

# “Hugging the middle” on selection of educational philosophy: empirical evidence from higher education in Sultanate of Oman

Selection  
of educational  
philosophy

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research aims to examine the educational philosophy of teachers in classrooms. Teachers' educational philosophy influences the power balance, course content function, student and teacher roles, responsibility for learning and assessment purposes and processes. The research also analyzes whether gender, qualification, specialization and experience significantly influence classroom educational philosophies.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study utilized a quantitative research design, utilizing data from 193 teachers working in a public higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman. The study utilized a survey method to solicit data from the respondents. Besides utilizing descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, the study used analysis of variance (ANOVA) and *t*-test to test the hypotheses.

**Findings** – Analysis revealed an instructional strategy's preference, including elements of both teacher-centered and student-centered educational philosophies. Elements of progressivism, constructivism, reconstructivism and perennialism are more relevant in the teacher's instructional design. The results show no significant differences in teachers' pedagogical philosophy that exist based on gender, specialization and experience. However, teachers' age significantly influences their educational philosophy preferences.

**Research limitations/implications** – This research centers on a public higher education institution in the Sultanate of Oman, with a particular focus on the Department of Business Studies. This research delimits its discussion on teachers' chosen educational philosophy. Other possible factors may also impact student retention and effective teaching and learning.

**Practical implications** – This research offers valuable insights to academicians, higher education administrators, and policymakers. Specifically, this research emphasizes the significance of employing a blended approach, which incorporates both student-centered and teacher-centered educational philosophies, to enhance student engagement, retention, and effective teaching and learning.

**Social implications** – This research emphasizes the importance of educators' adoption of a blended educational philosophy in promoting student retention and engagement within higher education institutions. To achieve desirable outcomes, policymakers in higher education must ascertain which educational philosophy is most effective in the classroom. Additionally, ensuring congruence between preferred educational philosophy and teachers' instructional practices is vital in facilitating effective teaching and learning.

**Originality/value** – To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the first of its kind among teachers in higher education in the Sultanate of Oman. The outcome of this study helps detail the specific strategies teachers deploy and categorize into various educational philosophies.

**Keywords** Educational philosophy, Higher education, Teachers, Teacher-centered, Student-centered, Oman

**Paper type** Research paper



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## 1. Introduction

The previous studies on student learning demonstrated a significant association between student engagement, student retention and the learning environment (Adunola, 2011; Sabah & Du, 2018; Thygesen *et al.*, 2020), the course content and instructional methods (Robinson, Neergaard, Tanggaard, & Krueger, 2016; Claver, Martinez-Aranda, Conejero, & Gil-Arias, 2020). Student motivation significantly impacts academic achievement and retention rates (Lackeus, Lundqvist, & Middleton, 2016; Setiawan, Aprillia, & Magdalena, 2020). Among the various factors, the role of the educator reports a significant impact on the student's learning and development (Siddi, 2018). The teacher's teaching philosophy about teaching and learning greatly influences the instructional methods a teacher deploys in classrooms. Teachers' underlying educational philosophy influences classroom behavior, curriculum design, pedagogical interventions and student engagement. Academically, a teacher opts for student-centric, teacher-centric or blended educational philosophy in classrooms. The blended philosophy, hugging the middle approach, customizes an educational philosophy by incorporating student- and teacher-centric educational philosophies. Teaching and learning philosophies refer to educators' beliefs about learners and learning, teaching, the subject, the learning to teach and the self and the teaching role (Uztosum, 2013; Thomas, 2013). Educational philosophy systematically determines program and course objectives' instructional design and implementation (Ardalan, 2008). Thus, educational philosophy influences everything a teacher does in the classroom, including the instructional design, the assessment and evaluation and their belief about teaching and learning.

Teachers constantly interact with students inside and outside classrooms, guiding and facilitating their learning and thus significantly influencing student learning outcomes. However, to achieve learning outcomes and lifelong learning interests among students, teachers should select methods that produce effects of interest, and education policymakers need to know which education philosophy really "works" (Lack  us, 2020). The success of higher education institutions (HEIs) depends on their ability to retain students to continue their studies at the campus (Setiawan *et al.*, 2020). The intriguing question is, "What underlying belief do teachers hold about their teaching, students and learning environment?" Several empirical studies, including Yamagata (2016), Ismail, Sawang, and Zolin (2018), Muganga and Ssenkusu (2019), have examined the nexus between the teachers' education philosophy, institutions' core values and the student learning experience. This study contributes to the discussion and growing area of interest and examines teachers' prominent beliefs about the purpose of education and student engagement. This research significantly focuses on a public HEI in the Sultanate of Oman.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted face-to-face teaching and forced educational institutions to engage in a fully online or hybrid educational approach to ensure continuity of education. Since then, several asynchronous and synchronous teaching approaches have emerged into the mainstream of teaching and learning pedagogy. Unlike traditional teacher-centered philosophy, wherein the course content is transmitted from the teacher to the learner in an organized way, the course contents are embedded in the online course through readings, videos and links to web resources (Sanga, 2018; Leslie, 2020). In the online and blended approach, teachers deployed several strategies to enhance student interaction and engagement, which were comparatively challenging compared to the regular face-to-face classes. There are three levels of interaction in an online environment: learner–learner interaction, learner–content interaction and learner–instructor interaction (Moore, 1989). Now, teachers must adjust their approach to teaching and learning, instructional methods and views about student engagement to be effective in online classes. The transition posed specific challenges to gauging teaching effectiveness and various student and teacher-centric approaches in an online and blended approach. The transition required adjustment to the underlying beliefs about the purpose of education and changes in the teaching and learning pedagogies.

