

# **Pedagogical Practices: Triggering and Sustaining Students' Interest and Engagement in Bhutanese Science Lessons**

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy**

Under the supervision of Associate Professor Nick Hopwood and  
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July 2021

## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I, Bijoy Kumar Rai declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program.

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## Acknowledgements

I would like to formally acknowledge and thank all those individuals and organisations who have played a vital role in providing assistance and support along this challenging yet, enriching journey.

Firstly, I wish to offer my heartfelt gratitude and acknowledgement to Professor Nick Hopwood for making this journey possible, and bearing with me patiently despite my shortcomings. I remain eternally grateful for his guidance, encouragement, support and ongoing critique along the way. He constantly challenged and inspired my thinking through questioning and engaging in robust, fruitful discussions and a quick turnaround feedback on written work. Through Nick's strong leadership as a doctoral supervisor, he facilitated the further development of my scholarly writing and helped me conceptualise the theoretical frameworks that I applied in this thesis. I also would like to thank Dr Tracey-Ann Palmer and Dr Kimberley Pressick-Kilborn my co-supervisors, for their support and encouragement to continue writing my thesis. As experts in science education, and on interest and engagement, their roles were critical in generating deeper understanding of the topic. I remain grateful to Dr Tracey-Ann for her wisdom and wonderful ideas in writing the thesis. I would also like to thank Associate Professor Anne Prescott, who provided assistance in the initial stages of my research journey.

Secondly, I am grateful to the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) for the International Research Scholarship (UTS-IRS) and President Scholarship (UTS-P), without which this opportunity to pursue PhD would not have materialised.

Thirdly, to the Royal University of Bhutan for granting study leave to engage in full time study.

To Ministry of Education, Administration of Vajra Middle Secondary school, and the participants for your approval and consent. Without you, the study would not have been possible.

I also wish to thank my wonderful HDR colleagues, who travelled this journey with me as fellow students.

To my wife Sonam Choden and my daughters Senmiyang, Sonam Lhanzey, and Zitshen Lhazeen, thank you for your generous support, encouragement and belief that I could complete this study. I would also like to acknowledge my family and friends for their support and believing in me.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to “All the beautiful people out there – because you exist, the world is a little better place to live.” Thank you!

This thesis was edited by Dr Terry Fitzgerald.

Editing was limited to formatting grammar and style and did not alter or improve the substantive content or conceptual organisation of the thesis. Editorial interventions were restricted to Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AoI	Action of Interest
BCSEA	Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment
CoE	College of Education
FPMID	Four-Phase Model of Interest Development
GNH	Gross National Happiness
GoI	Government of India
HoL	Hands-on Learning
IL	Interactive Lectures
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAPE	New Approach to Primary Education
NEP	National Education Policy
NNSCF	New Normal Science Curriculum Framework
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
POI	Person-Object Theory of Interest
REC	Royal Education Council
RGoB	Royal Government of Bhutan
SCF	Science Curriculum Framework
SGD	Small Group Discussion
SPP	Signature Pedagogical Practices

STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
VMSS	Vajra Middle Secondary School

## **Abstract**

Securing future generations of scientists and scientifically literate citizens is vital for the economic development of Bhutan. But, the current teaching and learning of science does not seem to inspire Bhutanese students to take up science as they progress along the grades. Consistently, the benchmarking assessment in grade 10 has revealed that students' performance in science has been one of the lowest of all the subjects, while the performance in science in grade 6 is one of the highest. This study, pedagogical practices in triggering and sustaining students' interest and engagement in science, attempts to understand the current classroom practices in teaching school science despite many challenges. It was aimed at identifying those pedagogic practices that trigger and sustain students' interest and engagement in the Bhutanese school science lessons.

This study was guided by the conceptual framework of the Action of Interest (AoI) from Krapp's Person-Object Theory of Interest (POI). The relational construct between person and the object was adapted to identify interest being generated as students engaged with the science content during the lesson. In order to generate relevant data to enable the intended contribution to knowledge, the study adopted cross-sectional ethnographic case study design to elicit valid and justifiable meanings on the topic.

Data was generated from a middle secondary school in Bhutan through non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews. A class from each grade 6, 8 and 10 was identified. From each grade, four students and their science teacher(s) were recruited for the study. Following a two-part data generation process, the researcher spent initially two weeks in each grade video recording the lessons, audio recording the group discussions, and taking still photographs beside the note-taking, and this procedure was repeated for the second round. Each student participant was interviewed once a week focusing on the lesson they found most interesting and the teacher participants were interviewed twice (beginning and end) in the entire duration of the fieldwork. NVIVO 12 was used to organise the data, and a multi-stage progressive process with an in-built iterative approach was undertaken to analyse them.

The findings indicate that three approaches (interactive lecture, small group discussions and hands-on learning) were used in the teaching and learning of science in the school. These approaches in themselves were not found to be associated with triggering and sustaining students' high interest and engagement in science lessons. Rather, it was specific pedagogic practices embedded within each of them. Questioning technique in interactive lectures, variations and scaffolded autonomy in small group discussions, and distributed responsibilities in hands-on learning were key to triggering and sustaining students' interest and engagement. This was accomplished despite the constraints and challenges of teaching science in Bhutanese schools.

The findings have implications for practising teachers, teacher educators and the curriculum developers to enhance the teaching and learning to foster students' interest and engagement in Bhutanese science lessons. Furthermore, the study opens up new avenues for research building on these key findings. The first of its kind in Bhutan, this study contributes original knowledge, revealing how students' interest and engagement in science lessons can be triggered and sustained.