engagement of students in the challenging and complex process of learning, 2) student reflection on their learning processes, 3) some degree of learner autonomy over these processes, 4) explicit skills instruction for teachers, and 5) the promotion of a collaborative learning environment. Proponents of SCL argue that embracing this approach can be challenging as it necessitates changes on multiple fronts, including curriculum development, instructional practices, and broader shifts in educational culture. However, if higher education is to meet the evolving demands of the job market, SCL appears to be a promising solution.

In response to increasing demands from stakeholders including parents, students, and government agencies for higher education institutions to develop employable graduate attributes (HILLS ET AL. 2016; LI 2021), numerous institutions have established on-site teaching-learning centers to provide professional development programs to enable educators to comprehend and impart these crucial skills through their teaching processes. For instance, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established in 2010, stemming from the Bologna Process of 1999, which urged and mandated universities in the European Union member states to adopt the SCL framework in higher education. Klemencic (2017) posits that, despite being welcomed, the SCL framework is often misunderstood among EU universities as student engagement rather than as an empowerment of students to direct their own learning.

Similarly, the Centre for University Learning and Teaching (CULT) was established at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) in 2008 to promote excellence in teaching and learning across its colleges. Likewise, the Royal Thimphu College (RTC), driven by a vision to foster educational excellence, launched a Centre for Innovative Teaching and Learning (CITL) in July 2021, with the aim to "inspire innovative teaching and learning culture." Over the past two years, CITL has offered 31 professional development programs to over 100 tutors, with a total participation of 594 (including repeated participation). As a small, interdisciplinary higher education institution in Bhutan, RTC serves approximately 1400 students with 96 tutors. All tutors at RTC are expected to earn 6 professional development credits each year (1 credit is equal to 1 hour of contact with at least 2-3 hours for preparation before and reflection after the program). The CITL credit is in a pilot phase that will be integrated into the faculty appraisal system and standardization of faculty career advancement at RTC. The philosophy of student-centered or learner-centered teaching forms the core of CITL's commitment to educational excellence. Given that RTC offers interdisciplinary studies in its undergraduate program, Biggs's (BIGGS & TANG 2011) constructive alignment serves as the primary driving concept for the student-centered teaching-learning process. Importance is placed on developing attributes that promote independence and lifelong learning, such as critical and reflective thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, technological proficiency, and communication skills.

At present, higher education institutes in the UK and Australia are at the forefront in aligning higher education with graduates' attributes; however, the literature highlights the complexities and challenges associated with achieving this alignment (BARRIES ET AL. 2009; HARPER & DAVID 2011). Factors such as curriculum design, academic auditing by management, tutors' pedagogical training, and the students' own acceptance and willingness to learn all present challenges to the incorporation of learner-centered teaching in higher education. Furthermore, there is a dearth of research regarding how institutions truly align their teaching-learning procedures with a SCL approach to developing graduate skills.

The CITL conducts a need assessment study every year to assess various aspects of teaching and learning, including students' preferences and experiences, tutor experiences,

and challenges faced by tutors while adopting SCL methods at RTC. The findings from need assessment studies are subsequently used for developing teaching-learning support and training. The current study is the first need assessment study conducted within one of RTC's largest programs, the Business Program. This study solely examines the most commonly practiced SCL strategies, the teaching-learning techniques that students prefer, and their experiences and challenges with these strategies.

Therefore, we want to raise the following two research questions:

1. What is a students' preferred choice of instruction for learning in higher education?
2. What are the challenges faced by students in learning?

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology – specifically, an exploratory focus group study – to explore and understand students' requirements concerning their learning experiences, as well as to scrutinize students' perceptions of student-centered teaching practices at RTC in Bhutan. A focus group design was employed because it is traditionally used for determining needs, evaluating programs, and ascertaining the effectiveness of an educational program (WILLIAMS & KATZ 2001).

