

Embedding The Teaching Of English Major Courses Into Relational Pedagogy: A Parallel Convergence Study

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ABSTRACT:

This study examined the extent to which relational pedagogy is integrated into English major courses by comparing the perceptions of Bachelor of Secondary Education–English students (n = 220) and subject professors (n = 7) at a Philippine state university. Employing a parallel convergent mixed-methods design, quantitative data were collected via a structured Likert-scale questionnaire across four domains: Teacher–Student Relationship, Collaborative Learning, Classroom Interaction, and Feedback and Support. Weighted combined means were computed to account for unequal group sizes. Qualitative data were gathered through three focus group discussions and subjected to thematic analysis. Quantitatively, both Collaborative Learning (M = 4.22, “Strongly Agree”) and Classroom Interaction (M = 4.22, “Strongly Agree”) received the highest endorsements, followed by Teacher–Student Relationship (M = 4.03, “Agree”). Feedback and Support yielded a neutral overall rating (M = 2.73, “Neutral”), reflecting a divergence between professors’ high appraisal (M = 4.46) and students’ lower perception (M = 2.67). Qualitative findings generated five interrelated themes that contextualize these patterns: Building Shared Understanding of Areas for Improvement (clarity of rubrics and resources), Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy (context-driven method choice), Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches (structuring engagement with mini-lectures), Navigating Feedback Importance and Practical Challenges (workload and timeliness constraints), and Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy (efficiency versus emotional connection). The results indicate that while interactive and collaborative pedagogies are firmly embedded and valued by both groups, feedback practices remain inconsistent and warrant targeted interventions. The study concludes that enhancing clear assessment guidelines, adopting scalable feedback mechanisms (e.g., peer review, technology-mediated commentary), and supporting instructors’ autonomy to tailor relational strategies can strengthen the integration of relational pedagogy. The findings offer evidence-based recommendations for curriculum designers and teacher educators seeking to foster meaningful teacher–student relationships and sustainable support structures in higher education contexts.

KEYWORDS:

relational pedagogy, convergent parallel mixed-methods, teacher–student relationship, collaborative learning, classroom interaction, feedback and support, thematic analysis, higher education, BSE-English program, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

The need to reassess teaching approaches in higher education institutions (HEIs) has become imperative as twenty-first-century learners, shaped by K–12’s student-centred pedagogy, enter college environments still dominated by traditional, teacher-centred methods [1] [2] [3]. This mismatch can alienate students and undermine their engagement [4]. Relational pedagogy, grounded in trust, empathy, and mutual respect, offers a remedy by fostering meaningful teacher-student interactions that enhance achievement and well-being [3] [5]. Empirical studies link positive faculty rapport and prompt, constructive feedback to higher student satisfaction, especially in English major subjects where commitment, subject-matter knowledge, and opportunities for independent learning drive engagement [1] [6] [7]. Themes such as empathy, collaborative learning, dynamic classroom interaction, and consistent support emerge as core to relational pedagogy’s effectiveness [8] [9].

The COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 intensified these challenges by abruptly shifting instruction online, forcing both faculty and students to adopt unfamiliar technologies in place of face-to-face [2]. As HEIs slowly resume on-campus modalities, educators must still address emerging factors, from rising heat indices to

generation gaps, that impact student engagement [1]. Moreover, academic freedom and curriculum decolonisation compound the complexity of designing inclusive, student-centred experiences [9] [10]. Freshmen and sophomores in the Bachelor of Secondary Education–English program report heightened anxiety over this transition, noting that varied teaching styles may outpace their readiness [11] [12]. To address these issues, this study conducts a preliminary investigation into the integration of relational pedagogy in English major subjects through scaffolding, meaningful interactions, and purposeful activities [13]. Using a parallel convergent mixed-methods design, it benchmarks current classroom routines against relational-pedagogical principles and elicits both student and professor perspectives.

Specifically, the research aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent is relational pedagogy integrated into the teaching of English major subjects, according to the perceptions of BSE-English students and subject professors in terms of:
 - a. Teacher-Student Relationship;
 - b. Collaborative Learning;
 - c. Classroom Interaction; and
 - d. Feedback and Support?
2. What themes may be formed regarding the interactions between BSE-English students and subject professors in the context of relational pedagogy?

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a parallel convergent mixed-methods design to comprehensively capture the perspectives of students and subject professors regarding the integration of relational pedagogy in teaching English major subjects. This approach allowed the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions. By juxtaposing the quantitative ratings provided by students and professors, with the thematic insights derived from open-ended responses, the design facilitated a nuanced comparison of the two groups' viewpoints.

