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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Inculcating Civilizational Ethics through Education: Efficacy of Educating for Gross National Happiness

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ABSTRACT

Background/purpose – In the trajectory of the Bhutanese education system, imparting traditional and cultural values to children has always been at the core. With the growth and transition of the education system from monastic to modern, various ways have been explored and applied to inculcate values among Bhutanese children. In 2010, a concept called "Educating for Gross National Happiness" was introduced into the Bhutanese education system. At that point it was believed that Educating for Gross National Happiness was the answer to addressing falling values, shifts in attitudes, and beliefs among our children brought about by the forces of globalization. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of Educating for Gross National Happiness in instilling proper human and cultural values among our children. In total, 108 teachers working in schools across the country participated through responding to a survey questionnaire. Findings demonstrate that while there are indications of some positive impacts of the Educating for Gross National Happiness program, certain factors need to be taken into consideration to bring about a more profound impact in the overall development of Bhutanese children as initially envisioned. n this study, I examined the efficacy of Educating for Gross National Happiness in terms of inculcating moral values among children in Bhutanese schools.

Materials/methods – I applied both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in this research. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 108 teachers located across Bhutan, and qualitative data were collected through interviews, observation, and lesson plan analysis. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data was conducted in order to validate the findings.

Results – The findings revealed that while there are some indications of success from the Educating for Gross National Happiness program, it has yet to deliver any profound impact in the overall development of Bhutanese children as initially envisioned.

Conclusion – The Educating for Gross National Happiness program could become much more effective if certain factors such as providing adequate training to teachers on the revised curriculum, and introducing standardized testing of values-based education as a separate subject area.

Keywords – GNH, Education, Values, Morals, tha-dham-tsig, ley gju-drey

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Bhutanese education system has its roots in a monastic form of education that is generally believed to date back to the 8th century with the arrival of the Buddhist saint Guru Padma Sambhava[1]. Teaching and learning took place between a master and their disciples through the informal and unstructured teaching of Buddhist texts. It was only in 1622 that formal monastic education began with the establishment of the first Monk Body in Chari monastery, Thimphu, by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel[2]. With time, this formal monastic education grew and spread to the rest of the country. It was then customary for every family to send at least one male child to a nearby monastery to become a monk. These monks were taught the art of liturgy and rituals, and lived and studied under strict monastic disciplines, following the path of Buddhahood. They were thus considered the epitome of virtues such as compassion, discipline, moral and cultural values, and character.

First king Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck sowed the seeds of a modern education system in Bhutan by establishing the first western model school in 1914 in Haa. The main subjects taught were Hindi, English, and Arithmetic, along with Dzongkha[3]. By 1960, the number of modern schools in Bhutan increased to 11 with some 400 students in total (Education Department, 2001, as cited in Dorji, 2005).

In 1962, His Majesty the late third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck wisely chose English as the medium of instruction for all Bhutanese schools as it was considered the lingua franca of the world, and thereby seen as necessary for communication in Bhutan's development. On this, Dorji (2005) asserted that;

> …it is mainly because of this farsighted vision of our late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck that today Bhutanese students can adapt to the world that uses English as a medium of communication and learning without much difficulty. It has enabled us to find our way into the global society to learn, to trade and to share our beliefs and practices.

During this transformative period of the Bhutanese education system from monastic to modern, traditional values were still at the core of education as much as they were before. Former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bhutan, Sonam Tobgay (2019), listed the codes of conduct framed by his father in Bumthang during the 1930s:

1. Be always tidy and clean; work patiently and methodically.
2. Put your books on the desk properly.
3. Do not handle maps or any property of the school roughly.
4. Never spit upon the walls or on the floor.
5. Walk softly and speak gently.
6. Go to your class upon the ringing of the school bell.
7. Always sit upright.
8. Do not cause damage to the school furniture, nor write upon them or on walls of the school.
9. Always keep to your left.
10. Be good to yourself and also try to make others feel good.

[1] *Eighth-century Buddhist saint believed to have introduced Buddhism in Bhutan.*
[2] *Founder of the Bhutanese nation state.*
[3] *National language and the lingua franca of Bhutan.*

11. Be punctual and polite.
12. Try to take some refreshments during the midday interval.
13. Never run to school after meals.
14. Treat your juniors with love and your seniors with respect.
15. Cultivate good manners.
16. Do some physical exercise every day.
17. Obey your parents and superiors, and make yourself be loved by all.

