

## Present Practices and Background to Teaching and Learning at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB): A Pilot Study

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In Bhutan relatively few studies at the higher education level have been done and fewer still reported in international journals. This pilot study highlights the present practices and culture of teaching and learning at one of the teacher education colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). It looks broadly across the issues of teaching/learning practices and identifies ways forward in teaching and learning. It is largely qualitative research based on constructivist principles using the case study design. Multiple methods were used including lesson observations, focus group discussions, questionnaires and interviews to seek answers to the questions of this study. The study found that college lecturers' behaviors varied between teacher-centered and learner-centered practices. Although lecturers were conversant with many of the concepts of learner-centered pedagogy, there were some grey areas in understanding notably in assessment and evaluation. Planning, implementation and assessment practices were only to some extent congruent with RUB policies and the present situation can be largely understood through a socio-historical analysis as well as the resource base to the teaching and learning approaches and academics' knowledge and experiences.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is the guiding philosophy of the Royal Government of Bhutan and Education in Bhutan is viewed as one of the fundamental ways to achieve GNH (Royal Government of Bhutan, 1999). With the recent establishment of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), a new and different set of policies and procedures has emerged. These are set out in the RUB's key policy document entitled the *Wheel of Academic Law* (Royal University of Bhutan [RUB], 2006). In particular, one of the policies focuses on student learning outcomes. This policy intends to compel RUB staff to make a conceptual shift from their historical use of the input model (transmission/teacher-centered) to a learning outcomes model with students becoming responsible for their own learning (constructivist/learner-centered). Given that students learn in different ways and that teacher educators should model a range of teaching and learning practices, it was critical and timely to examine the nature of the teaching and learning practices at the RUB and find ways forward to improve them. The purpose of this paper is to identify the nature and the extent of the gap between what is intended, as set out by the Royal University of Bhutan, and what is actually practiced. Given the current stage of development of teaching and learning in Bhutan at present this is accomplished using the concepts that are current in Bhutan, namely, learner- and teacher-centeredness.

### Literature

Bhutanese education discourse has only recently entered the debate on "teacher" and "learner-centeredness" (Dorji, 2005, p. 117). Internationally, debates on teaching and learning in HE have emerged like those of Prosser and Trigwell (2002), Ramsden

(2003), Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle, & Orr (2000) in the UK; Barr and Tagg (1995) in US; and Bowden and Marton (1998) and Biggs (e.g., 2003) in Australia illustrating that outside Bhutan the push is to more learner-centered approaches in HE. They provide the direction for this RUB policy. In the next sections we contrast learner-centeredness with teacher-centeredness.

### Learner-Centeredness

Learner-centeredness is not a new concept and its roots date back to the progressive education movement as early as Dewey. Since then there has been a vast literature for schools and more recently for higher education (HE; Burnard, 1999) on this topic. Over time, learner-centeredness has become a term that encompasses a variety of different educational ideas and practices. Pedagogically, learner-centered practices are more clearly connected to constructivist approaches.

**Defining learner-centeredness.** Many terms have been linked with learner-centered learning, such as flexible learning (Taylor, 2000), experiential learning (Burnard, 1999), and self-directed learning. Consequently, the slightly overused term "learner-centered learning" can mean different things to different people. This can lead to confusion. Burge (1989) explained that the concept of learner-centeredness is sophisticated because its components require a lot of fast processing and decision-making. They are "cognitively tough, challenging, and multi-faceted" (Burge, 1989, p. 1). To put it simply, learner-centeredness is a learning model that places the student (learner) actively in the center of the learning process. Instructional approaches are used in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning and even the assessment process.

**Learner-centeredness in HE and teacher education.** Though traditionally learner-centered practices have been most evident in school settings, there is a growing awareness that they are equally important in HE, particularly in teacher education. For quite some time now, learner-centeredness and the drive to adopt it as the central pedagogy of university courses, has been recommended by many (see above). There is research to show that adults are more able to be self-directed and reflective and to articulate learning goals, and they are more disposed to bring their life experiences to what and how they learn (Smith & Pourchot, as cited in Kerka, 2002). Accordingly learner-centered practices should be appropriate for HE. Despite its significance, research on learner-centered practices in higher education have not been all that common.