This research focuses on two specific teaching and learning philosophies: the nexus between HEI philosophy and teacher's philosophy and student learning experiences. Social theories on learning put forward the role of transformative learning for sustainable development and sustainability learning and is now an emerging field of inquiry. The fundamental principle in transformative learning emanates from the underlying belief about the purpose of education (Aboytes, Gustavo, & Mattias, 2020). Teachers have a significant role in the transformation process as facilitators in the learning process. Specifically, this research centers on management education, where student engagement and learning experiences are primary requirements for successful completion and graduate employability.

## 2. Literature review

The main objective of teaching is to create fundamental changes in the learner (Tebabal & Kahssay, 2011). Teachers' strategies to achieve the objective often differ. The deep-rooted philosophy of education is like an iceberg and manifests a complexity of forces that drive the teachers' classroom behavior. The different educational philosophies emerge from different perspectives about the purpose of education and address several philosophical questions about education theories and practices (Sahan & Terzi, 2015). Educational practices and policies have their foundation and philosophical beliefs. The role of teachers' practical educational considerations as facilitating methodologies, curriculum issues, the role and function of educational institutions and the nature of the learners have eventually become philosophical perspectives (Jumani, Malik, Warner, & Malik, 2020). Several factors influence underlying teaching philosophy, including teachers' experience, educational background, culture, HEI vision and mission, learners' characteristics and so on. Questions about the effectiveness of teachers' different methods brought considerable empirical literature. The teaching methods influence students' academic performance; ineffective teaching methods contribute to the poor academic performance of students (Adunola, 2011).

Teaching philosophies are broadly classified into student-centered or teacher-centered teaching and learning philosophies. A student-centered, also referred to as learner-centered, is attributed to various instructional methods and pedagogical concepts wherein students and their learning are placed at the heart of the educational process to foster deeper learning processes and outcomes (Hoidn, 2017). Student-centeredness focuses not only on individual learners and their learning processes but on the whole learning context and issues of content, culture, community and instructional practice (e.g., activities and assignments) informed by educational constructivism, a theory of knowledge and learning Hoidn and Reusser (2021). A student-centered approach emphasizes providing students with opportunities to participate and engage in activities while interacting with the subject matter, the teacher and each other (Sabah & Du, 2018). On the other hand, teacher-centeredness refers to communicating knowledge to students in a learning environment in which the teacher has the primary responsibility (Mascolo, 2009). Lecturers direct the overall learning environment and consider themselves as the source of knowledge (Serin, 2018). Weimer (2002) cited that student-centered and teacher-centered learning practices differ in terms of (1) the balance of power in classrooms, (2) the function of course content in classrooms, (3) the role of student and teacher, (4) the responsibility of learning and (5) the purpose and processes of evaluation.

### 2.1 Underlying beliefs among advocates of teaching philosophies

In this context, defining what brings a fundamental change in the learner is relevant. A dominant perspective emerged from research concludes that discipline and order bring academic excellence (Claver *et al.*, 2020), mediated by achievement goals and self-determination (Jung, Zhou, & Lee,

2017). Teachers holding this perspective follow teacher-centric teaching methods to influence students' behavior. They emphasize timeliness, order, integrity and adherence to guidelines as mandatory to create a fundamental change in the learner. Teaching strategies are driven to implement planned tasks. However, several empirical studies have documented the failure of teacher-centric approaches to bring fundamental change in learners (Sabah & Du, 2018; Du, Su, & Liu, 2013). They argue that the teacher-centered approach fails to develop reasoning and critical thinking skills, problem formulation skills, collaborative skills and other lifelong learning competencies. Contradicting these findings, Ismail *et al.* (2018) argued that students who learned using a teacher-centered approach showed higher subjective and objective learning outcomes than students who learned using the student-centered approach. Zohrabi, Torabi, and Baybourniani (2012) considered teacher-centered teaching effective for English courses compared to student-centered teaching for developing grammar knowledge among learners.