Similarly, in Bhutan the brief 1976 paper on education, which formed perhaps the first curriculum policy of the country, had the following goals:

1. To promote learning by understanding and to emphasize the relevance and practical use of knowledge learned.
2. To develop in students a sense of love, respect, and loyalty to the country and the system of governance, and the mutual relationship prevailing between the monarch and the people.
3. To develop in students a sense of appreciation and a zest for practicing the values, traditions, and moral standards of Bhutan.
4. To enable students to participate in economic development programs with a greater sense of responsibility and dedication (Dorji, 2005).

While values were still given importance, since the whole school curriculum itself was fully borrowed from outside Bhutan, and thereby consisted of western concepts, it had a heavy influence on learners and thus the threat to traditional Bhutanese values remained real.

However, with the Bhutanization of the curriculum in 1985 that incorporated many traditional Bhutanese values, traditions, and subject matter, so that teaching and learning were in better accordance with national needs and aspirations (Education Division, 1989, as cited in Gyamtso et al., 2017), the idea of "wholesome education" or "wholesome personal development of an individual" was rigorously implemented (Ngedup, 2006, as cited in Sherab, 2013). It should be noted that at this point there was no separate values education subject being taught. Values were supposed to be imparted implicitly through the telling of stories and folktales from within the curriculum. Values were taught through being integrated within traditional subjects (Thinley, 2016). This was done perhaps, as Drukpa (2021) argued, so that "moral lessons or values taught through stories were more appealing and palatable to young children than the adoption of direct indoctrination".

More systematic series of values education curricula and guidelines have been published and initiated since 1996: Purpose of School Education, CAPSD 1996; Teaching Learning To Be, CAPSD, 1999; and, Suggested Values Education lessons for PP-VIII and IX-XII CAPSD, 2001 (Royal Education Council, 2021). In 1999, the Education Department of Bhutan formally introduced "values education" as a separate subject area to be taught in schools once a week from the pre-primary level through to Grade 12 (Wangyel, 2001). This was in response to social issues such as "weakening traditional family ties and the community-based social support system, and youth-related problems such as drugs, petty crimes, and teenage pregnancy" (Department of Education Bhutan, n.d., as cited in Sherab, 2013). More importantly, the celebrated "Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness" document stressed that;

> Education in Bhutan must inculcate an awareness of the nation's unique cultural heritage, drawing upon sources of inspiration that date from the time of the Zhabdrung as well as universal values that develop the capacity of our young people to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, and to lead lives that are guided by moral and ethical choices. (Planning Commission, 1999)

This became the driving force for the inclusion of formal values education classes. For the first time values education was taken into the classroom and was taught explicitly as a separate subject for 40-45 minutes every week, with the aim being to impart moral, traditional, and cultural values to Bhutanese children.

Hence, in the journey of the Bhutanese education system, values have always been at the core, and concerted efforts made to teach values to children in schools since traditional values, as Wangyel (2001) argued, were being "gradually undermined, as people become more self-centered, and materialistic".

Starting in 2010, with the introduction of the "Educating for Gross National Happiness" program, formal classes in values education were removed. This change endeavored to deliver a curriculum that had Gross National Happiness (GNH) values inbuilt within any activity that children took part in through what was termed the "GNH-infused curriculum."

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term Gross National Happiness (GNH) was first conceived by His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in 1972. His Majesty always maintained that GNH was more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Bhutanese society. Thus, in the measurement of Bhutan's development, the happiness of its citizens takes precedence over economic growth (e.g., GDP). Although people may define GNH in various ways, it simply refers to Bhutan's holistic guiding development policy of balancing the country's material growth with its people's well-being based on four main pillars; *Sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, Environmental conservation, Preservation and promotion of culture, and Good governance.*

While GNH was initially used as an economic model in Bhutan, concerns about the decline of moral and cultural values among Bhutanese children brought about by the encroachment of western and popular cultures necessitated formally bringing GNH values and principles into the Bhutanese education system. The current paper, therefore, presents a discussion and analysis of the efficacies of the principles of GNH that have been incorporated into the Bhutanese education system through the Educating for Gross National Happiness program in order to give a more meaningful and values-based education to the children of Bhutan. On this, Ura (2009) stated that;

> It is contended that the values taught in the US [united States] in the last 50 years emphasized individual rights, de-emphasized social responsibility and produced psychological individualism. It might be a natural outcome of the segregation of wisdom learning and secular learning in schools, which went hand in hand with the separation of church and politics. We run the risk of falling into the same trap if we don't change our [Bhutanese] education models.

Similarly, Zangmo (2014) remarked that;

> Education can be dangerous if we are not careful about excluding pedagogy, enhancing curriculum and including vocational training, and teaching other societal

> values. Incorporating cultural and moral values to help literate people become meaningful contributors to the nation is crucial for development.