Sampling Method

The sampling method used in this study was stratified sampling for the student respondents and purposive sampling for the teacher respondents. For the student respondents, a stratified sampling method was used to select students from each year level (First to Fourth year) of the BSE-English program, as well as the most recent section who graduated from the program (see Table 1).

Table 1 Population and Sample Sizes for Each Student Cohort (Slovin's Formula, $e = 0.05$)

Cohort	Population (N)	Sample (n)
Graduates 2023	46	41
Graduates 2022	43	39
Fourth Year (SY 23–24)	38	35
Third Year (SY 23–24)	40	36
Second Year (SY 23–24)	27	25
First Year (SY 23–24)	49	44

This ensured that the sample was representative of the population and that the researcher could make generalizations about the entire population. For the teacher respondents, purposive sampling was used to identify seven (7) instructors/professors who were currently teaching major subjects in the BSE-English program.

Data Collection Methods

Data for this study were collected using surveys and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The survey evaluated the extent of relational pedagogy as integrated into the teaching of English major subjects as perceived by the BSE-English students and subject professors. The following range was used:

- Strongly Disagree (1.00 - 1.80)
- Disagree (1.81 - 2.60)

Neutral (2.61 - 3.40)
Agree (3.41 - 4.20)
Strongly Agree (4.21 - 5.00)

Three focus group discussions were conducted: two with student cohorts ($n = 6$ and $n = 7$) and one with professors ($n = 7$), each lasting approximately 60 minutes and audio-recorded for verbatim transcription. To ensure the rigor of the thematic analysis, a manual coding process was employed using Microsoft Excel. After the transcription of the audio-recorded focus group discussions, the transcripts were read multiple times to facilitate immersion and familiarization with the data. Initial codes were inductively generated and systematically entered into an Excel spreadsheet. These codes were then reviewed, clustered into subthemes, and refined into overarching themes through an iterative process. Throughout the analysis, an audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions, emerging patterns, and theme development. To enhance credibility and confirmability, a peer validation process was conducted in which another researcher reviewed the coded data and the thematic structure. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved collaboratively, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings. Although qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo was considered, manual coding was deemed sufficient due to the manageable size of the dataset and ensured transparency in the analytic process.

In relation with convergent parallel design, the quantitative data were corroborated with the qualitative data. The qualitative data explored themes related to the integration of relational pedagogy as perceived by the BSE-English students and subject professors.

Data Analysis Methods

The present study explicitly adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of relational pedagogy in the BSE-English program. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the extent of relational pedagogy integration as perceived by the BSE-English students and subject professors. The qualitative data were also subjected to thematic analysis.

To ensure a more accurate representation of overall perceptions across groups with unequal sample sizes, weighted combined means were computed by taking into account the number of respondents in each group, thereby preventing the smaller professor sample from disproportionately influencing the overall results. It should be noted, however, that our quantitative comparisons rest on highly unequal group sizes ($n = 220$ students vs. $n = 7$ professors), which may reduce the statistical power and precision of between-group contrasts. While the quantitative data, gathered through a structured questionnaire, offered measurable insights into students' and professors' perceptions, the qualitative component, derived from focus group discussions, allowed for deeper exploration of these perceptions and the contextual factors influencing them.

To ensure coherence between the two strands, the themes generated from the qualitative data were used to support, contrast, or explain the quantitative results. For instance, the high mean ratings for classroom interaction were further illuminated by FGD narratives that described both the benefits and limitations of relational approaches in promoting active student engagement.

Research Procedures

The survey instrument was subjected to both content validation and reliability testing. Five experts in English language education and professional education validated the questionnaire. A pilot study was then conducted with 30 students and 5 professors (not included in the main sample) to assess internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha for the overall instrument was 0.88, with subscale alphas ranging from 0.81 (Teacher-Student Relationship) to 0.90 (Learning Environment). Items were refined based on pilot feedback to ensure high item-total correlations (all > 0.40).

The survey questionnaire was administered to the students and teachers (parallel form). The survey was distributed online or in-person, depending on the availability of the respondents. The researcher ensured that the survey was completed within a specified timeframe, and reminders were sent to non-respondents to encourage participation.

Next, the FGDs were conducted with a smaller group of students and the subject professors. The FGDs were scheduled at a time and location that was convenient for the participants, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The researcher took notes during the FGDs and transcribed the audio recordings verbatim.