On the other hand, a student-centered teaching pedagogy considers teachers as facilitators in bringing fundamental change in students. Teachers who follow this philosophy focus on engaging students in classrooms, promoting class interactions and creating an environment that facilitates student learning in classrooms and their application in real-life cases/scenarios. Yamagata (2016) considered the student-centered approach more effective than the teacher-centered approach in improving retention rates for learned definitions and accuracy rates for novel definitions of the primary target verbs. Similarly, Robinson *et al.* (2016) shared the need to use student-centered techniques to teach entrepreneurship to gain experiential and existential life-long learning practices. Arguments favoring and opposing both approaches exist; however, a conclusion may be drawn, the effectiveness of these approaches depends on the subject, level, program and so on. Thus, a teacher-centered technique may be effective for English courses compared to student-centered entrepreneurship techniques.

Surprisingly, empirical reviews identified a gap between the instructors' perceptions and their actual practice (Sabah & Du, 2018), reflecting that they consider practices as student-centered; however, it is not. This gap is explored in the current research, making the study unique. The research emphasizes identifying the elements or strategies that distinguish student-centered and teacher-centered teaching practices. Although empirical studies demarcated the teaching strategies into student-centered and teacher-centered, in most cases, the actual teaching practice is often a combination of student-centered and teacher-centered strategies. Ismail *et al.* (2018) cited the reason in their article that both pedagogical approaches positively impacted learning outcomes. Many teachers opt for "hugging the middle" between these extremes, blending and creating a hybrid of the two educational philosophies (Lackeus *et al.*, 2016; Cuban, 2007).

The teacher-centric teaching pedagogy is a traditional model that focuses on lecturing, memorizing, repeating and testing knowledge and theories that are valuable for all students (Lackeus *et al.*, 2016; Pring, 2010). On the other hand, student-centered teaching pedagogy is progressive and focuses on active project work, problem-based learning and social team-based learning from practice (Lackeus *et al.*, 2016; Labaree, 2012). Pedagogical methods exist along five dimensions; power balance, course content function, student and teacher roles, responsibility for learning and assessment purposes and processes (Muganga & Ssenkusu, 2019; Wright, 2011). Explaining educational philosophies from this perspective, teacher-centered learning occurs when teachers control the learning process. At the same time, students construct their knowledge, facilitated by the teacher in a student-centered philosophy. The major teacher-centered educational philosophies are perennialism, essentialism and behaviorism, while the student-centered educational philosophies are progressivism, constructivism, reconstructivism and existentialism.

Perennialism bases its argument on universal facts. The philosophy states that education aims to train individuals for life, both spiritual and material facts. In other words,

advocates of perennialist education philosophy consider that the essence of human beings remains the same always and everywhere (Uyangör, Sahan, Atici, & Borekc, 2016). Like perennialism, essentialism is also a teacher-centered teaching pedagogy. Essentialism emphasized the importance of teaching essential and enduring knowledge accumulated through the ages and encapsulated in the great (Tan, 2006). Rob and Rob (2018) concluded that constructivism focuses on setting up a learning environment that fosters individual learning and presents a problem to be solved to produce a personally meaningful artifact without further teacher intervention. Progressivism considers that education's purpose is to prepare students for change actively. Scientific thinking is a collaborative learning process (Bolat & Bas, 2018). It is a student-centered teaching philosophy. As the name indicates, the purpose of education, according to reconstructivism philosophy, is to reconstruct the culture and society and support critical thinking and problem-solving using scientific methods.

Positivism, as an educational philosophy, emphasizes using scientific methods to study and understand the world. The philosophy focuses on critical thinking and problem-solving skills and preparing students with analytical and data-driven decision-making skills. The focus is on students and developing skills to use scientific methods in learning. Siraj, Hamdan, Pandurengan, and Al-Subhi (2020) explained that teachers who emphasize positivism focus on the multicultural background of students and utilize experiments and scientific and interpretive methods in teaching and learning. Hjørland (2005) compared positivism with other philosophical ideologies and concluded that positivist philosophy should be scientific, that metaphysical speculations are meaningless and that there is a universal and a priori scientific method. In the social sciences positivism focus on quantitative data and precisely formulated theories, the doctrines of behaviorism, operationalism and methodological individualism. Positivism's primary focus is promoting learning based on scientific conceptions and systematizing the art of social life (Comte, 2009). Humanist educational philosophy believes in teaching the "whole child" and focusing education on the broader needs of learners, not cognitive alone but also social and emotional needs (Duchesne and McMaugh, 2016; Drew, 2023). A humanistic philosophy promotes practical utility, human values and connectedness with societal events to achieve inclusiveness and a student orientation (Aikenhead, 2014).

