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Research Paper

Thinking Styles as a Correlate of Rational Decision-Making Among University Students

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ABSTRACT

The present study evaluates the legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles as correlates of rational decision-making among university students in Delhi-NCR. 200 Graduate & Post-Graduate university students in the age range 20 to 25 years from various academic discipline were selected using purposive sampling method. Thinking Styles Inventory–Revised II (TSI-RII; 2007) was used to measure legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles based on the Mental Self-Government framework and rational decision-making style was measured using the Decision-Making Style Scale (1995). In order to assess the relationship between the three sub-domains of thinking styles and rational decision-making Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Stepwise Regression were employed. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles with rational decision-making. The results further indicated that the most significant predictors of rational decision-making were legislative and executive thinking styles.

Keywords: *Legislative Thinking Style, Executive Thinking Style, Judicial Thinking Styles, Rational Decision-Making Style, University Students*

University life is a period in which students are required to make important decisions related to academics, career planning, relationships and personal goals. These decisions often involve uncertainty and long-term consequences, making the ability to think clearly and rationally important. Psychologists have long emphasized that individuals differ not only in intelligence but also in the ways they prefer to think and approach problems, which in turn influences how they make decisions.

Early cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget (1972) highlighted the development of logical and abstract reasoning during late adolescence and early adulthood, which enables more systematic thinking. Bruner (1966), emphasized the role of active thinking and problem solving in learning and decision processes. Building on these ideas, Sternberg (1997) proposed the theory of Mental Self-Government, which explains individual differences in preferred ways of using cognitive abilities, referred to as thinking styles.

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Among the various thinking styles described by Sternberg (1997) in his theory of mental self-government**,** legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles are particularly relevant for understanding rational decision making. Legislative thinkers prefer to plan, create, and generate new ideas; executive thinkers prefer to follow rules, instructions, and structured guidelines; and judicial thinkers enjoy analyzing, evaluating, and judging ideas or procedures. These preferences shape how individuals approach tasks, solve problems, and make choices in everyday life (Zang & Sternberg, 2005).

Decision making is also understood as a style-based process. Scott and Bruce (1995) identified different decision-making styles, of which the rational decision-making style involves careful information gathering, logical evaluation of alternatives and thoughtful consideration before making a decision. Rational decision making is generally associated with better academic adjustment, effective problem solving and reduced impulsive behavior, making it especially important for university students (Byrnes, 2002).

Research has shown that thinking styles are meaningfully related to decision-making styles and they significantly determine the choices that one make in a lifetime. Zhang and Sternberg (2005), reported that legislative and judicial thinking styles were positively associated with systematic and analytical approaches to problem solving, which are core features of rational decision making. Zhang (2010), found that individuals with analytical and evaluative thinking preferences were more likely to engage in rational decision making.

Indian studies also provide important insights into this relationship in the Indian context. Bharadwaj and Sharma (1995), in their work on thinking styles among Indian students, demonstrated that cognitive preferences significantly influence academic and problem-solving behaviors. Singh and Jha (2013), found that Indian university students who showed higher levels of rational thinking reported better decision-making ability and lower decisional conflict. Further, Kumar and Gupta (2019) reported that structured and analytical cognitive styles among Indian college students were positively associated with rational decision-making tendencies, while unstructured styles were linked to avoidant decision making. On the contrary, Murgan and Vinoth (2020) explored the relationship between thinking styles and decision-making ability among students but did not find any significant association, indicating that this relationship may not be as straightforward as often assumed. However, more recent evidence presents a different perspective. In a very recent study, Sitiko (2025) found a significant positive relationship between executive and judicial thinking styles and rational decision-making. These contrasting findings suggest that the link between thinking styles and decision-making may depend on contextual factors such as sample characteristics or research design, highlighting the need for further exploration.

This concern becomes even more important in the context of Indian higher education, where students are increasingly required to make important academic and career-related decisions amid intense competition and uncertainty. Despite these demands, limited research in India has specifically examined how legislative, executive, and judicial thinking styles influence rational decision-making. Most existing studies have instead focused on factors like stress, emotional intelligence, or academic performance. As a result, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the role of thinking styles in shaping rational decision-making among university students in the Indian context.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles as correlates and predictors of rational decision-making among university students**.**

However, it was hypothesized that legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles were positively correlated with rational decision-making among university students. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in educational guidance and student development within Indian context.