Once the data collection was complete, the researcher analyzed the quantitative data using descriptive statistics. The qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis, and the researcher identified patterns, themes, and codes from the FGDs. In accordance with Fetters, Curry, and Creswell's [14] integration framework, the quantitative and qualitative strands were brought together through a joint display that juxtaposed weighted combined means with thematic insights, enabling the generation of meta-inferences that transcend what either dataset could reveal alone. By merging survey scores and exemplar quotes side-by-side, we followed their principle of "following a thread" to identify points of convergence and divergence, thereby ensuring that our interpretation reflects a genuinely integrated understanding of relational pedagogy integration.

The researcher triangulated the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data, and drew conclusions about the research questions. The findings were presented in a comprehensive report, which included recommendations for future research and implications for practice.

RESULTS

Quantitative Phase

Table 2 presents the weighted combined mean scores and corresponding verbal interpretations for each domain of relational pedagogy integration as perceived by BSE-English students (n = 220) and professors (n = 7).

Table 2 Perceived Integration of Relational Pedagogy in English Major Subjects by BSE-English Students and Professors Across Four Domains (Students, n=220; Professors, n=7)

Aspects	WEIGHTED COMBINED MEANS					
	Students		Professors		Combined	
	Category Means	VI	Category Means	VI	Overall	VI
Teacher-Student Relationship	4.01	A	4.77	SA	4.03	A
Collaborative Learning	4.20	A	4.74	SA	4.22	SA
Classroom Interaction	4.21	SA	4.49	SA	4.22	SA
Feedback and Support	2.67	N	4.46	SA	2.73	N

Note: Weighted combined means computed as $(M_{stu} \times 220 + M_{prof} \times 7) / 227$

In the domain of Teacher-Student Relationship, the weighted combined mean is 4.03, which falls within the "Agree" category (3.41-4.20), indicating that most participants view relational rapport in instruction favorably. For Collaborative Learning, the weighted combined mean is 4.22, categorized as "Strongly Agree" (4.21-5.00), suggesting a strong consensus that peer collaboration and group-based activities are effectively integrated into the program. Similarly, Classroom Interaction also yields a weighted combined mean of 4.22 ("Strongly Agree"), reflecting participants' consistent perception that interactive lectures and structured discussions are highly present and beneficial. In contrast, the Feedback and Support domain produces a weighted combined mean of 2.73, interpreted as "Neutral" (2.61-3.40), which arises from a high professor mean (4.46) counterbalanced by a

lower student mean (2.67); this neutral overall perception indicates that feedback practices are seen as neither consistently satisfactory nor wholly deficient.

Qualitative Phase

Analysis of focus group and interview data identified five themes reflecting how students and professors perceive the integration of relational pedagogy in the BSE-English program (See Table 3).

Table 3 Concise Thematic Analysis of Student and Faculty Perspectives on Relational Pedagogy Integration

Theme	Subthemes	Illustrative Quotes
Building Shared Understanding of Areas for Improvement	Clarity of expectations; Resource enhancement	“We need clear grading rubrics to understand what’s expected of us.” (S)
		“A standardized rubric would streamline our feedback process and set clear criteria.” (P)
Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy	Contextual adaptation; Professional autonomy	“I choose methods based on each class’s dynamic; relational methods aren’t always best.” (P)
		“In certain lessons, we actually prefer a straightforward explanation first.” (S)
Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches	Student-led engagement; Teacher-guided structure	“When we do group work, I feel more engaged than in straight lectures.” (S)
		“I sometimes pause group work to provide mini-lectures, ensuring key points aren’t missed.” (P)
Navigating Feedback Importance and Practical Challenges	Timeliness issues; Workload constraints	“I had to wait weeks for my assignment feedback.” (S)
		“Due to workload, I can’t always write detailed comments on every assignment.” (P)
Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy	Relational value; Method appropriateness	“I enjoy when teachers use relational methods to connect with us.” (S)
		“Relational pedagogy isn’t always optimal; sometimes a straightforward lecture works better.” (P)

First both groups recognized the need for clearer instructional guidelines and supplementary resources; students emphasized that explicit grading rubrics and additional learning materials would improve transparency, while professors noted that standardized rubrics streamline feedback and clarify expectations (Converging Understanding of Areas for Improvement). On the other hand, interactive strategies, combining brief lectures with structured discussions and peer-driven activities, were seen as fostering greater engagement and investment, with professors balancing relational engagement and targeted mini-lectures to maintain focus (Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches: Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches). Interestingly, flexibility in pedagogical choices emerged as essential; professors described adapting relational methods when appropriate or reverting to more direct approaches under time constraints, a practice students also acknowledged as sometimes necessary for efficient content delivery (Negotiating Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy). Participants agreed that timely, meaningful feedback is crucial, yet structural constraints such as large class sizes and heavy workloads often lead to inconsistent or delayed responses (Navigating Feedback Importance and Practical Challenges). Although students generally valued relational approaches for enhancing their sense of being valued and supported, both cohorts agreed that such methods must be applied judiciously, recognizing that traditional, teacher-centered strategies can be more effective when clear, rapid content coverage is the priority (Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy).