Comparing different educational philosophies, empirical research produced several differing arguments. For instance, Uyangör *et al.* (2016) observed that progressivism and reconstructivism are preferred to essentialism and perennialism philosophies, which advocate more traditional approaches. Perennialists follow the old age adage "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Teachers who teach English courses mentioned that teacher-centered philosophies are more suitable for their curriculum. Entrepreneurship teachers favored student-centered teaching philosophies as more appropriate (Lackeus *et al.*, 2016; Robinson *et al.*, 2016; Mavlutova, Krastins, Hermanis, & Lesinskis, 2019; Ismail *et al.*, 2018; Martin, 2020). However, the focus of this paper is not to identify the best philosophy but rooted in the argument that teachers blend different philosophies to create a unique and rewarding learning atmosphere for students.

Student engagement and retention is the cornerstone of student-centered teaching pedagogy. The focus demands facilitating student learning through active learning and experimentation. When learners gain control over what they learn, student-centered pedagogy brings pedagogies of engagement. Two perspectives are addressed in this research. First, the critical aspects of teaching and learning regarding preferred strategies and approaches. Second, the perspective of a "blended strategy" or a "hugging the middle" approach, if any. Of course, we observed a shortage in empirical reviews on this perspective in the empirical literature. Hence, this topic can shed a new perspective on educational philosophy's research initiatives.

### 3. Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

Educational philosophies refer to a complete body of thought that presents a worldview of which education is a part (Tan, 2006). Considering educational philosophies from this perspective necessitates a review of educational philosophy from the teacher's point of view, shedding on their reviews about students, the purpose of education, the student and teacher's role in education, the instructional design, etc. Likewise, there is no reason to believe that teachers strictly follow student-centered or teacher-centered classroom philosophies. The desired approach may be blended, combining a student-centered and teacher-centered educational philosophy. This is called a "blended design." Each philosophy has its own merits and demerits. However, a blended approach optimizes the strategies for a desirable outcome, satisfying the complete bodies of thought of which education is a part. However, the empirical reviews brought a perspective that the selection of educational philosophy is linked to the specialization, experiences and courses teachers handle (Zohrabi *et al.*, 2012; Robinson *et al.*, 2016; Yamagata, 2016; Ismail *et al.*, 2018; Siraj *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, we put forward the following hypotheses.

- H1. There is a significant difference in the educational philosophy of teachers with different qualification levels.
- H2. There is a significant difference in the educational philosophy of teachers with different experience levels.

Uyangör *et al.* (2016) observed significant differences in selected educational philosophies of female and male teachers. Female teachers are significantly influenced by progressivism and reconstructionism, while essentialism and perennialism were observed as preferred educational philosophies of the male teachers. Considering the possible influence of gender on educational philosophy, the following hypotheses are developed.

- H3. There is a significant difference in the educational philosophy of female and male teachers.
- H4. There is a significant difference in the educational philosophy of teachers with different specializations in the department of business studies.

Among the philosophies, empirical research posits that both philosophies influence HEIs' teachers. The dominant teacher-centered educational philosophies are progressivism, Reconstructivism, constructivism, humanism and positivism. Furthermore, teacher-centered educational philosophies include behaviorism, essentialism and perennialism. Accordingly, we put forward the following hypotheses.

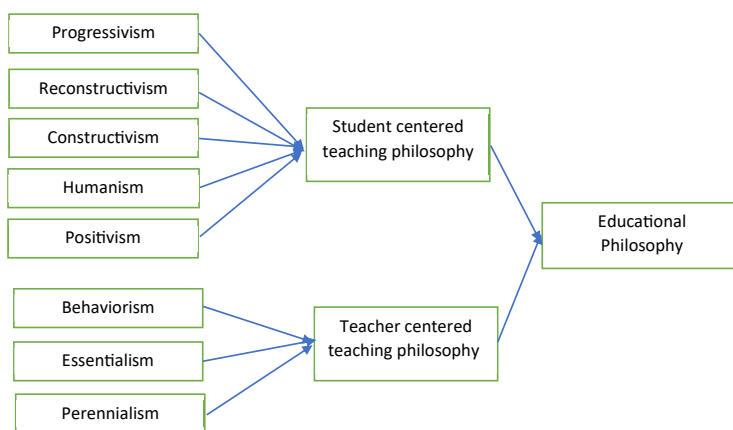
- H5. Teacher-centered educational philosophies significantly influence the educational philosophies of teachers in HEIs.
- H6. Student-centered educational philosophies significantly influence the educational philosophies of teachers in HEIs.

A set of statements that explain the various characteristics of each student-centered and teacher-centered philosophy were prepared. The teachers, on a five-point Likert scale, rated these statements. The educational philosophy is considered a blended philosophy that combines student-centered and teacher-centered philosophies. Accordingly, the study's proposed conceptual model is prepared and shown in Figure 1.

### 4. Research methodology

Teachers' educational philosophy is measured using different techniques, including a student survey on learning experience, class observation, teachers' interviews and instructional





**Source(s):** Authors' self-elaborations based on literature review

Selection  
of educational  
philosophy

**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual framework

methods assessments. This research used teachers' surveys to gain insight into their educational philosophy. The survey was conducted among faculty members in the department of business studies at the Colleges of Technology (the University of Technology and Applied Science), Sultanate of Oman.