METHOD

Aim

To examine whether there is any relation between Thinking Styles (legislative, executive and judicial thinking style) with Rational Decision- Making among university students.

Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between Thinking styles (Legislative, Executive, Judicial) and Rational Decision-Making Styles among University students.
2. To investigate the extent to which Thinking styles (Legislative, Executive, Judicial) will predict variations in Rational Decision-Making Style among University students.

Sample

In the present study, the sample comprised of 200 university students drawn from various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Purposive sampling technique was employed to collect the data from the participants aged 20-25 years, from diverse academic disciplines (engineering, humanities and professional programmes like law, MBA and nursing) ensuring variability in cognitive preferences and decision making tendencies.

Inclusion Criteria

1. The participant must be in between the age limit 20 to 25 years.
2. The participant must be university going students.
3. Both genders, male and female were included.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants other than from Delhi- NCR.
2. Participants who were not university students.

Tools

1. **Thinking style Inventory (TSI-R II)**: The Thinking Style Inventory Revised– II was developed by Sternberg, Wang & Zang (2007) to measure thinking styles of people aged 20-25 years. TSI-R II is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 65 statements, which describes 13 thinking styles in the following five dimensions namely: Forms (monarchic, hierarchical, oligarchic, anarchic), Functions (legislative, executive, judicial), Scope (internal, external), Levels (global, local) and Leaning (liberal, conservative). Scale Items are measured on a 7-point Likert scale, with “1” representing that the statement does not describes themselves at all, and “7” showing that the statements describe themselves very well (Zhang, 2006). Mean score of each subscale (1-7) is calculated and the higher scores on a subscale indicate stronger preference for that specific thinking style.
2. **Decision-Making Style Scale:** Decision-making style scale was developed by Scott & Bruce (1995) to measure individual differences in decision-making styles which individuals exhibit in face of the problems. The scale consists of 25 items and is scored on a five-point Likert Scale from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree"

(5). Decision- Making Style scale consists of five sub-dimensions. These dimensions are listed as rational, intuitive, dependent, spontaneous and avoidant decision-making styles. The score range for each sub-dimension is 5-25. The higher scores on a subscale indicate stronger preference for that specific decision-making style and vice-versa.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were used to analyse the data:

1. **Correlation Analysis:** Correlation analysis was computed to measure the correlation between Thinking Styles (legislative, executive and judicial) and Rational Decision-Making Style among university students.
2. **Stepwise Regression Analysis:** In order to identify the most significant predictor of Rational Decision-Making, stepwise multiple regression analysis wase performed. The predictor variables were the three subtypes of Thinking Styles on the Functions sub-domain according to Mental Self-Government Theory (legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles).

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing Descriptive Statistics and Correlations of Thinking Styles (legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles) with Rational Decision-Making among University students.

Variables	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Legislative Thinking Style	200	5.22	0.93	1	-	-	-
Executive Thinking Style	200	4.98	1.04	.23**	1	-	-
Judicial Thinking Style	200	4.82	0.93	.45**	.38**	1	-
Rational Decision-Making	200	20.35	2.95	.44**	.29**	.32**	1

**$p < .01$

The Descriptive Statistics (mean and standard deviation) and Correlational Analysis among the thinking styles (i.e. legislative, executive and judicial) and rational decision-making are presented in Table 1. As can be seen (Table 1), the mean score for rational decision-making style (M = 20.35, SD = 2.95) indicates that the participants generally demonstrated a moderate to high tendency toward rational decision making. Among the thinking styles, legislative thinking style had the highest mean (M = 5.22, SD = 0.93), followed by executive (M = 4.98, SD = 1.04) and judicial thinking styles (M = 4.82, SD = 0.93).

It is evident from Table 1, that there exists significant positive correlation between the sub-dimensions of thinking styles (legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles) and rational decision-making style among university students. The strongest correlation was observed with legislative thinking style ($r = .44$, $p < .01$ followed by judicial thinking style ($r = .32$, $p < .01$ and executive thinking style ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). Thus, higher levels of the legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles are associated with greater engagement in the rational decision-making. Thus, it can be concluded that students who prefer planning, structured execution, and evaluative thinking are more likely to adopt rational approaches when making decisions. Hence, these findings support the hypothesis.

