

An Inquiry into the Nature of Teaching and Learning practices at the Royal University of Bhutan

Deki C. Gyamtso BA Hons (University of North Bengal), MA (Jawaharlal Nehru University, India), PGCE (Institute of Education, London)

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Abstract

Teaching and learning practices in higher education have been the focus of educational research for more than a decade in many countries contributing to the international debate. In Bhutan however, relatively few studies have explored teaching practices in the tertiary sector and this study breaks new ground. This study examines the nature of teaching and learning practices in a representative sample of the colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB).

The establishment of the Royal University of Bhutan saw the introduction of the *Wheel of Academic Law*, which introduced new policy guidelines for tertiary teaching. Its introduction was one of several factors that prompted this study. This policy obliges RUB staff to make a conceptual shift in their teaching, from earlier reliance on the input model (transmission/teacher-centred) to a learning-outcomes model with students becoming responsible for their own learning (facilitation/learner-centred). The motive was to improve teaching and learning practices at the RUB, a motive that led to the establishment of the Centre for University Learning and Teaching in 2008. Even more recently the RUB (July 2011) gained recognition as an autonomous organisation, separate from the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) in Bhutan. This move has again generated interest in and commitment to enhancing the quality of its teaching and learning. It was critical and timely to examine the nature of the teaching and learning practices at the RUB with a view to the enhancement of practices. The purpose of this study was to identify the nature and the extent of the gap between what is intended by the RUB as set out in the *Wheel of Academic Law* and what is actually practiced.

This study employed qualitative research based on interpretivist principles using the case study design. A mixed-methods approach was used, that included lesson observations, questionnaires, interviews, and field notes. An analytical framework consisting of seven categories based on existing literature that covered planning, implementation, and evaluation classroom practices was developed to analyse the data. Participants included 36 academic staff, 805 students, and 15 academic support staff at five of the ten Colleges of RUB.

Analysis of the findings indicated that although there was a combination of teacher-centred/transmission and learner-centred/facilitation practices involved in the

planning, implementation, and evaluation of classroom practices in the selected colleges of RUB, the Colleges of Education showed more learner-centred characteristics in all three areas. The results suggested that although the policies and regulations of *The Wheel of Academic Law* were used to guide the teaching and learning practices in the colleges, there were gaps in their implementation. Based on the findings of the study, possibilities for further research have been outlined.

The following refereed publication has resulted in the International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (IJTLHE), from the research described in this dissertation:

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List of Abbreviations

CERD	Centre for Educational Research and Development
CNR	College of Natural Resources
CST	College of Science and Technology
CULT	Centre for Learning and Teaching
GNH	Gross National Happiness
HE	Higher Education
HoD	Head of Department
ILCS	Institute of Language and Cultural Studies
JNP	Jigme Namgyel Polytechnic
LO	Learning Outcome
LOs	Learning Outcomes
MoE	Ministry of Education
RIHS	Royal Institute of Health Sciences
NITM	National Institute of Traditional Medicine
OVC	Office of the Vice Chancellor
PCE	Paro College of Education
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PQC	Programmes Quality Committee
RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
SC	Sherubtse College
SCE	Samtse College of Education
V-C	Vice Chancellor
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

Glossary of Bhutanese Terms

Driglam Namzha	Bhutanese etiquette and rules of discipline
Dzongkha	National language of Bhutan
Dzongkhag	District
Gewog/geog	political geographical unit smaller than a district
Lhakhang	Monastery
Lopen	Teacher