McCombs (2001) and McCombs and Lauer (1997) emphasise that learning through learner-centered practices in higher education is framed by factors similar to those identified in elementary and secondary schools: (a) establish positive personal relationships, (b) honor students' ideas and opinions, (c) facilitate higher order thinking, and (d) address students' individual needs and beliefs. Given the assumption that teacher educators model teaching learning practices for their students, the former need to be well versed in, and practice, learner-centeredness. However, the learner-centered approach is not without its critics.

**Criticisms.** The main critique of learner-centeredness is its focus on the individual learner at the expense of substantive curriculum content. In addition, there can be difficulties in implementation. Chief amongst these are lack of teacher knowledge of successful practices, lack of resources, the lack of congruence of belief systems of the students and staff, and related to this students' lack of familiarity with the approach. These problems, particularly the latter, apply to the Bhutanese higher education context.

In conclusion, the term "learner-centeredness" is interpreted differently but a working definition can be arrived at (see above). The Learner-centered policy at the RUB is consistent with higher education literature and it has particular importance for teacher educators.

### Teacher-Centeredness

The teacher-centered approach on the other hand is associated chiefly with the transmission of knowledge. Harden and Crosby (2000) describe teacher-centered learning strategies as a focus on the teacher transmitting content, from the expert to the novice. "Teachers in a teacher-centered environment decide for the learner what is required from outside the learner by defining characteristics of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and management" (Wagner & McCombs, 1995, p. 32).

They usually focus more on presenting content than on student processing the content. Instruction is the activity in which the information (i.e., knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, etc.) is handed over to the learner (Kember, 1997). In the teacher-centered approach, teachers act as the center of knowledge selection and presentation, exercising the power to decide and control the students' learning and usually treating everyone alike. It is on these very premises that teacher-centeredness is rigorously criticized in Bhutan as elsewhere.

### Bhutanese Experiences

Phuntsho (2000) in "On the Two Ways of Learning in Bhutan" compares the practices of traditional education with what he terms "modern education." His modern education contains some elements of learner-centeredness. For Phuntsho (2000), "traditional" refers to practices in, and derived from, those in Buddhist monasteries. Table 1 contrasts the two styles in Bhutan identified by Phuntsho (2000) and in so doing provides a valuable insight into the historical and cultural perspective of education in Bhutan.

These traditional practices are mirrored in schools where there is a three to four decade history of teaching dominated by teacher-centered approaches since Bhutan's secular education was established through the influence of teachers from the Indian sub-continent (see Maxwell, 2008). Thus RUB lecturers themselves largely only had personal experiences of traditional teaching/learning. The advent of the RUB represents a new era in education in Bhutan – one that signals its readiness to establish its own HE teaching, training and knowledge creation capacity (Maxwell et al., 2006). Implicit in such a development, as pointed out by Reid (2007), is the fact that this university, like Bhutan itself, faces particular challenges concerning internationalization and retention of its culture. The RUB has made a stand through its adherence to GNH.

*The Wheel of Academic Law* (RUB, 2006; 2008a) and *The University Strategic Plan 2004-2012* (RUB, 2007a) are the RUB's two key policy documents that require staff to become more learner-centered. Consistent with this, recent College documents such as the *B.Ed. Syllabus Handbook* (RUB, 2008a) advocate learner-centeredness with focus on "learning by doing" (p. 4). Moreover, the RUB has created the Centre for University Learning and Teaching amongst whose tasks is to assist in the development of more learner-centered teaching and learning practices (Maxwell, Reid, Gyamtso, & Dorji, 2008)

In summary, the growth of secular, western-style education since the 1950s has been strongly influenced by Indian teacher-centered practices as well as by the socio-cultural influences from the monasteries. This

Table 1  
*Traditional vs. Modern Learning (Phuntsho, 2000)*

	Traditional	Modern
Purpose	Mainly introvert Spiritual Training culminating in Omniscience	Mainly extrovert skills for human development
Content	Religion or Religion Oriented, Liberal	Secular and Scientific, Technical
Approach	Mostly passive reception, static, conservative	Mostly Active Innovation, Creative, progressive.
Perspective	Faith, Reverence, Sanctity, For Religious Edification	Interest, Curiosity, Rationality, For Acquiring Knowledge and skills
Medium	Chökey/Dzongkha <sup>1</sup>	English
Methodology	Buddhist monastic methods memorization, debates, contemplation, exposition, etc.	Systematic western educational techniques of critical scrutiny, statistics, experiments, etc.

*Note.* <sup>1</sup> Dzongkha is the national language. Chokey is the language of the Buddhist texts.

creates particular problems for RUB's intent to move teaching learning practices to more learner-centered approaches.