Further, Wangyel (2001) maintained that due to the process of economic modernization, Bhutanese society was witnessing a shift in values, attitudes, and expectations. External influences arising from the values accompanying economic development, the media, and modern systems of education, among others, challenged the continuance of traditional Bhutanese values.

Therefore, some restructuring of the Bhutanese school curriculum was felt to be seriously needed in order to impart more humanistic and spiritual values instead of focusing purely on academic development alone. Thus, in December 2009, Bhutan hosted an international education conference on the theme of "Educating for Gross National Happiness." The week-long dialogue featured 25 of the world's top educators in the fields of holistic education, eco-literacy and sustainability education, contemplative education, indigenous knowledge, and critical and analytical thinking; with 50 international observers from 16 countries; and Bhutan's own leading educators (Thinley, 2016). There was a general agreement that the conference would culminate in an educational curriculum which was more holistic in nature. According to the website of the Bhutanese Ministry of Education, the main outcome of the conference was the agreement that Bhutan's educational system

> …will effectively cultivate GNH principles and values, including deep critical and creative thinking, ecological literacy, practice of the country's profound, ancient wisdom and culture, contemplative learning, a holistic understanding of the world, genuine care for nature and for others, competency to deal effectively with the modern world, preparation for right livelihood, and informed civic engagement. (Riley, 2011)

While the term "Educating for GNH" may seem complex, in essence it may be said to be;

> …no more than teaching the students to be mindful of their actions in body, speech and mind, such that their actions cause no harm to others and nature; but rather benefit them, and in turn bring greater peace, harmony and happiness among others around them, including themselves. (Ura, 2009)

However, it should be mentioned here that Educating for Gross National Happiness was neither an overhaul of the total school curriculum nor addition of a new subject on GNH values education. It was simply inclusion of GNH values within the existing curriculum; both academic and co-curricular. Jigme Yezer Thinley, the then Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan, declared in his keynote address of the international education conference that;

> Infusing GNH into the education system is not adding a new subject but enriching, and improving the process of education. It has to do with creating a content and approach that infuse a GNH consciousness into everything that is learned and taught. This will make the curriculum and learning more enjoyable, more pleasurable, and more relevant. (as cited by Hayward & Colman, 2010)

The report of this international conference stated that the GNH education workshop was certainly a first step in what could be a far-reaching national educational transformation with impacts extending well beyond Bhutan's borders. From this the Bhutanese Ministry of Education drew up an immediate plan.

Committed to immediately introducing the GNH values into the Bhutanese education system, the Ministry of Education drew up an ambitious plan that that would see all school

principals provided with the requisite professional development and training on a GNH-inspired curriculum within 12 months of the 2009 international conference. Furthermore, within 3 years, all of Bhutan's school teachers would receive effective similar professional training. It was a national project which, for the first time, included all teachers in Bhutan. The end result was that by the beginning of the 2012 academic year, every teacher in Bhutan would be trained to impart GNH-infused education to the children of Bhutan. The GNH-infused curriculum included emphasis on deep critical and creative thinking, ecological literacy, practice of Bhutan's ancient wisdom and culture, contemplative learning, a holistic understanding of the world, genuine care for nature and for others, competency to deal effectively with the modern world, preparation for right livelihood, and informed civic engagement (Hayward & Colman, 2010).

It was indeed considered to be a genuinely holistic approach to education that would address the overall development of a child.

Affirming the importance of instilling GNH values in children, the Bhutanese Ministry of Education, as the department responsible for national school education, and the Royal University of Bhutan, which is mandated to provide quality higher education, set out their visions as "An educated and enlightened society of Gross National happiness built and sustained on the unique Bhutanese values of *tha-dham-tsig*[4] and *ley gju-drey*[5]," and "An internationally recognized university steeped in GNH values," respectively. Similarly, all Bhutanese schools and colleges today, have their visions and missions firmly aligned with the national vision of GNH, and all their daily activities are designed to translate the philosophy of GNH into everyday practices.

Drukpa (2016) noted that, "to bring GNH into the school curriculum, schools have incorporated GNH values and principles into their school policies through various academic and co-curricular activities. It is mandatory for teachers to infuse GNH values in their daily teaching activities".