Sample and procedures

Participants were selected utilizing the purposive sampling method – a sampling design that is based on the researcher's assessment of who will provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study (ETIKAN & BALA 2017). The purposive sampling is often employed in focus group study approaches (PLUMMER-D'AMATO 2008). The study's sample comprised 46 students (50% male, 50% female) from the first, second, and third years, all enrolled in various business programs. To ensure group homogeneity, the participants were categorized into six groups, each containing 6 to 9 students. This division was based on their program enrolment and year of study, with the intent of facilitating comfortable communication among the participants (WILLIAMS & KATZ 2001; PLUMMER-D'AMATO 2008). The sample encompassed a range of low-, average-, and high-achieving students to capture diverse perspectives. The characteristics of each focus group are presented in Table 1 (see following page).

Year of Study	Program	Focus Group	Male	Female	Total Participants
1	Business Foundation	FG1	3	3	6
		FG2	5	4	9
2	Bachelor of Business Administration	FG3	5	3	8
	Bachelor of Commerce	FG4	2	5	7
3	Bachelor of Business Administration	FG5	4	4	8
	Bachelor of Commerce	FG6	4	4	8
Total			23	23	46

Table 1
Characteristics of the sample for the focus group study

Focus group interviews were conducted at the beginning of the spring semester in 2022. Semi-structured interviews were employed to garner rich and descriptive data concerning students' perceptions of the student-centered teaching and learning environment at RTC. For the purposes of this study, a learning environment is defined as the pedagogical approach to teaching or the physical setting wherein teaching and learning transpire. The focus group approach was utilized to explore students' thoughts, views, ideas, attitudes, and experiences, as the interaction between participants can stimulate the revelation of facts and ideas that may be overlooked in one-on-one questioning (PLUMMER-D'AMATO 2008). The data procured through the focus group discussion is both rich and nuanced as it combines interviews, observations, and participant interactions.

A discussion guide [see appendix] featuring open-ended questions was developed to elicit both positive and negative responses regarding opinions, attitudes, and experiences of the learning environment. It included questions about students' learning experiences, perceptions of their program of study, and preferred teaching approaches. This guide was also employed to facilitate discussions about key dimensions related to the study's research questions and objectives. The discussions spanned approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and the focus group discussion processes were audio-recorded.

Informed consent was obtained from all study participants. Participants were also advised that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point without incurring any consequences. Throughout the study, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants were strictly preserved. This study received approval from the RTC Research Committee.

Data analysis procedure

The data were analyzed iteratively, entailing multiple readings of the transcripts and subsequent comparison and contrast (MILES & HUBERMAN 1994). The initial step of data analysis in this study encompassed the transcription of the audio recordings of the discussions. To gain a more profound comprehension of the data, the transcripts were meticulously reviewed multiple times. Subsequently, the data were coded and categorized into broader themes, whereby related codes were grouped based on their similarities and differences. As advocated by Morgan (1997), themes ought to be developed inductively from the data, rather than being predetermined by the researchers. Themes were subsequently assessed to ensure they accurately represented the data and were neither excessively broad nor overly narrow.

Findings

The finding of this study has been categorized into three broad themes as follows:

1. Common strategies reported by student and their preferred choice of learning
2. Students' expectations and experiences
3. Challenges of transitioning to higher education

Theme 1: Common strategies reported by student and their preferred choice of learning

Students indicated a preference for quality assignments, which they see as assignments that have real life applications, up-to-date case studies that provide content and engagement in meaningful learning. They also expressed that assignments, if repeated too frequently, became tedious. In addition, they preferred assignments or projects that possess real-world relevance and imbue practical and life skills useful in their everyday life or future, such as profit calculation, personal income tax filing, business fests, and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analyses. A student respondent from focus group 4 expressed *"We like classrooms where we get the opportunity to participate and be involved in activities rather than listening and writing down the notes."* Students also expressed a desire for more experiences such as field trips and activities like business fests. Furthermore, it was suggested to schedule theory-based classes in the morning to leverage their cognitive alertness, and practical modules after lunch.

Case Studies

The students lauded case studies for helping them improve their writing and analytical skills. Case studies assisted in connecting theoretical lessons with current affairs and practical situations (for example, studying companies during the COVID-19 pandemic). A student respondent from the focus group 3 opinion exemplifies this perfectly,

> "[…] In the case of case studies, I get to enjoy more because it enhances our knowledge and the knowledge can be applied to our practical lives […] It was memorable for me because I could learn more than what is taught in the class […] I feel all the different styles of case study solving help me learn."