### Research Questions

The study reported here is a pilot developed as part of a larger study of Colleges in the RUB. The key research questions were:

1. What is the nature of teaching and learning practices at one of the Colleges of Education?
  - Planning: What characteristics do lecturers' planning for teaching and learning demonstrate?
  - Implementation: What characteristics do the lessons possess?
  - Evaluation: To what extent do the evaluation techniques applied by the lecturers support students' learning?
2. What Factors facilitate or impede these practices?
  - How do the cultural factors support teaching and learning practices?
  - What resources support the teaching and learning practices?
  - How do the academics' knowledge and experiences influence the teaching and learning practices?

### Method

This pilot study is based on constructivist principles using a case study design. A multi method

approach was used to gather data including: (1) eight lesson observations (videotaped with permission and using an observation guide) randomly selected from the eight subject departments; (2) in-lesson questionnaires completed by students immediately after the observed lessons; (3) standardized open-ended interviews before and after the lesson observations with each lecturer; (4) informal conversational interviews using stratified sampling with the teaching and administrative staff on the various resources of the college; (5) a focus group discussion on evaluation practices amongst academic staff; and (6) field notes were also used. The focus group discussion was led by a colleague (as required by UNE ethics) and was recorded. The field notes were meticulously maintained during the entire study. Participants were academic staff ( $n = 8$ ), students ( $n = 222$ ) and administrators ( $n = 5$ ). To address the second question analysis of policy documents and of cultural writing was undertaken as well as gathering data on background characteristics of staff available in documentation in the college and elsewhere. The whole study was set out using a research design matrix (Maxwell & Smyth, 2008; Smyth & Maxwell, 2010). Responses had to be interpreted carefully. Bhutanese are not used to being asked their opinions and culturally they tend to defer to authority. Judgments were made against criteria (using observational guidelines) to assess lesson type (learner-centered (LC), or teacher-centered (TC) or a blend of both (LC/TC). Interviews and similar qualitative data were analyzed for key themes. Meanings were extracted from data sources separately then triangulated to inform the responses to the research questions.

## Results

The outcomes of the study establish that the nature of teaching and learning practices at one of the colleges of RUB is in the “middle” (i.e., that it is neither completely teacher-centered nor learner-centered). There are some grey areas in the understanding of concepts and theories especially those related to evaluation and assessment techniques. The following analysis is organized around the research questions rather than by technique (Bazeley, 2009).

### Nature of Teaching and Learning Practices

Planning, implementation and evaluation are addressed in the sections that follow.

#### Lecturers’ planning for teaching and learning.

A comparative analysis of eight lessons captured the essence of what actually went into the planning of eight lesson plans (see Table 2). Judgments were made about characteristics from teacher centeredness, through teacher-centeredness blended with learner-centeredness, Learner-Centeredness blended with Teacher-Centeredness to Learner-Centeredness against a pre-developed rubric. For example, the use of the term “learning outcomes” is seen as learner-centered as these are statements describing what students should know or be able to do as a result of learning as set out in the *Wheel* (RUB, 2008b).

Firstly, there is no uniformity in the characteristics of the work plans. One is consistently TC. All the others have some combination of LC and TC with three tending toward LC in their *planning*. Secondly, some of the lecturers appear to follow the prototype of the syllabus handbook *B.Ed Syllabus Handbook* (RUB, 2003) which is essentially learner-centered in its approach. Thirdly, there is variation in work plans despite the model provided. For example, some of the work plans contain detailed aims and objectives, content topics, assessment tasks, instructional strategies and marking schemes suggesting a learner-centered approach. Others are simply lists of topics with little information on the assessment tasks and instructional strategies. As seen from the Summary of Findings, there is a mix of teacher and learner-centered practices for planning, though teacher-centeredness is more evident.