The survey instrument utilized statements emphasizing distinct aspects of teaching and learning, student engagement and the philosophy of education. We requested teachers to rate their level of agreement on statements. The demographic details, such as gender, specialization, age, years of teaching experience and so on were also obtained. The link to fill out the online Google questionnaire was shared through emails with an assurance of confidentiality of individual information therein.

The research objectives were detailed at the beginning of the survey. After going through the introductory paragraph (purpose and confidentiality clause), those who agreed to participate in the survey later submitted their responses. The survey instrument was piloted initially among 20 teachers from the Higher College of Technology, Muscat. The pilot study feedback was used to modify the survey instruments, particularly on key "verbs" and reframing a few questions. Besides few statements were added based on the feedback received. The pilot study was conducted among staff with longstanding experience in teaching and learning, and their comments were highly relevant to improve the overall quality of the questionnaire.

The survey instrument has 48 statements. The statements started with phrases such as "I allow my students" or "I believe that" to reflect the current teaching practices. We used a five-point Likert Scale to measure responses, with "Strongly Agree" indicating a score of 5 and "Strongly Disagree" indicating 1. Table 1 shows the interpretation of the Likert Scale.

Student-centered teaching philosophy consisted of 29 items in five categories. The reliability of the scales in the survey was measured using the Cronbach's alpha score. Progressivism was measured using five items ( $\alpha = 0.745$ ). Reconstructivism was measured using six items ( $\alpha = 0.792$ ). Similarly, constructivism was measured using seven items ( $\alpha = 0.855$ ), and humanism was measured using eight items ( $\alpha = 0.879$ ). The last student-centered teaching philosophy used in this paper, i.e., positivism, was measured using three items ( $\alpha = 0.741$ ). A total of 17 items were used to measure teacher-centered teaching philosophy, classified into three categories. Behaviorism was measured using six items ( $\alpha = 0.772$ ). Essentialism was measured using four items ( $\alpha = 0.645$ ), and the last construct, i.e., perennialism, was measured using seven items ( $\alpha = 0.772$ ).

**Table 1.**  
Likert scale  
interpretation

Likert scale interpretation and distribution of values			Interpretation of Rogers' Innovation adoption classification based on 5-point Likert Scale	
Likert scale	Description	Value allocation	Value range allocation	Rogers' innovation adoption status
1	Not at all	1.0–1.49	0.1–1.0	Laggard
2	Slightly true	1.5–2.49	1.1–2.0	Late majority
3	Moderately true	2.5–3.90	2.1–3.0	Early majority
4	Mostly true	3.5–4.49	3.1–4.0	Early adopters
5	Completely true	4.5–5.00	4.1–5.0	Innovators
<b>Source(s):</b> Author's self-elaborations; <a href="#">Alston and Miller (2002)</a> , <a href="#">Mohammad, Noor'Ayni, and Kamal (2014)</a> , <a href="#">Owusu-Manu, Torku, Parn, Addy, and Edwards (2017)</a>				

SPSS was used to code, edit and summarize data. Descriptive analysis was completed using mean, correlation and standard deviation. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test is used to verify the goodness of fit. The student-centered and teacher-centered educational philosophies are individually tested for the goodness of fit. If the *p*-value is less than or equal to the critical value (0.05), we fail to reject the null hypothesis that the data follows the normal distribution.

4.1 Population and sample

A total of 193 staff participated in the survey. The study population was the teaching staff. According to [Krejci and Morgan \(1970\)](#), the sample size is appropriate and above the minimum requirements. According to the model, if the total population is 260, the sample size should be 155. This research collected data from 193 participants and is a representative sample.

4.2 Demographic profile

In total, 52.9% of the respondents had more than 15 years of teaching experience, while 31.6% had experience from 10 to 15 years. 52.9% of the respondents hold a master's degree, while 47.1% have a Ph.D. 62.3% of the respondents were male, while 37.3% were female. 32.9% of the respondents were within the age group 40–45 years, while 25.5% were within the age group 35–40 years. 45.00% of the respondents majored in accounting and finance, while 24.6% specialized in human resource management.

5. Results

[Table 2](#) shows the results of the mean, standard deviation and correlation. The mean value ranges from 3.95 to 4.48. Progressivism has the highest mean score (4.48), while perennialism has the lowest mean score (3.95). All variables under focus had a significant positive correlation with each other.