Educating for Gross National Happiness was thus introduced into the Bhutanese education system through embedding GNH values into the school curriculum. The main goal of the Bhutanese government was to instill human values in Bhutanese children in order to make them better citizens and human beings. The Prime Minister of Bhutan stated that the GNH-infused curriculum should produce

> Graduates who are genuine human beings, realizing their full and true potential, caring for others, including other species, ecologically literate, contemplative as well as analytical in their understanding of the world, free of greed and without excessive desires; knowing, understanding, and appreciating completely that they are not separate from the natural world and from others; in sum, manifesting their humanity fully (as cited by Hayward & Colman, 2010).

Educating for GNH is used, as the Bhutanese Ministry of Education envisaged it, as a program to teach the values and principles of GNH through five pathways of meditation and mind training, infusing GNH values in the curriculum, holistic assessment of students, broader learning environment, and media literacy and critical thinking skills (Ministry of Education 2014b, as cited in Thinley, 2016).

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[4] *Core value that emphasizes the importance of honesty, fidelity, moral integrity, and moral rectitude in Bhutanese life.*

[5] *Law of cause and effect; a core Bhutanese value.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Methodology

To collect quantitative data, predetermined structured questionnaires were sent to teachers working in different schools located around Bhutan. A total of 108 teachers (54 female, 54 male) responded to the questionnaire. For data triangulation, qualitative data such as the evaluation of teachers' lesson plans and ethnographic interviews with teachers and students were conducted, in addition to casual observation of school-based activities. Relevant literature on educating for GNH were used as secondary sources in the research.

3.2 Research Aims and Questions

The overarching aim of the current research was to evaluate the efficacies of Educating for Gross National Happiness in instilling core traditional Bhutanese values among school-aged children. To address this aim, answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. How are GNH values embedded in the Bhutanese school curriculum?
2. What are the other aspects of GNH, apart from values taught in classrooms through normal lessons being practiced in Bhutanese schools?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions of values among Bhutanese children today?
4. Has embedding GNH values into the Bhutanese school curriculum brought about desirable outcomes?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For quantitative data collection, predetermined questionnaires were distributed to teachers working in schools located across Bhutan. In total, 108 teachers (54 male and 54 female) responded to the questionnaire. Table 1 presents a demographic summary of the respondents, based on their teaching experience, school level, school location, grades, and the subjects taught.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents (*N* = 108). *Pre-Primary

Variables	*Category*	*n*	*%*
Gender	Male	54	50.0
	Female	54	50.0
Teaching experience	0-5 years	28	25.9
	6-10 years	37	34.3
	11-20 years	38	35.2
	21 years or more	5	4.6
School level	Higher secondary	65	60.2
	Middle secondary	16	14.8
	Lower secondary	13	12.0
	Primary	14	13.0
School location	Urban	23	21.3
	Semi-urban	67	62.0
	Rural	18	16.7
Teaching grades	PP*-6	29	26.9
	7-10	50	46.2
	11-12	29	26.9

Variables	*Category*	*n*	*%*
Subjects taught	English/History/Geography/Social	61	56.5
	Studies	28	25.9
	Math/Science/IT	10	9.3
	Dzongkha	9	8.3
	Economics/Commerce		

Frequency of the use of GNH values

Incorporating values in classroom teaching is considered the most effective way to impart values to children. As such, teachers in Bhutan are encouraged to use various values as learning outcomes in their daily lesson plans. Table 2 presents the frequency of the use of GNH values as learning outcomes in the lesson plans based on four variables: respondents' gender, teaching experience, and the grades and subjects they taught.

Table 2. Frequency of using GNH values as learning outcomes

		Always	*Often*	*Rarely*	*Total*
Gender	Male	19 (35.1%)	29 (53.7%)	6	54
	Female	18 (33.3%)	30 (55.5%)	(11.1%)	54
	Total	37	59	6	108
				(11.1%)	
				12	
Teaching experience					
	0-5 years	11 (39.2%)	14 (50%)	3	28
	6-10 years	13 (35.1%)	20 (54.1%)	(10.7%)	37
	11-20 years	13 (34.2%)	22 (57.9%)	4	38
	21 years or more	0	3 (60.0%)	(10.8%)	5
	Total	37	59	3 (7.9%)	108
				2	
				(40.0%)	
				12	
Teaching grade	PP-6	10 (34.5%)	14 (48.3%)	5	29
	7-10	17 (34.0%)	30 (60.0%)	(17.2%)	50
	11-12	10 (34.5%)	15 (51.8%)	3 (6.0%)	29
	Total	37	59	4	108
				(13.8%)	
				12	
Subjects	English/History/Geography/Social	19 (31.1%)	37 (60.7%)	5 (8.2%)	61
	Studies	10 (35.8%)	12 (42.9%)	6	28
	Mathematics/Science/IT	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	(21.4%)	10
	Dzongkha	4 (44.4%)	4 (44.4%)	0	9
	Economics/Commerce	37	59	1	108
	Total			(11.1%)	
				12	