Despite the positive reviews of case studies, the lack of access to local companies' primary data was a challenge, and students wished that the focus of their case studies could be occasionally shifted away from banks.

Group work

Students tend to prefer assignments characterized by substantial group work, interaction, and sharing. One student respondent from focus group 3 stated,

> "I like to work in groups because with many people in the group, we get many ideas [...]. I also like group assignments because I get to understand the group dynamics and how to work well with each other."

Views on group work are divided: high-performing students tend not to like group work as they often end up doing everything last minute, whereas average and below-average students favor group work owing to the varied ideas and discussions that ensue. Similarly, extensive readings, when divided among numerous group members, often caused students to miss the broader picture of the reading. A student respondent from focus group 3 asserted,

> "I like doing individual assignments because when we do group assignments, the workload we receive is more [...], we have to wait for other group members to submit their parts [...]. It frustrates me and I don't like to submit assignments in the last minute. [...] when I get individual assignments, I start early and get over with it. [...] I don't have to wait for others to submit their assignments. And sometimes [...], when my friends send their work, it is not up to my expectation and standards so I end up redoing it."

Role Play

Students note that work assigned in groups for role play assignments helped them understand lessons better. These tasks also helped them acquire new skills such as video editing and bolstered their confidence, as this quote by a student respondent from focus group 5 demonstrates,

> "When we do such activities, we take it in a fun way rather than as something we are working hard and studying. When we see our other friends acting and trying to convey the lesson through acting, it stays in our brains. When we learn in a different way, our brain retains for longer."

Theme 2: Students' expectations and experiences

When asked about the type of classroom in which the students feel most welcomed, based on their experiences, students expressed the attributes they appreciate in tutors. Students find particular teacher characteristics conducive to an optimal learning environment. They tend to prefer tutors who are soft-spoken, open-minded, friendly, and approachable, as opposed to those who are reserved and uncommunicative. Students appreciate tutors who know them by name and are aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Further, students expect their tutors to have not only content knowledge, but also the ability to deliver the content effectively in a manner they can understand. They desire to learn from tutors who demonstrate confidence and passion for the subject they teach. Since students view tutors as responsible for creating a classroom environment that encourages student participation, stimulates interest, and fosters learning, they also consider tutors accountable for cultivating a non-judgmental environment where they can express themselves freely. In addition, they favor a tutor who is open to receiving anonymous or monthly feedback from students, without invoking reactionary responses in the classroom. Similarly, students want tutors to provide clear feedback on assignments and other tasks. As stated by the student respondent from focus group 3,

> "[...] One of the unmemorable classes was when the teacher always gave different answer to our questions [...] it was very confusing. The teacher didn't seem very confident in the subject. [...] This happened most of the times. This also happened during the presentation – question answer sessions. [...] we did not have a good experience."

On the other hand, students do not favor lectures that merely require them to take notes and listen passively. Rather, they mentioned that quality classroom learning is facilitated by an interactive environment characterized by group discussions as well as question and answer sessions. The student respondent from focus group 6 stated,

> "[...] He brings in topics which we already know it exists but would have never given much thoughts to it. By discussion and by the way he includes everyone in the class, it makes the class very interesting and it makes me look forward to his class. [...] I like her classes because she is very engaging. She asks a lot of questions and doesn't leave any student in the class. In her class, everyone has equal opportunity to participate and share their thoughts […]"

Rubrics and Guidelines

Students emphasized the importance of clear rubrics and guidelines for assignments. However, it was noted that the quality of rubrics and guidelines varied among tutors. Poorly designed assignments resulted in late work and instances of plagiarism. Some students, particularly those in their first year, struggled to understand the prompts or directions and required additional guidance from tutors. The absence of suitable rubrics led to grading inconsistencies, with some students calling for appropriate rubrics for assignments and examinations. In the case of co-taught modules or those instructed by multiple tutors, students expressed dissatisfaction when their papers were cross-graded due to the inconsistencies in grading.