**Characteristics of lessons.** Two sources of data collection (lesson observations and in lesson questionnaire) enabled the key features of the observed lessons to be identified. It is important to clarify that lecturers knew that they were to be observed. The lessons need to be interpreted as the “best possible” lessons. This is especially the case in Bhutan due to cultural influences where the observer was a senior person. The student statements from the in lesson

questionnaire illustrate the realities faced in this kind of research:

- “today’s lesson was far more better (sic) as compared to the previous one as more number of activities were carried out”;
- “more teaching aids were used in the lesson, excellent teaching compared to previous lesson, imparted more information, and provided activities in groups”;
- “well organized and structured in sequence compared to previous lessons”;
- “I would like if Sir could give us different activities and make us do our activities in pairs like we had in present class.” (21.03.08)
- 

However, not all lessons were different:

- “same as usual”;
- “lesson well planned as before” (14.03.08)

Firstly, the most distinct feature was a mix of practices in the classrooms where teacher-centeredness and learner-centeredness were used in varying degrees. There wasn’t one single lesson that demonstrated all seven characteristics of learner-centeredness. Analysis of the video clips indicated some strong features of teacher-centeredness in the lessons with lecture inputs in the beginning where the students are in some ways treated like “vessels to be filled.” Ironically, in the Child Development Studies’ lesson, theories were explained to the students as they were in the Science lesson on Concept Mapping. Typical student comments for the latter lesson were: “was well sequenced and planned,” and “was a detailed informative session.”

However, learner-centered features in the lessons were evident. This observation was supported by the students’ own observations as illustrated by these typical comments:

- “organized activity-based learning in groups and gave good feedback to group presentations”;
- “active participation of students was encouraged being allowed to express their views”;
- “the group activity was interesting with good discussion and presentation and monitoring during the activity.”

Secondly, in some cases the notion of organizing activities in the lessons appeared to be something that was done to keep the students busy. This is a misunderstanding of the constructivist approach to learning inherent in student-centered practices.

Table 2  
*Characteristics of Lesson Planning*

Characteristics of lesson	Type of Lesson							
	Professional: Bhutanese Education System	Education Psychology: Learning Process	Dzongkha: Dzongkha for Communication	English: Study of Critical Essays	Social Studies: People & the Land	Science (Biology): Plant Kingdom	Maths: Advanced Algebra & Calculus	Health & Physical Education: Sports Medicine
Goals and Objectives	TC & LC	TC	LC & TC	LC & TC	LC	TC	TC & LC	TC
Organization of Curriculum	TC & LC	TC	LC	LC & TC	TC & LC	LC & TC	TC & LC	TC & LC
View of Knowledge	LC	TC	LC	LC	LC & TC	TC & LC	TC	TC
Role of Teacher	LC	TC	LC	LC	TC & LC	TC & LC	TC	TC
Role of Learner	TC & LC	TC	TC & LC	TC & LC	TC & LC	TC & LC	TC	TC & LC
Summary of Findings	TC & LC - 3 LC - 2	TC - 5	TC & LC - 1 LC & TC - 1 LC - 3	TC & LC - 1 LC & TC - 2 LC - 2	TC - 1 TC & LC - 3 LC & LC - 1	TC - 1 TC & LC - 3 LC & TC - 1	TC - 3 TC & LC - 2	TC - 3 TC & LC - 2

*Note.* TC = “teacher centered”; LC = “learner-centered”

Activities should not be organized for the sake of it but for meaningful learning to take place to achieve outcomes.

Thirdly, while a reasonable mix of strategies was evident rigor was missing in the lessons, that is, lessons showed insufficient conceptual depth. At times the techniques of learner centeredness were being applied in shallow way, while a much more challenging and stimulating approach was possible. In two lessons in particular, the tasks set were not as demanding as they could have been. That is, the issue is not the inappropriateness of the task per se, but rather the substance and level of the tasks assigned. The tasks were more like Marton and Säljö’s (1976; as cited in Biggs, 1976, 2003) concept of surface rather than deep learning. Alternatively, two other lessons engaged the students in slightly more deep learning. Here depth learning was emphasized, active responses were elicited from students by questioning, presenting problems and teaching in such a way as to explicitly bring out the structure of the subject (see Marton & Säljö, 1976, as cited in Biggs, 2003, p. 14). Some of these attributes were also present in three different lessons.

Fourthly, the Dzongkha lesson was a complete surprise. Phuntsho’s (2000) analysis indicated that a traditional approach would be more likely. However, to the contrary, it was by far one of the most learner-centered lessons observed. It had individual activities wherein the lecturer had brought in the week’s

newspaper<sup>1</sup> (in Dzongkha), distributed sheets of it to the class and asked them to read and find out the commonly mispronounced words. This was a creative idea as it related to their everyday activity and made sense. Reading the words aloud and repeating them till they pronounced them correctly as a class activity was entirely appropriate. Webb (1997, as cited in Biggs, 2003) explains that there is a common misconception that memorization indicates surface learning. On the contrary, it is appropriate in such cases of difficult language learning.