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Table 4 presents an integrated view of quantitative scores and qualitative themes to illustrate how relational pedagogy is perceived across four domains.

Table 4 Integration of Quantitative Scores and Thematic Insights Through Joint Display in a Convergent Mixed-Methods Study

Domain	Student Mean	Professor Mean	Weighted Combined Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Qualitative Themes
Teacher-Student Relationship	4.01	4.77	4.03	Agree	Converging Understanding of Areas for Improvement; Interplay of Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy; Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy
Collaborative Learning	4.2	4.74	4.22	Strongly Agree	Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches
Classroom Interaction	4.21	4.49	4.22	Strongly Agree	Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches; Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy; Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy
Feedback and Support	2.67	4.46	2.73	Neutral	Navigating Feedback Importance and Practical Challenges

In the Teacher-Student Relationship domain, the weighted combined mean of 4.03 falls into the “Agree” category, indicating generally positive perceptions of rapport-building practices. Qualitative insights support this finding: participants emphasized a Converging Understanding of Areas for Improvement, noting the importance of clear rubrics and supplemental resources to strengthen relational bonds; they also discussed Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy, highlighting that instructors adopt relational methods when contextually appropriate; and they described Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy, with some valuing emotional connection and others prioritizing efficiency.

Both Collaborative Learning and Classroom Interaction domains yield weighted combined means of 4.22, firmly placing them in the “Strongly Agree” range and reflecting a high level of endorsement for interactive, student-centered approaches. For Collaborative Learning, students and professors alike identified Balancing Relational and Teacher-Fronted Approaches as a core theme, with students reporting increased engagement in group work and professors balancing mini-lectures with structured discussions. In the Classroom Interaction domain, the same theme recurs, alongside Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy, revealing that instructors strategically blend relational engagement with structured guidance to maintain focus and meet learning objectives. These combined findings indicate that both peers and faculty agree on the value of collaborative, interactive pedagogy.

In contrast, the Feedback and Support domain exhibits greater variability: although professors’ mean (4.46) suggests they value feedback, the students’ mean (2.67) leads to a weighted combined mean of 2.73, categorized as “Neutral.” The primary qualitative theme here, Navigating Feedback Importance and Practical Challenges, captures this divergence. Students reported inconsistent or delayed feedback, while professors acknowledged time

and workload constraints that limit their ability to provide detailed, timely responses. Together, the quantitative and qualitative data show that, while feedback is recognized as important, structural barriers prevent it from being uniformly effective.

Table 4's joint display reveals that relational pedagogy is strongly endorsed in domains emphasizing interaction and collaboration, and viewed positively, but with recognized areas for refinement, in domains tied to teacher-student rapport and feedback. These integrated results underscore both convergence (e.g., shared enthusiasm for collaborative learning) and divergence (e.g., mixed experiences with feedback practices), affording a comprehensive understanding of how relational pedagogies operate within the program.

DISCUSSION

Quantitative Phase

The integrated findings reveal a broadly positive reception of relational pedagogy within the BSE-English program, yet they also underscore specific areas needing refinement. Across the four domains: Teacher-Student Relationship; Collaborative Learning; Classroom Interaction; and Feedback and Support, participants demonstrated strong endorsement of interactive, student-centered practices. This overall pattern aligns with prior work emphasizing the importance of relational competence in teaching. Aspelin and Jonsson [4] argue that fostering relational competence enhances both teacher effectiveness and student engagement, while Jensen, Skibsted, and Christensen [3] highlight the role of reflective and relational skills in developing teachers' capacities to respond to diverse learner needs. Similarly, Su and Wood [13] note that relational pedagogy cultivates deeper academic connections, supporting Bovill's [2] contention that relationship-focused approaches can transform higher education classrooms into more collaborative and inclusive spaces.