Teaching assistants were employed during the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting students to discuss the positive role of teaching assistants in bridging the gap between teacher and student. The student respondent from focus group 2 stated,

> "[...] TAs are very helpful as well. They help us to get along with the module. They are very approachable as well. We also get help from them outside the classroom."

Theme 3: Challenges of transitioning to higher education

Upon being asked about transitioning from high school to college, first-year students described the shift to higher education as a challenge. The student respondent from focus group 1 stated,

> "I feel that coming to college is a big shift from high school. In school, we were spoon fed and we had to do, and did what the teachers said [at college] we have the freedom to pick and choose and study according to our interests."

First-year students felt that the expectations placed upon them by the college were substantial. They identified several challenges that impeded their learning. Firstly, they reported a lack of foundational knowledge in certain subjects prior to joining college. Secondly, they believed that due to the large student numbers, they individually received insufficient attention and guidance. Thirdly, students felt they were left to manage their own study in a limited amount of time, as the following quote demonstrates:

> "I think the assignment was given at a very early stage and we were not ready to intercept such kinds of concepts or assignments […] We were not at a level to do such assignments […]".

Discussion and conclusion

This paper investigated students' favored teaching methods, classroom environments, and challenges within Business programs at RTC. It also examined the current SCL practices that enhance self-directed learning and independent learning skills among students at RTC, and their alignment with the objectives of CITL.

For an ideal learning environment, students express a preference for tutors who are approachable, soft-spoken, open-minded, understanding, familiar with their individual strengths and limitations, and who recognize them by name. They expect their tutors to be competent in the subject matter and to employ effective teaching strategies that create positive classroom environments. Students hold tutors accountable for cultivating a space free from judgement, within which they can express themselves openly. They also demonstrate a preference for high-quality assignments, particularly those that have real-world applicability. First-year students encounter numerous challenges, including a lack of foundational knowledge, inadequate attention, and insufficient study time. Students report limited timescales for assignments and tests, often proximate to examination periods. Case studies, field trips, role-plays, group work, business fests, and guest lectures are examples of SCL approaches currently employed at RTC.

Our findings echo those of Berenyi and Deutsch (2018), supporting the idea that students favor active learning strategies such as case studies, group work, and role-play over more traditional lecture methods; this preference was noted among Hungarian students in higher education, who favored non-lecture teaching techniques. Students enrolled in Business programs reported improved learning outcomes when a student-centered teaching strategy was employed, necessitating students' active participation in class discussions. Similarly, traditional teaching methods like lectures and seminars, which focus primarily on theoretical knowledge, were reported as the least favored teaching methods among students studying entrepreneurial courses in the Czech Republic (PECH ET AL. 2021).

Students' preference for role-playing activities may be attributed to the unique learning experience they offer, bridging the gap between theory and practice, and thereby enabling students to better understand various scenarios and appreciate the importance of interpretation (BRYANT & DARWIN, 2004). Role-playing encourages active participation, provides opportunities to apply theories and concepts to real-world situations, and enhances students' communication skills. It also infuses a degree of enjoyment and excitement into the learning process, leading to a more positive and meaningful educational experience.

While students have expressed that they acquire more meaningful learning through case studies, the lack of access to primary data from local companies presents a challenge. In response, business simulation games, which are innovative teaching models conducive to active learning (LEVANT ET AL. 2016), could be a feasible alternative due to their essential role and effectiveness in the teaching-learning process (GOI, 2018). Simulation is an effective educational tool that enhances the traditional classroom environment by providing students the opportunity to learn experientially or by doing (GUNDALA & SINGH, 2016). Given

that business simulation activities necessitate higher-order thinking skills such as analytical thinking, strategic decision-making, application of theoretical concepts, and integration of ideas (GOI, 2018), they promote the development of 21st-century skills, which are considered critical for the success and sustainability of future generations (STAVROULIA ET AL. 2015).

Findings from this study also revealed a positive outlook toward active learning strategies, particularly field trips. As such, we may speculate that field trips have a positive influence on students' learning outcomes. This aligns with the findings of Earle and Thomas (2011), who established that students are more engaged and perform better during business trips, leading to enhanced student learning, more significant engagement with assignments, and the establishment of robust relationships with local businesses.