In answer to the question, “What characteristics do the lessons possess?” the in-lesson questionnaire data corroborated the lesson observations. The lessons had a combination of both teacher- and learner-centered practices with surface learning characteristics and activities for the sake of them evident in a few. It is likely that, given RUB policy and the fact that the observations were taking place, more learner-centered-influenced lessons were observed than would normally be the case.

**Are the evaluation techniques supporting students’ learning?** The focus group discussion with eight, randomly selected lecturers across the subject departments was organized. The arena for the

<sup>1</sup> *Kuensel* was for many years the only newspaper until recently. Printed in English and Dzongkha, it was distributed widely throughout the country and is thus a readily available resource.

discussion using 14 questions was the previous year's moderation meetings of the College's evaluation process. Moderation includes reviews of exam question papers and answer scripts, the coursework, performance of the students, the final results in each subject departments and the resulting issues.

Firstly the most telling evidence concerned the lecturers' view of knowledge. 47% of the discussions convey teacher-centered perspectives with a smaller 33% reflecting a learner-centered outlook. The greater proportion of lecturers having a teacher-centered approach (knowledge exists in the lecturer) contradict the discussion covering four areas of learner-centered evaluation practices. This reflects the lack of congruence of basic ideas about knowledge and evaluation practices.

Secondly there were a variety of perspectives among the participants on issues related to assessment. Ideas would be stated and then contradicted by the same speaker, or, one statement would be contradicted by another person. For instance, some would say a variety of methods were used in assessing students while others mentioned only one method. There is a rather mixed perspective on assessment practices in the college and from the discussion it seems that some of the lecturers are practicing learner-centered assessment practices while others are not.

Thirdly, there was also confusion among the participants of evaluation/assessment concepts. For example, the first question asked about the ways assessment was "treated by staff and students." It was actually addressed by only one participant out of eight. This is disquieting as the higher incidence of the data in favor of teacher-centeredness suggest that about one half of the respondents still view assessment to be an exercise to sort and monitor students summatively not as an integral part of learning. Perhaps one third see assessment as an integral part of learning. None see the importance or even the potential of performance-based assessment. However in the commonality shared by both approaches, about one quarter view assessment as a way of discovering whether learning has taken place. These data imply that most assessment practices are not practiced in a learner-centered manner and so not directly supportive of students' learning.

Moreover, formative, summative and diagnostic assessments were mentioned but their purposes were not clearly established. There was a lack of conceptual clarity, or agreement, about what key concepts meant. Three respondents referred to course work as formative assessment whereas the course work is marked in a way that cannot be regarded as a part of knowledge construction/assisting learning. Only one participant mentioned diagnostic assessment, a very learner-centered characteristic. There was also silence on basic ideas especially for the question regarding the balance of formative and summative methods.

Fourthly, learning in the class was mostly aligned with summative assessment especially where coursework tasks were taken into account as well as final examinations. The B.Ed curriculum is modularized, each module with its own discrete assessments as part of coursework with a consequent reduction in the final semester-end assessment. But these coursework assessment tasks are treated like mini summative tasks. The evidence pointed towards the practices being similar to a "modern assessment environment in a teaching-oriented institution" (Gibbs & Dunbat-Goddet, 2007) as: "characterized by frequent summative assessment of a wide variety of forms, very low levels of formative-only assessment and oral feedback, with clear specification of goals and standards and aligned curricula" (p. 26). Thus, the evaluation practices in the college were essentially summative in nature. This is contrary to the well articulated college academic documents like the B.Ed Syllabus Handbook and the *Wheel*.

### Summary of Findings

The overall analyses of the first research question presented a picture of mixed practices in planning, teaching and assessment among the lecturers across the different subject departments. In the planning component, there was relatively more teacher-centeredness. In the teaching component, where lessons were likely to be the best possible, approaches to teaching and learning varied where some were visibly teacher-centered and others more learner-centered though it could be interpreted that lessons were more teacher-centered in nature than observed in this study. Surface learning characteristics were evident in some of the lessons. For the evaluation component, the practices were largely teacher-centered with summative forms of assessment being used most commonly.

RUB policy documents indicate a move toward learner-centeredness. The mix of practices indicated that some congruence of practice with policy had been achieved as many lecturers had incorporated learner-centered ideas though some still maintained the teacher-centered approach. Perhaps with time, the focus will be more on the students' learning and in that way the lecturers will be modeling such practices for their student teachers.

### Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning

To answer this question a number of factors either enhance or impede teaching and learning practices. Four critical factors were found in the context of the College from the interviews and from our close knowledge of the background of the college itself over many years:

- historical-cultural;
- resource base;
- the teaching and learning approaches; and
- academics' knowledge and experiences.

**Historical-cultural.** Culturally, education in the college has been influenced by the socio-cultural history of education in Bhutan. From the 8<sup>th</sup> Century AD to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century monastic education was the predominant form of education in Bhutan. Learning was traditional in the sense that the approach was dependent on rote learning and memorisation based upon key texts. Phuntsho (2000) argued in "On the Two Ways of Learning in Bhutan" that these earliest educational experiences in Bhutan have influenced teaching and learning in Bhutan. Buddhism remains important for the majority population in Bhutan and even the southern Bhutanese have a Hindu background and their religious heritage is similar in process. The second feature influencing teaching and learning in Bhutan is also historical but more modern. The introduction of secular education towards the end of the 1950s made education increasingly available to the common people (Maxwell, 2008; Phuntsho, 2000). It affected all sections of society and brought about unprecedented changes in the social, cultural, political and economic structures in Bhutan. Of considerable influence was the import of the Indian system of education with its roots deep in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries' British system (Brooks & Jones, 2008). During the early period the school curriculum was largely imported from India and all the teaching materials were those prescribed for Anglo-Indian schools, except for Dzongkha (Gyamtso & Dukpa, 1998). At the same time, teachers with the teacher-centeredness characteristics of Anglo-Indian schools were also recruited from India as the country lacked teachers. Moreover the Dzongkha teachers were, and still to a great extent are, ill prepared to teach in the modern education context (Phuntsho, 2000). Historically, teachers in Bhutan are viewed to be discipline-keepers and knowledge-providers in control of their classes which is somewhat consistent with the cultural or societal norms (Jamtsho, 2004) and more in keeping with teacher-centeredness. The evaluation system was externally examination oriented. Students were mainly assessed on the regurgitation of knowledge by the learners although in recent years some freedoms have been introduced mainly in the primary sector (Maxwell, Rinchen, & Cooksey, 2010). Consequently, the nature of the curriculum, importance of the exam system and the experience of the teachers' own learning background compelled a particular learning style based on teacher-centeredness to develop.

Only after 1985 did some elements of learner-centeredness gain a foothold in the education policies,

and to some extent classroom practices (Dorji, 2005) following policy borrowing from international consultants in a major project. However, Dorji (2005) found that the learner-centered approach had not materialized as intended. This was due to severe systemic limitations such as the shortage of qualified teachers, lack of sufficient support and guidance from the center, availability of resources, mismatch between the physical establishment of schools and increase in enrolment (Dorji, 2005). Again, the individual biographies of teachers, who had been schooled in the teacher-centered form of teaching, were important. Students of these teachers came to be teaching in the RUB. To explicate the matter a little further, an informal survey undertaken in November 2008 among the College lecturers revealed:

- 100% said that their primary and secondary education was mostly teacher-centered. It is noteworthy that almost all students attend schools in Bhutan;
- 80% said that their Bachelor degree in education was a mix of teacher- and learner-centered practices. These degrees are taken both within and outside Bhutan with a majority of the latter; and
- 70% agreed that their Masters was mostly learner-centered and these degrees are largely from outside Bhutan.

Teacher-centered practices thus formed an important part of the biographies of Bhutanese academics in the College. These practices became part of the College's history also as academics will reproduce what they have experienced. What has been learnt over a considerable time in Bhutan will be hard to modify (Maxwell et al., 2008).

Another manifestation of the impact of culture is in the practice of lecturers being absent from the college on matters such as personal and official duties. Since the lecturer is not present the practice is for the students to work in the library. However, the library does not have enough resources to gainfully occupy a whole class. Alternatively, in order to compensate for the lost time, some lecturers do organize extra classes to cover syllabus points that were otherwise missed. This practice is actually resented by the students, as they have to take time away from their other activities (students, personal communication, September 2008).

**Resources.** A study of the College's resources and facilities reveal that extensive upgrading is required in order to support learner-centeredness. Though the facilities and resources served well in the past, there is need for extensive improvement and as quality teaching and learning are dependent on them. In particular library facilities are insufficient (Maxwell et al., 2008) and Internet services are unreliable and inadequate.

