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Research Title:

Identification and evaluation of innovative teaching approaches which enhance agricultural student's engagement in classroom settings



Background

Student engagement in the classroom is an essential element to effective teaching. Studies from (Freeman et. Al 2014 & Kearney, 2013) have shown that active learning strategies appeal to a wider range of learning styles compared to traditional methods (Lectures)

Not only do active learning strategies appeal to a wider range of student's, they also have been shown to increase grade's by 6% and decrease failure rates by 12% (3,500 Student's). This is a substantial sample of data captured in an area which encompasses Agriculture which makes it a very worthy representation of what active learning strategies could do in Teagasc College's.

Objectives

- Identify teaching methods used in Agricultural colleges which have a positive influence on student learning.
- Identify how to create the appropriate environments in which students will engage in the class.
- Identify how course design could be altered to help teachers improve engagement in the classroom.
- To identify appropriate training for teachers to improve engagement in the classroom.

Aim

The aim of the research is to identify the most effective teaching method's which enhance student engagement in the classroom. According to research from (Freeman et. Al 2014 & Kearney, 2013) achieving this will improve learning , increase grades and decrease failure rates.

Sources of Data

Population: Agricultural Teachers & Student's in Teagasc Colleges.

Sample size: Agricultural Teachers & Student's in Kildalton Agricultural College.

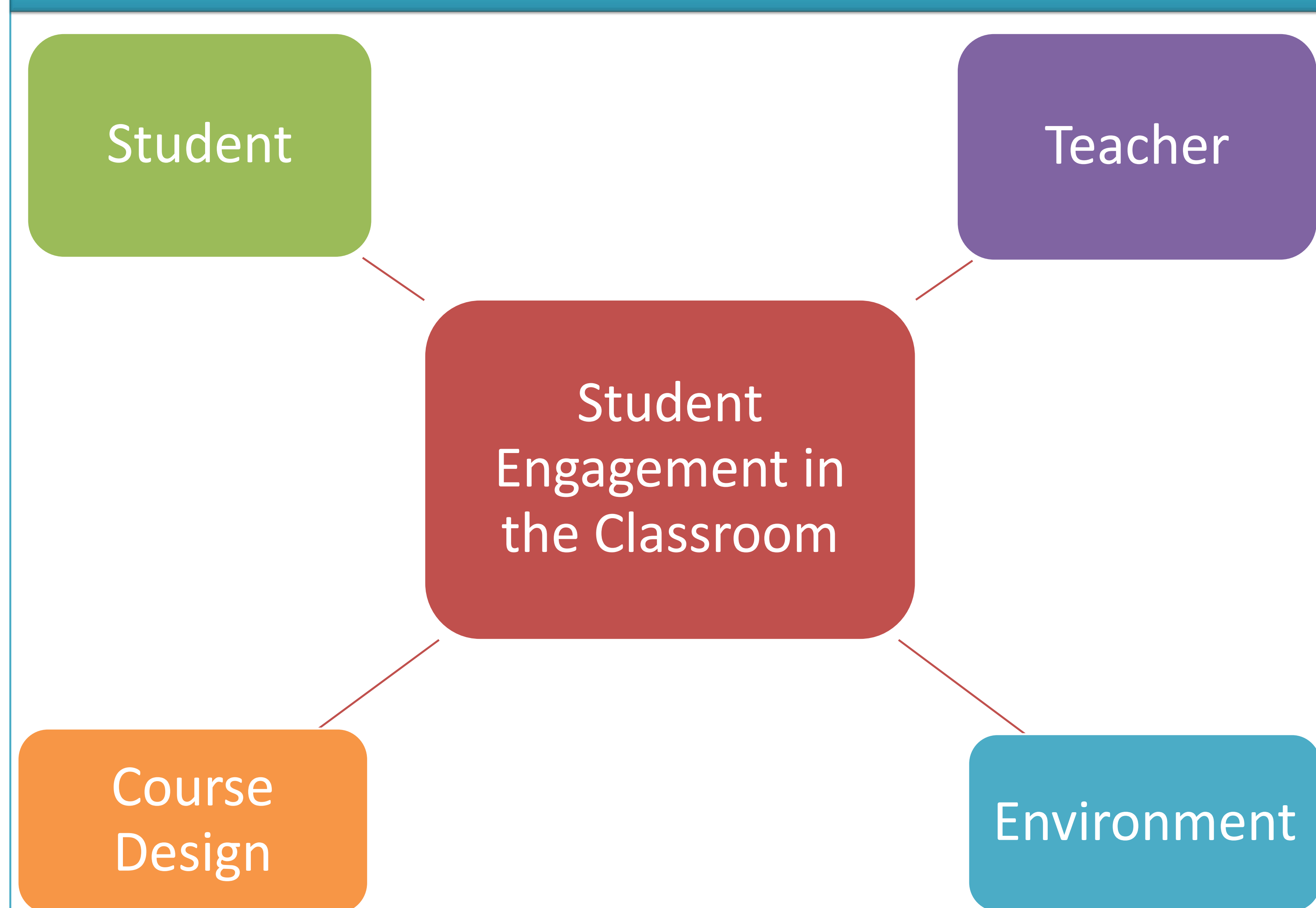
Location: Kildalton Agricultural College, Piltown, Co. Kilkenny

Methods: Qualitative with the use of secondary data

Research Methods

- **Observation:** An observation guide has been developed to observe a list of criteria to compare against several classes. The observation guide takes into account events that happen which are not part of the criteria and could be source of discovery.
- **Interviews:** These will be used to interview teachers, education officers and Department officials in relation to their opinions, behaviours and issues in relation to student engagement in the classroom.
- **Focus Groups:** 2 Focus Groups will be used; One Group of Teachers & One group of student's. These groups will be used as a collaboration exercise to collect the groups experiences, opinions, behaviors and issues encountered from the members of the group.

Conceptual Framework



Student;

- Degree of interest shown
- Response rates to teachers questions
- Participation in discussions and activities
- Are they motivated/Passionate

Teacher;

- Experience/Age/Gender - Demographics
- Training – Education/teacher training
- Relevance of content – Accurate, Up to date?
- Encourages student participation?
- Teaching Methods – Effective?
- Classroom Management Skills
- Response rates to students questions

Environment;

- Environment created by teacher – Positive/Negative
- Resources Available
- Classroom layout – Space, seating etc.

Course Design;

- Does it give the teacher flexibility?
- Does the quantity and detail of content suit the audience which it is being delivered to?
- Does it allow for the integration of a variety of assessment methods?

Conclusions & Next Steps:

To date, from research of the literature, development of research questions, development of research methods and developing an understanding of the difficulties which teachers face in the classroom has led to a decision on the type of research methods to use, piloting of the observation guide, development of an interview guide and identifying and contacting potential Key Informants for interviews. Work to be completed over the coming year includes; Development of Focus Group guide, conducting interviews, conducting observation and continue with literature review.