Students' preference for group work is consistent with Burdett's (2003) finding that students were pleased with their group work experiences and appreciated its value as part of their university education. However, the mixed views on group work could be ascribed to some group members being reluctant and unmotivated to participate in group activities, resulting in social loafing and "free-riding" (WATKINS 2004). This could also be attributable to student dissatisfaction with perceived unfair assessment processes and challenges in scheduling meetings with group members (BURDETT 2003).

Students at RTC encounter numerous challenges during their first year of university-level studies, ranging from time management and workload to meeting the expectations of a higher-education learning environment. These challenges, as Brooker et al. (2017) noted, should not be considered as isolated experiences, but rather as multiple concurrent difficulties. People both within and outside the university can aid students in addressing these issues, with implications for both the institution and its tutors. For example, following Brooker et al.'s (2017) suggestion, tutors could consider designing curricula and teaching methodologies that enable students to try new strategies, develop support networks, and assess stressful components of their courses.

From a policy perspective at the institutional level, findings from this study suggest that the College and tutors should invest more in innovative teaching methods to encourage student's participation in the teaching-learning process. For example, our data demonstrates that students prefer student-centered learning activities such as field trips, case studies, role-plays, group work, business fairs, and so on. The tutors should incorporate more of these strategies into their teaching and develop new teaching methods that fit with student preferences. It emphasizes the importance of the institution prioritizing the formation of additional partnerships with businesses and industry professionals in order to facilitate guest lectures or sponsor business fests. It also emphasizes the need for the college to invest in resources that foster student-centered learning, such as designated places for group work or tutor training on effectively integrating case studies, field trips, and role plays.

Similarly, data suggests that case studies provide students with more meaningful learning; nevertheless, the inability to get primary data from local businesses has various policy implications. Although simulation allows students to practice what is taught in the

class through experiments, it removes the element of risk or danger of the real-life situation (GUNDALA & SINGH 2016), therefore, presenting the potential to reduce the authenticity and depth of learning experiences. In order to ensure that students receive comprehensive educational experiences, the college can effectively intervene and facilitate learning in such situations by fostering relationships with local businesses and industries; and leveraging alumni working in local companies that can facilitate interactions, workshops, or even data-sharing.

Additionally, they should establish programs to assist students in navigating both academic and non-academic challenges, especially during their first year of university tenure. Possible interventions include modifying the curriculum and courses to better help first-year students. This could involve offering more resources or developing introductory courses to bridge the gap between high school and college-level work. Another possible intervention could be expanding student support services, such as tutoring programs and an intensive academic advising system.

The significance of understanding students' diverse learning preferences and their role in achieving academic success is well recognized in today's academic world (WILLIAMSON & WATSON 2007). By acknowledging students' preferred learning approaches, tutors can design alternative course structures that better align instructional goals with learning experiences that students value the most (CANFIELD, 1992). Moreover, aligning students' cognitive styles with tutors' teaching approaches can directly influence grades as well as learning in the classroom and beyond. This is particularly pertinent as students are more likely to become lifelong learners when their learning needs and expectations are met, and opportunities for learning are broadened (WILLIAMSON & WATSON, 2007). Given that graduate employability is a key indicator of a higher education institution's effectiveness, it is imperative for tutors to impart 21st-century skills by providing students with opportunities to engage with graduate qualities during the teaching-learning process. Despite the challenges, the benefits of the SCL approach have the potential to fulfill the requirements for graduate employability.

Limitations

The findings from this study ought to be interpreted with due regard to certain limitations related to the sample. First, the study was conducted with students from a single discipline, who volunteered to participate, potentially leading to a degree of bias in the results. Secondly, whilst these findings may aid in the selection of suitable teaching methods, the limited sample size restricts their generalizability to the entire population of higher education students in Bhutan. Further studies are required to explore students' preferred choice of learning approaches and environments in other disciplines.

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Appendix

Focus Group Discussion Questions

The following questions were designed to gather comprehensive responses related to key themes of the research.

1. Please introduce yourself, tell us your name, your current semester and programme you study at RTC.
2. Mention a class that stood out to you/that was memorable to you at RTC.
3. What assignment have you learnt most from?
4. According to your experience, what kind of classroom do you feel most welcome in and why?