Students are paid monthly stipends by the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) to study and most live on campus. Studying and living in the college is an important part of the student's life. However, they are distracted and troubled by congestion in the hostels, water shortages, erratic printing and photocopying facilities, limited access to the Internet, and waiting in long queues for their meals. These have an adverse effect on the learning of the students, as they will be preoccupied by these trivial but basic essential services and facilities. This problem gets further compounded as the student numbers are increasing. But somehow the students have so far been rather accommodating. Three new self-catering hostels have been constructed to ease the accommodation problem.

**Academics' knowledge and experiences.** While resources are important, academics' knowledge and experiences are fundamental to teaching and learning practices. According to Beeby (1966) and many others, the quality of education mostly depends upon the quality of the teaching staff, their academic and professional qualifications, commitment to work and experiences. The College has 54 lecturers with the student to lecturer ratio of 17:1.

An earlier analysis of the profile of the academic and professional qualifications revealed that the academic staff was a relatively young one (see Figure 1) and so relatively inexperienced. More than 50% were aged between 30 and 39 years.

In terms of academic expertise there are a relatively high number of masters degrees in substantive areas, commonly coupled with a professional qualification such as the Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), though several hold only a Bachelor as their first degree (see Figure 2). One third holds a Masters in Education. Only one has a Ph.D. while two are currently undertaking doctoral studies. All higher degrees are earned outside Bhutan. With so few staff with doctorates academic leadership

is largely dispersed amongst those with masters degrees.

Over the last 10 years or so, most of the academic staff have gained considerably from their overseas higher degree or short-course studies where it would be hoped they had developed academic rigor and discipline, higher levels of research and writing abilities and broadened understandings (Brooks & Jones, 2008) besides being exposed to the current methodologies of teaching and learning. Thus the knowledge and experiences of the lecturers has to a certain extent influenced the teaching/learning culture at the College. Additionally, in-house programs are conducted on regular intervals to share innovative teaching ideas and research activities are also encouraged on specific areas.

With respect to the teaching of school substantive content, coverage by appropriately educated staff is generally good (see Figure 3). However, the teaching of Professional Studies, such as Teaching Skills, does not have core specialist lecturers and all lecturers are expected to teach in this area even though some will not have been teachers themselves. The Science department has the highest number of staff as the College has been identified to concentrate more on the training of science teachers since 2008.

In summary, the picture that emerges is one in which much is desired. There was a range of factors which assist in the explanation of the continuation if not the preponderance of teacher-centered practices at the College and the slow uptake of learner-centered practices. Amongst the former are the historical-cultural background and the biographies of the lecturers themselves coupled with the lack of resources at the College. Contributing to the latter are the lecturers' own efforts in gaining higher degree qualifications and the formal and informal learning that has taken place and brought to the College from overseas.