Overall, 37 (34.3%) of the respondents always used GNH values as learning outcomes in their lesson plans, while 59 (54.6%) used it often, and 12 (11.1%) used it rarely. While no

significant differences were found in terms of the respondents' gender, teaching experience, or the grades they taught for the frequency of using GNH values as learning outcomes, in terms of the subjects taught, those teaching arts subjects (English, History, Geography, Social Studies) and Dzongkha showed a slightly higher rate with 60.7% and 60%, respectively, having often used GNH values as learning outcomes in their lessons.

Teachers with experience of 21 years or more responded the most (40%) that they rarely incorporated GNH values in their classroom teaching, compared to 10.7% for teachers with 0-5 years' experience, 10.8% for 6-10 years, and 7.9% for teachers with 11-20 years' experience. This finding may be attributed to the sample size, as the participants who had taught for 21 years or more represented only 4.6% of the sample.

Overall, the respondents mostly indicated that they often used GNH values as learning outcomes; whereas a lesser number always used GNH values in their lessons, but very few said that they rarely used GNH values as learning outcomes. This finding is notable in that the teachers made some efforts to incorporate GNH values into their daily lessons to some extent. However, it may be stated that to incorporate teaching values in every single class would be neither easy nor desirable. Sherab (2013) argued that;

> It is important to understand that EGNH does not require forceful indoctrination of GNH values and principles in all the topics and in all the subjects. EGNH is about the infusion of GNH values and principles in direct and subtle ways as found fitting with the lesson topic and in hidden curriculum practices rather than teaching them in isolation.

For the qualitative analysis of how GNH values were being incorporated within classroom lessons, English, Dzongkha, mathematics, and social studies lesson plans were analyzed. Some of the common values taught in these lessons were respect, sharing, love and compassion, the importance of collaboration, and loyalty and dedication to one's country. For instance, in English, the lesson on *Blessed Rainy Day*[6] in class two taught the children the value and importance of traditional festivals and community vitality. Similarly, values such as love and sharing were taught through subtraction in mathematics. In teaching subtraction to children, the teacher did so by saying something like, "Dorji has five apples. He gives one each to four of his friends. How many apples does Dorji have now?" This approach helped to ensure that the students were implicitly taught about giving and sharing, while also learning about subtraction in mathematics.

Difficulty incorporating GNH values

When Educating for GNH was initially rolled out, teachers had reservations on how they would be able to use GNH values in different subjects and grades. Thus, a question on the level of difficulty of incorporating GNH values as learning outcomes was asked in order to find out how difficult it was for teachers to incorporate GNH values in their classroom teaching based on teaching grades and subjects (see Table 3).

[6] *Traditional Bhutanese festival in late September where all water bodies are believed to be blessed and sanctified. It also marks the end of the Monsoon season.*

Table 3. Difficulty level of incorporating GNH values in different grades and subjects

		Easy	*Moderate*	*Difficult*	*Total*
Teaching grades	PP-6	7 (24.1%)	22 (75.9%)	0	29
	7-10	11 (22.0%)	34 (68.0%)	5 (10.0%)	50
	11-12	9 (31.0%)	16 (55.2%)	4 (13.8%)	29
	Total	27 (25.0%)	72 (66.7%)	9 (8.3%)	108
Subjects	English/History/Geography/Social	14 (23.0%)	41 (67.2%)	6 (9.9%)	61
	Studies	4 (14.3%)	22 (78.6%)	2 (7.1%)	28
	Mathematics/Science/IT	4 (40.0%)	6 (60.0%)	0	10
	Dzongkha	5 (55.6%	3 (33.3%)	1 (11.1%)	9
	Economics/Commerce				
	Total	27 (25.0%)	7	9 (8.3%)	108
			2 (66.7%)		

While no significant difference was observed in the difficulty level of using GNH values as learning outcomes in different grades and subjects, it is worth noting that none of the participant teachers who taught lower grades (PP-6) found using GNH values in their lessons to be difficult. It could be concluded, therefore, that it is easier to teach values to younger children than those in higher grades.

Similarly, none of the Dzongkha teachers responded as having faced difficulties in using GNH values as learning outcomes. This may be attributed to as Wangyel (2001) stated;

> Unlike modern secular subjects, the texts taught in the Dzongkha classes have a very strong values education content although it is taught as a language class. The Dzongkha texts in the form of biographies, ethical treatises and poetry have their origins in Buddhism and are based heavily on Buddhist ethical principles.