Table 2: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of the legislative, executive and judicial thinking styles as predictors of rational decision-making

Independent Variable		r	Beta Coefficient	*t*	R^2	R^2 *Change*	F-value (R^2 Change)
Legislative Style	Thinking	.44	.44	6.85**	.19	.19	46.85**
Executive styles	Thinking	.48	.39	6.10**	.23	.04	29.62**

***p<.01*

Table 2, shows that the significant predictors of rational-decision making among university students are legislative thinking style (β= .44, t= 6.85, p< .01) and executive thinking style (β= .39, t= 6.10, p< .01) and both these predictor variables were positively correlated with rational decision-making among university students. These two variables accounted for 23 per cent of the variance in the rational decision-making among university students. Out of these, legislative thinking style explained 19 per cent (F= 46.85, df=198, p< .01) of the variance and the executive thinking style contributed an additional 4 per cent (F= 29.62, df=197, p< .01) of the variance in the rational decision-making scores of the university students. Thus, higher rational decision-making among university students was predicted by higher legislative and executive thinking styles of the university students. Judicial thinking style, although significantly correlated with rational decision making, did not contribute unique variance beyond legislative and executive thinking styles and was therefore not retained in the final regression model.

Overall, the stepwise regression analysis demonstrates that legislative thinking is the strongest predictor of rational decision-making**,** followed by executive thinking and highlighting the combined importance of planning and structured execution in rational decision processes among university students.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most noteworthy findings of the present study was that rational decision-making was significantly predicted by university students' preference for legislative and executive thinking styles. The way that young people approach making decisions is significantly correlated with their thinking styles. The three sub-domains of thinking styles (legislative, executive and judicial) were positively correlated with rational decision-making, indicating that individuals who prefer legislative (structured, evaluative or flexible) thinking are more likely to engage in rational decision making. Among these, legislative thinking style emerged as the most influential, followed by executive thinking. This highlights that individuals who prefer generating ideas and working independently tend to process information more deeply and consider alternatives more carefully. Similar patterns have been observed in recent research (Bavolar, 2023), where rational and analytical thinking styles were found to be correlated with better performance, adaptable behavior, and goal-oriented decision-making.

The results also align with contemporary cognitive perspectives suggesting that rational decision-making relies on deliberate and analytical processing rather than impulsive responses. Recent studies (Işıkgöz, 2025) indicate that rational decision-making is linked with positive outcomes such as prosocial behavior, emotional stability, and better adjustment

among adolescents. In this context, legislative and executive thinking styles appear to support such analytical processing, thereby strengthening rational outcomes. Although judicial thinking style was significantly correlated with rational decision-making, its lack of predictive power suggests that evaluative thinking may function alongside generative processes rather than independently. Pathak, Srivastava, and Dewangan (2023) on decision-making styles additionally highlighted this overlap, wherein various cognitive preferences interact rather than function independently.

From a practical perspective, these findings highlight that rational decision-making is not just a matter of ability but also of cognitive preference. Encouraging students to think independently, question assumptions, and approach problems creatively may strengthen legislative thinking, while structured learning environments can support executive thinking.

At the same time, certain limitations need to be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias. The sample was restricted to youth, which may affect generalizability across different populations. Additionally, the moderate level of explained variance indicates that other factors like personality traits or emotional processes may also contribute to rational decision-making, as suggested in recent research (Aydemir Dev & Bayram Arli, 2025) linking decision styles with broader psychological variables.

Future research may benefit from longitudinal and experimental designs to better understand how thinking styles influence decision-making over time. Including variables such as emotional intelligence, personality, and real-life decision contexts may provide a more comprehensive picture. Exploring these relationships across diverse populations and settings would also enhance the applicability of findings.

The study concludes that thinking styles (legislative and executive styles) play a significant role in shaping rational decision-making among university students. It reinforces the idea that how individuals choose to think is just as important as how well they think, and that fostering adaptive thinking patterns may contribute to more rational, balanced, and effective decision-making in everyday life.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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