Figure 1  
*Age Profile of College Academic Staff (Maxwell et al., 2006, p. 11)*

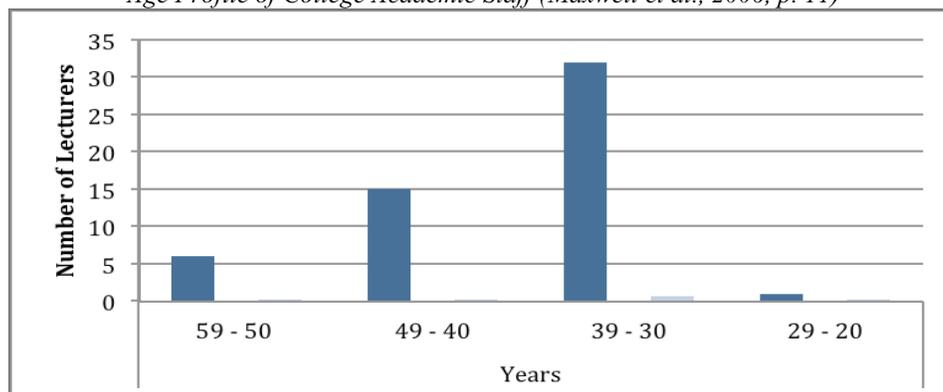


Figure 2  
*Qualifications of the Faculty (Maxwell et al., 2006, p. 12)*

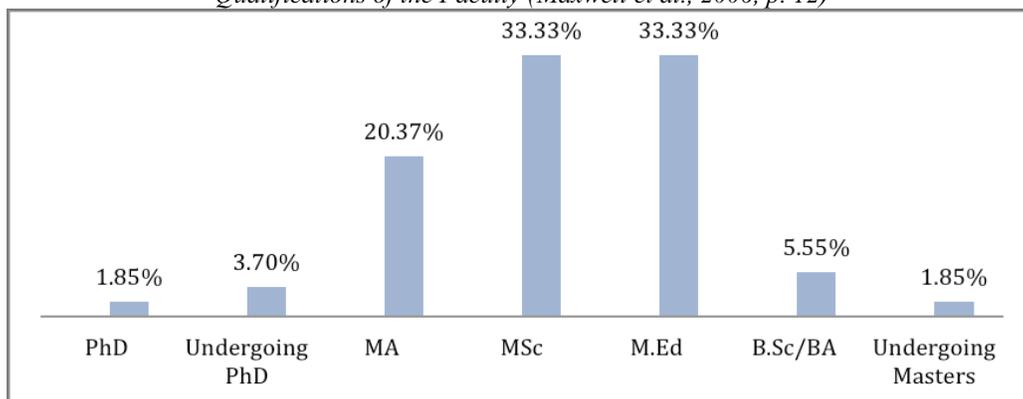
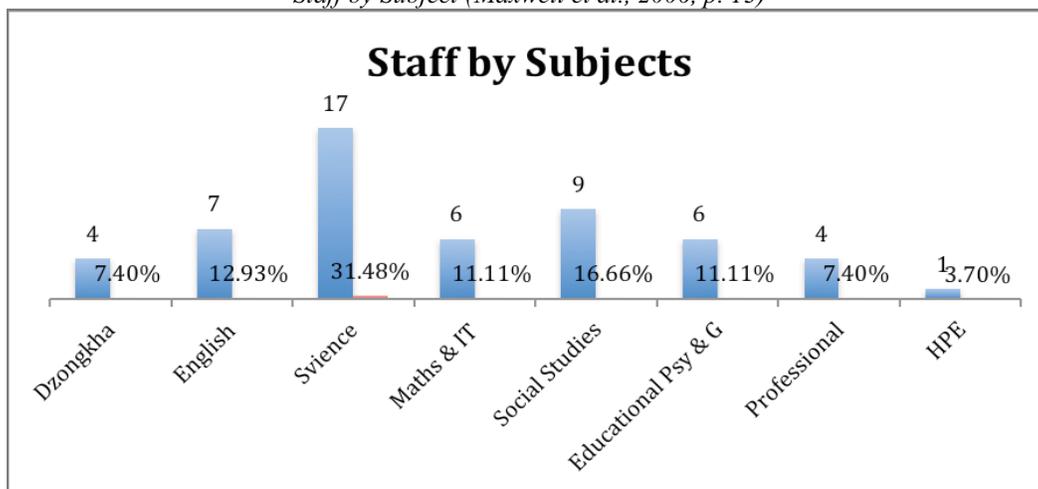


Figure 3  
*Staff by Subject (Maxwell et al., 2006, p. 13)*



**Conclusions**

The study clearly established that the nature of teaching and learning practices at the college range in the middle ground of the teacher-to learner-centered continuum. Given the factors affecting teaching and learning in Bhutan it is somewhat surprising that learner-centered practices have taken a hold to the extent they have. The evidently learner-centered policy of the RUB’s *Wheel of Academic Law* (2008b) has quite some way to go before being fully implemented.

Resources urgently need updating and upgrading in order to support effective teaching and learning in the college. In undergraduate courses such as the B.Ed., there will remain a primary requirement for paper-based resources and so the library must develop adequate collections in that form to support teaching and learning in the field of education (Maxwell et al., 2006, 2008). Similarly other resources must be

enhanced so that quality teaching and learning can take place. Doctoral qualifications are urgently needed.

A significant issue identified was the extent to which lecturers were conversant with the current pedagogies and related issues (Brooks & Jones, 2008). Grey areas in the understanding of concepts were identified especially those related to evaluation and assessment techniques. Additionally, learner-centered activities were seen to be at times superficial, leading to surface learning.

Even so, all is not lost. On the positive side, the study reflects that some good practices are happening and that given some motivation, good practices *can* be implemented. Clearly there is work to be done. The Vice-chancellor’s report to the University Council (RUB, 2007b) indicated that tertiary education has remained grossly underdeveloped therefore considerable investments have to be made. Then only can the teaching and learning practices become more

congruent with RUB policies and so cater to the emerging needs of the country. Without the required investments in higher education, it may be unable to support the current philosophy of Educating for GNH in Bhutan.

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