Concerns about students' behaviors

In order to find out whether the students' behaviors were a matter of concern mostly in higher-level schools and schools located in urban areas, as is the common perception, and if Educating for GNH had any effect on controlling them, a question on whether students' behaviors were a matter of concern was included in the questionnaire (see Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' concerns about students' behaviors based on school level and location

		Yes	*Maybe*	*No*	*Total*
School level	HSS	59 (90.8%)	6 (9.2%)	0	65
	MSS	14 (87.5%)	2 (12.5%)	0	16
	LSS	13 (100%)	0	0	13
	Primary	12 (85.7%)	2 (14.3%)	0	14
	Total	98 (90.7%)	10 (9.3%)	0	108
School location	Urban	23 (100%)	0	0	23
	Semi-urban	57 (85.1%)	10 (14.9%)	0	67
	Rural	18 (100%)	0	0	18
	Total	98 (90.7%)	10 (9.3%)	0	108

The data shows that majority of respondents from all four school levels (90.8% from higher secondary schools, 87.5% from middle secondary schools, 100% from lower secondary schools, and 85.7% from primary schools) responded that students' behaviors today were a concern. Similarly, the majority of respondents from all school location types (urban, 100%; semi-urban, 85.1%; rural, 100%) responded that students' behaviors were a current-day concern. Therefore, it may be said that the concerns about students' behaviors were found to be similar, irrespective of the school level or location type included in the current study. This finding may be due to the steady flow of ideas and information from the urban centers to the rural hinterlands, which are often seen as unidirectional since the centers are perceived as modern, advanced, and hence more desirable (Wangyel, 2001). This could also be a result of the unprecedented development happening in modern-day Bhutan, where even the perceived remote places are now significantly connected with basic modern amenities and where most children have access to mobile Internet and are thus exposed to a wide array of information and knowledge.

Ley gju-drey and *Tha-dham-tsig* among children today

Ley gju-drey and *Tha-dham-tsig* are at the core of Bhutanese cultural and traditional values. Phuntsho (2004) explaining these concepts as follows;

> In Bhutan, the law of karma often referred to as *ley gju-drey* or just *ley*, certainly features as a very popular religious concept. People view it as an infallible law of virtuous actions leading to happiness and happy rebirth and non-virtuous actions leading to suffering and unhappy rebirth. To be a moral man is to abide by *ley gju-drey* through engaging in virtuous actions and eschewing non-virtuous actions.
>
> And, *tha-dham-tsig*, depending on the context, covers a wide range of referents including honesty, fidelity, moral integrity, moral rectitude, moral coherence, reciprocal affection, gratitude, filial piety, etc. To say a shopkeeper did not have tha dhamtsi when she overcharged or manipulated the scales meant the shopkeeper lacked honesty. A spouse with no tha dhamtsi generally referred to a lack of marital fidelity while tha dhamtsi in connection with teacher-student and master-servant relations usually referred to kindness, respect, gratitude and loyalty. Among family and friends, it denotes affection, a feeling of kinship and sense of obligation. A person generally described as not possessing tha dhamtsi is someone lacking personal integrity and moral rectitude, and an act lacking tha dhamtsi is one which is unethical.

Hence, since *ley gju-drey* and *tha-dham-tsig* summarize the whole essence of the traditional Bhutanese values, the survey participants in the current study were asked to share their opinions on the possession of *ley gju-drey* and *tha-dham-tsig* among today's Bhutanese children. The results found were not very encouraging, as the majority (n = 95, 88%) indicated that today's students lacked these traditional cultural values, with opinions revealed as similar between males (88.9%) and females (87.0%), as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Respondents' opinions on *tha-dham-tsig* and *ley gju-drey* among today's students

		Children have lesser values today compared to the past	*Children have similar values today compared to the past*	*No comment*	*Children have greater values today compared to the past*	*Total*
Gender	Male	48 (88.9%)	1 (1.9%)	5 (9.3%)	0	54
	Female	47 (87.0%)	5 (9.3%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.9%)	54
	Total	95 (88.0%)	6 (5.6%)	6 (5.6%)	1 (0.9%)	108

The finding that student behavior at all school levels have become a concern, and that students lacked basic traditional cultural values such as *ley gju-drey* and *tha-dham-tsig* may cast doubt on the success of educating for GNH in bringing about the overall development of Bhutan's children. This finding is similar to that reported by Sherab (2013);

> Principal and teacher perceptions of GNH Education's impact on students were not very encouraging. More specifically, principals and teachers in the sample did not show strong perceptions that in the process of implementing GNH Education, their students have been able to: i) change some of their own beliefs and assumptions about values; ii) question some of their own beliefs and assumptions about values; iii) change some of their own actions and practices; and, iv) reduce disciplinary problems.