Among the 46 statements representing the teacher's view on education, student engagement and purpose of teaching and learning, the top 10 statements with the highest mean on a five-point scale were listed in [Table 3](#). These statements reflect the core of teachers' beliefs and practices in classrooms. For instance, the analysis shows that teachers allow and encourage students to ask questions and interact in class (mean = 4.82, SD = 0.48). This is a key attribute of student-centered philosophy, where the role of the teacher is to facilitate learning by promoting student interaction in class. Similarly, another key attribute of student-centered teaching philosophy is the teacher's support in developing students'



	Mean	SE	SD	Pr	Re	Cn	Hn	Pn	Po	Bh
Progressivism	4.48	0.03	0.48							
Reconstructivism	4.41	0.04	0.53	0.745**						
Constructivism	4.36	0.04	0.53	0.775**	0.776**					
Humanism	4.32	0.04	0.56	0.759**	0.747**	0.815**				
Perennialism	3.95	0.05	0.67	0.499**	0.569**	0.559**	0.600**			
Positivism	4.28	0.04	0.62	0.637**	0.613**	0.632**	0.711**	0.622**		
Behaviorism	4.16	0.04	0.58	0.611**	0.594**	0.624**	0.661**	0.653**	0.643**	
Essentialism	4.02	0.05	0.65	0.489**	0.521**	0.541**	0.551**	0.641**	0.572**	0.656**
<b>Note(s):</b> Pr – Progressivism; Re – Reconstructivism; Cn – Constructivism; Hn – Humanism; Pn – Perennialism; Po – Positivism; Bh – Behaviorism; En – Essentialism s										
SE – Standard Error, SD Standard Deviation										
** denotes 5 % statistical significance										
<b>Source(s):</b> Author's self-elaboration based on data analysis										

**Table 2.**  
Descriptive statistics  
and correlation  
analysis

#	Teaching and learning practice	Type	Mean	Std. deviation	Likert description	Rogers innovation adoption status
1	I allow and motivate my students to ask questions and interact during the classes	Progressivism	4.82	0.48	Completely true	Innovators
2	I believe a teacher should be a role model to the students	Behaviorism	4.64	0.61	Completely true	Innovators
3	I focus my teaching on helping students understand the present and future trends	Progressivism	4.63	0.60	Completely true	Innovators
4	I always support my students in developing their understanding of what is learned in the class	Constructivism	4.62	0.57	Completely true	Innovators
5	I allow my students to be themselves and express themselves freely	Reconstructivism	4.61	0.62	Completely true	Innovators
6	I believe that case studies, scenarios, and additional exercises are given in the class should help them address fundamental problems in society	Reconstructivism	4.61	0.58	Completely true	Innovators
7	I believe that all students cannot be educated in the same way, as students differ in their learning	Progressivism	4.60	0.69	Completely true	Innovators
8	I focus my teaching on making students responsible citizens (to make the world a better place to live)	Reconstructivism	4.60	0.70	Completely true	Innovators
9	I help students realize that they live in a dynamic world, where solutions and problems keep changing	Progressivism	4.56	0.62	Completely true	Innovators
10	I help students to understand the concepts in their totality	Perennialism	4.53	0.69	Completely true	Innovators
<b>Source(s):</b> Author's self-elaboration based on data analysis						

**Table 3.**  
Most preferred  
elements of teaching  
philosophy

understanding. This is often practiced using case studies, scenarios and practical problem-solving questions.

The mean score supports the “most preferred elements of educational philosophy” which reflects that the teachers’ are keen on experiencing new ideas in classrooms. The analysis shows that teachers deploy a blended pedagogy, i.e., a “hugging the middle” approach on various dimensions in teaching and learning: power balance, course content function, student and teacher roles, responsibility for learning and assessment purposes and processes. The shift is evident here; the teachers’ role is to “facilitate” student acquiring of knowledge through motivating and interacting with students (mean = 4.82), supporting

them (mean = 4.62), reconstructing and reiterating knowledge (mean = 4.61) and helping develop own understanding (mean = 4.63). At the same time, teachers' underlying belief is also influenced by teacher-centered pedagogy, such as showcasing them as a role model (mean = 4.64) and controlling students to make responsible citizens (mean = 4.60). The analysis revealed that the positive side of both pedagogical approaches is used in classrooms. The underlying principles governing teachers' practices are student interaction and engagement, acceptance of student differences, student responsibility in their learning and the importance of real-life learning. These elements help the student gain relevant graduate attributes, such as critical thinking, problem-solver, leadership and good communication.

On the other hand, there are some aspects of educational philosophies which teachers rated low compared to others. The results are presented in [Table 4](#). The less preferred belief/practice does not mean the teachers do not follow the practices. It means that their preference is less compared to others. The analysis shows that the less preferred practices consist of both students centered and teacher-centered practices, which the teachers currently do not value. For example, the earlier belief that teachers are the custodian of knowledge is not widely acknowledged by teachers (mean = 3.94) as their most preferred element of educational philosophy. It is also observed that teachers also avoid prompting students to memorize the subject; instead, they focus on active learning and applying knowledge to gain skills and expertise. They also consider class discipline and order less relevant (mean = 3.94) and promote class discussion and engagement. However, there are specific trivial issues that teachers avoid, which are not desirable for the quality of education. For instance, teachers avoid controversial issues (mean = 3.77). It is quite surprising; however, the results indicate that teachers found engaging in discussions with students on controversial topics challenging. Such approaches prevent engaging in discussion to gain a complete review of the topic or subject. Within the context of teaching and learning, we observed a significant challenge in teaching and learning due to changing educational landscape and competitive market in which HEI exists.