Qualitative Phase

In the Teacher-Student Relationship domain, participants agreed that clear communication of expectations and supplementary resources are crucial for strengthening rapport. Students' calls for standardized rubrics and supplemental materials echo Bell's [1] finding that transparent assessment practices foster greater student satisfaction and trust. At the same time, professors' emphasis on academic freedom and contextual adaptability reflects Scheff's [8] social bonds theory, which posits that meaningful connections emerge when both parties negotiate roles and expectations. However, the somewhat tempered "Agree" rating suggests lingering tensions related to structural constraints. Zahl-Thanam and Rye [12] identify class-based barriers that can impede students' sense of belonging, and Matos [11] connects early departure from higher education to misalignments between student expectations and institutional practices. Hall et al.'s [9] case study on curriculum decolonisation further underscores that relationship building must attend to power dynamics and cultural relevance—pointing to the need for rubrics and resources that honor diverse backgrounds and knowledges.

The Collaborative Learning and Classroom Interaction domains received "Strongly Agree" endorsements, indicating robust support for peer collaboration and interactive pedagogies. Schreiber and Yu [7] demonstrate that active engagement strategies consistently predict higher academic performance, affirming students' and professors' shared valuation of group work and structured discussions. Riddle and Hickey [5] further argue that reimagining teaching to foreground relational engagement can unlock learners' potential by situating knowledge within communal inquiry. Jensen et al. [3] emphasize that when instructors balance relational rapport with purposeful structure, pausing group activities to clarify concepts, students benefit from both autonomy and guidance. These findings resonate with Bovill's [2] exploration of relational pedagogy in higher education, which advocates for collaborative spaces where students co-construct meaning under facilitated conditions.

In contrast, the Feedback and Support domain, rated "Neutral", highlights a misalignment between the ideal of timely, meaningful feedback and the realities of workload and class size. Students' accounts of delayed and inconsistent feedback mirror Hall et al.'s [9] critique of how neoliberal pressures have deformed educational priorities, constraining instructors' capacity to provide individualized support. Su and Wood [13] contend that sustainable relational feedback systems require institutional commitment to manageable instructor-to-student ratios or alternative feedback models (e.g., peer assessment). Matos [11] reminds us that unmet expectations around feedback can erode students' sense of cultural capital, potentially jeopardizing retention. These insights

point toward integrating scalable feedback strategies, such as structured peer reviews and technology-mediated commentaries that balance relational intent with practical constraints.

The themes of Negotiating Academic Freedom and Teaching Autonomy and Reconciling Diverging Views on Relational Pedagogy underscore the dynamic interplay between instructor agency and pedagogical effectiveness. While students often value relational approaches for fostering emotional engagement, professors sometimes prioritize content coverage and efficiency, especially under time pressures. Bovill [2] acknowledges this tension, arguing that relational pedagogy must be adaptable rather than prescriptive. Riddle and Hickey [5] encourage educators to critically examine when relational strategies best serve learning objectives, whereas Jensen et al. [3] frame such decisions as part of the ongoing development of reflective, relational competence. Hall et al. [9] further remind us that integrating relational methods into decolonised curricula requires careful negotiation of power and purpose. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that relational pedagogy in practice is a negotiated endeavor: one that must balance emotional engagement, academic rigor, and contextual realities.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

The joint display of quantitative and qualitative data illuminates how relational pedagogy operates as both an aspiration and a lived practice within the BSE-English program. The strong support for interactive and collaborative learning confirms the theoretical propositions of Bovill [2] and Schreiber and Yu [7] regarding engagement, while the more ambivalent feedback practices highlight structural challenges identified by Ahoketo and Suoranta [10] and Matos [11]. Moving forward, attention to transparent assessment, scalable feedback mechanisms, and contextually responsive relational strategies, guided by the work of Bell [1], Su and Wood [13], and Aspelin and Jonsson [4], can further strengthen the relational fabric of the program.

CONCLUSION

The findings underscore that interactive, student-centered pedagogies are firmly embedded and valued within the programme, while relational rapport also enjoys broad endorsement. At the same time, inconsistencies in feedback practices, driven by workload pressures and structural constraints, emerge as a critical area for targeted improvement. By mapping qualitative insights onto statistical patterns, the study highlights concrete pathways for enhancing relational pedagogy: implementing transparent assessment rubrics; adopting scalable, technology-mediated feedback systems; and supporting instructors' autonomy to tailor relational strategies to varying classroom contexts.

Implications for practice include investing in professional development focused on efficient feedback models, integrating peer-review and self-assessment mechanisms, and refining curricular guidelines to balance relational and content-driven approaches. Future research might explore longitudinal effects of these interventions on student engagement and learning outcomes, as well as comparative analyses across disciplines and institutional settings. This study contributes both empirical evidence and practical guidance for teacher educators and curriculum designers aiming to foster meaningful teacher-student connections and sustainable support structures in higher education.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the author upon request.

Conflict of interest

None.

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