However, as presented in Tables 6 and 7, many teachers still affirm that it is important to continue imparting GNH values through classroom lessons as they feel in doing so still makes considerable differences in bringing about positive changes among the student population.

Some participant teachers, during their informal interviews, hypothesized that without GNH values being integrated into the school curriculum, the behavioral problems and values among today's schoolchildren could have been much worse. However, they agreed that it could be done better and made more effective if clearer policy guidelines and regular training were also provided. More importantly, they agreed that teachers should have the will to go beyond the prescribed texts and make concerted efforts to teach values through whatever they do and say, as "research has consistently found that teachers play a big role in motivating children" (Dorji, 2020). Sherab (2013) agreed, stating that;

> …role modeling by teachers, in this case, is of paramount importance. So it is important that teachers practice what they teach. If teachers lack intellectual depth, pedagogical skills and are not good role models, values education might lead to surface learning or the wrong values.

Table 6. Respondents' opinions on the importance of embedding GNH values in classroom lessons

		Important	*Maybe Important*	*Not Important*	*Total*
Gender	Male	48 (88.9%)	6 (11.1%)	0	54
	Female	52 (96.3%)	0	2 (3.7%)	54
	Total	100 (92.6%)	6 (5.6%)	2 (1.8%)	108

Table 7. Respondents' opinions on the impact of using GNH values in classroom lessons

		It makes a lot of difference in the development in their moral values	*I am not sure if they have any effect*	*It makes no difference*	*Total*
Gender	Male	39 (72.2%)	12 (22.2%)	3 (5.6%)	54
	Female	44 (81.5%)	10 (18.6%)	0	54
	Total	83 (76.9%)	22 (20.4%)	3 (2.8%)	108

Other GNH practices in the schools

To better understand other elements of GNH practices in schools besides GHN-values embedded classroom teaching, the participants were each asked to answer an open-ended question to list the GNH practices that their schools offered. Multiple responses were received which are listed under the following four common themes:

- Values Orientation Week (VOW)
- Meditation (mind training)
- Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage
- Health and Environment

Values Orientation Week (VOW)

According to the Bhutanese Ministry of Education (2017);

> From the 2017 academic year, all schools shall observe values orientation week at the start of the academic session every year. The main objective of the week is to strengthen values and life skills education in schools, and inculcate the essence of Bhutanese etiquette.

All schools in the country, therefore, spend the first week of every academic year orienting the students on various values. The values orientation week is expected to, 1) Achieve the national goal of producing nationally rooted and globally competent graduates, 2) Produce better decision-makers using life skills education, 3) Promote a values-based lifestyle, and 4) Enhance and inculcate love for our culture and national identity in our youth (Bhutan Ministry of Education, 2017). To achieve these goals, all schools today enthusiastically carry out the orientation program.

Meditation/Mind training

Mind training, or meditation as it was initially called, is an important part of the whole educating for GNH process. Mindfulness practice is a core value of the Psychological Wellbeing Domain of GNH, which is practiced through guided meditation in morning assemblies, classrooms, and at other school-based gatherings (Tshering, 2021).

When meditation was first introduced in schools in 2010, it was received with good humor, but also some ridicule. While many students found it funny, some parents commented that their children were now all going to become Buddhist monks. Tshering (2021) maintained that "the religious connotation of meditation in Bhutanese culture as practice for enlightenment left participants with difficulty accepting it as secular, speculating the purpose and even doubting the ethics of practice". The introduction of meditation, however, was purely a secular move intended to improve the psychological wellbeing of the children, enhance their attention in the classroom, improve their behavior, and to help them develop a deeper sense of self-awareness. It had no association with Buddhism, as was commonly perceived. Thinley (2016) remarked that; "with scientific findings showing improvements in academic performance, mental health and psychological wellbeing as well as reducing stress and anxiety among students, meditation is becoming generally accepted as a valuable practice beyond any religion". Further, while contemplative practice is often associated with religious life, it is a secular, practical concept that is useful for managing stress, and improving attention and self-regulation (Jennings et al., 2013; Langer, 2014; Slang, 2007; Tang, 2007, all as cited in Buchanan, 2017).