A key finding from the analysis helps to conclude that teachers employ both pedagogical approaches in the classrooms. However, the student-centered approach is dominant in the analysis. The HEI selected in this research focuses on a vision and mission to promote high-quality student-centered education to the students. HEI strategies and key performance indicators (KPI) also show the selection of student-centered teaching and learning techniques. However, the HEI priorities do not restrict staff from applying some of the teacher-centered practices they find most relevant to complement the student-centered strategies. For instance, "I monitor students' behavior inside and outside the class and reward accordingly" is considered a teacher-centric practice. Though the practice is rated as less preferred, it does not mean that the approach is completely discarded. In HEI parlance, teachers also perform advising and mentoring duties and observe their students outside their classes to support them in achieving their academic goals and aspirations.

The analysis also examined whether teachers' views differ based on their age, gender, area of specialization, qualification and experience. We combined the common elements of both philosophies and classified them into student-centered and teacher-centered. [Table 5](#) summarizes the results.

The result shows that there exist significant differences in teachers' pedagogical approaches based on their demographical profile, except age. Gender, Specialization, Qualification and Experience are not statically predictors of educational philosophy. The result brings in another vital observation. HEIs strategic plan (UTAS Strategic Plan 2015–20) highlighted the college's vision to provide students with high-quality, student-centered teaching and learning. The analysis showed that teachers preferred educational philosophy is not fully driven by institutional preferences alone.

#	Teaching and learning practice	Type	Mean	Std. deviation	Likert description	Rogers innovation adoption status
1	As a course lecturer, I choose the material for the students to study and organize students' activities	Perennialism	4.05	0.87	Mostly true	Innovators
2	Learning in the classroom should focus on experiments and statistics to reveal the true nature of how society operates	Positivism	4.03	0.88	Mostly true	Innovators
3	I help students to self-evaluate with a consented benchmarking	Humanism	3.94	0.91	Mostly true	Early adopters
4	Class discipline and order are maintained by rewards and discipline for good and bad behavior	Behaviorism	3.94	0.95	Mostly true	Early adopters
5	I believe that the teacher is the master of knowledge to guide the discussion and student learning	Perennialism	3.82	1.10	Mostly true	Early adopters
6	Controversial issues and problems are discussed and understood through teaching and learning	Reconstructivism	3.77	1.10	Mostly true	Early adopters
7	I monitor students' behavior in and outside the class and reward accordingly	Behaviorism	3.49	1.13	Moderately true	Early adopters
8	I believe that learning is not for everyone; some are capable and some are not capable which needs to be distinguished	Perennialism	3.36	1.36	Moderately true	Early adopters
9	I often tell students that learning comes through hard work, and make students drill and memorize the content	Essentialism	3.30	1.30	Moderately true	Early adopters
10	I strongly stress that the lecturers are the authority whose knowledge is unquestionable	Perennialism	3.02	1.42	Moderately true	Early adopters

**Table 4.**  
Less preferred teaching practices

**Source(s):** Author's self-elaboration based on data analysis

### 5.1 Hypothesis testing

Based on the above table, we answer the hypotheses developed based on the literature review.

**H1a** There is no significant difference in the educational philosophies of teachers based on their qualifications.

	Specialization		Qualification		Experience		Age		Gender	
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Progressivism	0.158	0.959	0.001	0.971	0.298	0.827	46.756	0.000	0.051	0.821
Reconstructivism	0.677	0.609	4.174	0.042	1.506	0.214	35.361	0.000	1.501	0.222
Constructivism	0.557	0.694	0.975	0.325	0.505	0.679	34.139	0.000	1.154	0.284
Humanism	0.311	0.870	0.170	0.681	0.853	0.467	28.533	0.000	0.581	0.447
Perennialism	0.262	0.902	0.953	0.330	1.770	0.154	13.320	0.000	0.272	0.602
Positivism	0.249	0.910	0.416	0.520	1.360	0.256	22.331	0.000	0.003	0.954
Behaviorism	0.180	0.949	0.270	0.604	1.177	0.320	22.662	0.000	0.160	0.690
Essentialism	0.387	0.818	0.000	0.992	0.694	0.557	16.390	0.000	0.132	0.716
TCL	0.164	0.956	0.391	0.533	1.401	0.244	23.963	0.000	0.052	0.820
SCL	0.173	0.952	0.966	0.327	0.898	0.443	44.625	0.000	0.531	0.467
Overall	0.117	0.976	0.793	0.374	1.101	0.350	41.548	0.000	0.323	0.571

Note(s): \**t*-test

Source(s): Author's self-elaboration based on data analysis

**Table 5.**  
Test of ANOVA

**H1b** There is no significant difference in the educational philosophies of teachers based on their experience.

**H1c** There is no significant difference in the educational philosophies of teachers based on their gender.

**H1d** There is no significant positive relationship between educational philosophies and the specialization of teachers.