Through informal conversations with both students and teachers of nearby schools, it was found that mind training was practiced diligently every morning in the assembly and before every class for about 1-2 minutes. While no in-depth conversation on the effectiveness of this practice was conducted, both teachers and students agreed that it did have positive impacts in calming their students' minds and in their achieving greater levels of concentration. In validating these claims, Tshering (2021) concluded in his study that;

> …the themes from qualitative findings demonstrated that mindfulness practice reduced work stress and has improved students' way of thinking. The students supplemented that although the practice was minimal and confined to classrooms, mindfulness meditation enhanced concentration and awareness of one's thought processes and actions.

There was, however, some reluctance on the part of some teachers with regards to their capabilities to truly demonstrate the essence of mind training when they hardly practiced it themselves. Both Ura (2009) and Thinley (2016) contended that mindfulness practice would play the most transformative of roles if taught by someone who both seriously studied and practiced meditation themselves. There is, therefore, a need to train the teachers first, if our schools are to reap the full benefits of mind training.

Preservation and promotion of cultural heritage

With neither military might nor economic power, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage has always been of utmost importance in setting Bhutan apart from other nations and exerting its sovereignty. Phuntsho (2020) remarked that "culture is seen as the binding force, which unites the Bhutanese and, as one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness, it is

regarded as Bhutan's shield against the negative and disrupting influences of modernization and globalization". Further, the Planning Commission (1999) stated that;

> Today, it is the culture and tradition bequeathed to us by our ancestors that can protect us from some of the negative and indiscriminate forces of modernization and enable us to retain our identity and dignity in a world in which 'culture' is increasingly defined as a global commodity.

The document further mentioned the need to instill in our youth a deep sense of custodianship of our country's distinct culture and values.

Qualitative data collected through the respondents' listing of GNH practices in their schools revealed that they are engaged in different activities intended to uphold and promote Bhutan's unique cultural heritage. Some of the most common activities mentioned were the conduct of annual school *rimdro*[7], morning and evening prayers, cultural competitions, celebration of important days such as national occasions, the Bhutanese New Year, religious days, national and local festivals, observation of *drig-lam-namzha*[8] day, and the organizing of *chhoeshey leyrim*[9] by prominent personalities.

Health and Environment

Promoting students' personal health (both physical and mental) and creating a conducive school environment were also reportedly afforded the utmost importance. To promote the mental wellbeing of students, schools maintain a policy of zero tolerance towards bullying, include circle time every evening whereby students can share their feelings freely and openly to their teachers, and classes aimed at teaching core life skills. Many schools also had trained school counsellors.

To promote physical health, many schools reportedly had a "no junk food policy," discouraging students from bringing junk food into the school from home or outside. They also had a "green day policy," whereby children are encouraged to bring only green food to school on that particular day. The lower grade classes also have dedicated Health and Physical Education lessons.

A "no plastic policy," social work every morning, the planting of flowers and trees in and around schools, and agricultural works through a school agriculture program (SAP) are all intended to create a conducive learning environment and also to promote a sense of dignity of work.

While I have listed and discussed only briefly the activities most commonly carried out in schools without in-depth qualitative analysis, it is nonetheless encouraging to note that through various activities, the principles of GNH are truly being practiced in some schools.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The practice of Educating for Gross National Happiness has seen mixed achievements. For instance, while disciplinary issues among students have risen in recent years and were acknowledged by the majority of the study's respondents, practices such as meditation were reported to have generated some level of positive impact. Overall, the efficacy of Educating for Gross National Happiness could not be ascertained.

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[7] *Buddhist religious rituals*
[8] *Bhutanese etiquette*
[9] *Religious discourses*

Perhaps, to achieve the desired outcomes of such a program, a few things may have to be attended to first. Since teachers are the agents of change within any school system, they must be properly oriented and trained in whatever they are supposed to do, rather than just putting a policy in place and teachers directed to undertake certain tasks without proper guidelines or training, which has largely been the case with Educating for GNH, as revealed by the participant teachers in the current study. According to Tshering (2021);

> Teacher informants expressed the need for practical training on mindfulness meditation guidance. The concurrent belief was that teachers either have not received any meaningful training in meditation guidance or have inadequate training provided by principals who received a week-long mindfulness training.

Second, as Sherab (2013) suggested, perhaps it would be a good idea to introduce tests on values-based education just as other core subjects, as there seems to be a general tendency to ignore activities and programs that are not subject to examination.

Third, teacher training colleges must provide adequate training to trainee teachers in these areas in order that they can teach these subjects themselves immediately upon qualifying as teachers, and therefore without having to wait for separate additional professional training as they may not always receive such opportunities once employed in the field.

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