However, age is a significant predictor of the educational philosophy of teachers in the HEI.

## 6. Discussion – the hugging-the-middle approach

The results exhibited “pedagogies of engagement” as the core of teaching and learning. The preferred teaching strategy includes a blend of both student-centered and teacher-centered pedagogies. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) rightly pointed out that engagement is positively absorbed when a student is engrossed in a challenging but meaningful task. However, teachers are also concerned that they should be role models in the facilitation process. The primary outcome from the analysis is the importance of a blended approach, thereby refuting the superiority claim of individual educational pedagogies. By opting for a blended strategy, teachers navigate traditional education's rigidity and progressive education's vagueness (Egan, 2008). As described earlier, it is the strategy of hugging the middle between two extremes (Lackeus *et al.*, 2016). Muganga and Ssenusu (2019), observed that teacher-centered educational philosophies are unavoidable and should be implemented along with student-centered philosophies. Concerning classroom management Garrett (2018) advocates for a combination of student-centered and teacher-centered strategies. The results of this research also support the claim.

The second relevant question is the identification of relevant student-centered strategies which teachers find more engaging. The results show that the philosophical pedagogies of progressivism, constructivism and reconstructionism help engage the students. At the same time, specific philosophical pedagogies of teacher-centered practices are also relevant. Teachers believe they should be student role models, part of behaviorism pedagogy. Also, teachers believe they must educate students about the concepts in their totality. Thus, the analysis revealed a mix of teachers' strategies to achieve teaching and learning outcomes. However, the analysis also showed an important observation. It is a fact that most of the

preferred strategies are student-centered. On the other hand, while examining the less preferred strategies, the opposite is evident. Most of the teacher-centered strategies are listed in the less preferred one; for instance, some of the philosophical strategies in perennialism, behaviorism and essentialism. Though these are less preferred, it is still evident that teachers deploy these strategies and observed from their mean value and standard deviation.

Teachers would set their course goals, objectives and contents more consistently if they became consciously aware of the underlying philosophy of their teaching method (Ardalan, 2008). This research also articulated the preference toward a blended instructional design, though the HEI specifically focused on student-centric teaching pedagogy in their strategic priorities. This is often a disparity between what the institution demands and what the teachers follow in classrooms. The teachers must be aware of their educational philosophy to align the teacher's philosophical orientation with the institution's philosophical orientation. The administrators, in this case, can utilize surveys, class observation and student feedback as tools to identify the teacher's underlying philosophy in teaching and learning, and strategies can be set in place to align it with the institution's preferred educational philosophy.

Not many research initiatives are conducted in this domain. This should be pioneering research in the domain. It focuses on the common practices and strategies teachers deploy in their classrooms and links them with the underlying educational philosophy. The analysis proves that though debates are ongoing on the dominance of each educational philosophy on student learning, teachers prefer a blend of good practices of both philosophies.

## **7. Theoretical and practical implications**

This research furthers the discussion and empirical research on educational philosophy. The study results proved that the teachers employ a blended approach, linking the attributes of student-centered and teacher-centered teaching philosophies. Philosophies of Progressivism, behaviorism, constructivism, reconstructivism and perennialism are embedded. However, the focus is selective. Not all the elements of these philosophies are preferred. This research sheds light on the emerging paradigm that focuses on students' responsibility for their learning with teacher support. This research exclusively focuses on the philosophical preferences of teachers in the business studies department. Addressing the findings of these studies and their relevance in other educational contexts is required to verify whether teachers' preferred philosophies differ.

Educational philosophies in classrooms impact student learning, engagement and motivation. Many factors influence the adoption of a specific educational philosophy in classrooms. This research focused on the perception of teachers on their preferred behavior, which helped the researchers to conclude that teachers prefer mixed strategies. A mixed strategy includes elements of both student-centered and teacher-centered educational philosophies. This research refutes earlier findings, which weigh the importance of a particular philosophy in classes. Based on the outcome of this research, we recommend further studies to verify the results of this study in a different context.

## **8. Limitations and recommendations for future research**

The preference for educational philosophies in the classroom is contextualized as the teacher's sole decision. However, many other factors may influence the teacher's educational philosophies. For instance, the HEI culture, the specialization, the level of students, the culture, the region, etc. However, this research does not address it and can form part of further studies. Also, this research focuses on teachers' perceptions of their behavior in class, indicating what they prefer the most. However, the actual practice may differ. It requires



other techniques, such as class observation and student surveys, to check the difference between teachers' perceptions of preferred educational philosophies and their actual classroom implementation.

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