GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS EDUCATION IN BHUTANESE SCHOOLS: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES AND EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

by

Kezang Sherab

M. Ed, St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada
B. Ed, National Institute of Education, Samtse, Bhutan

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
University of New England

September 2013
ABSTRACT

Since 2010, the Bhutanese education system has emphasised values education through its own unique approach known as ‘Educating for Gross National Happiness’ (referred to as GNH Education). This policy outcome emerged from the concern, shared by some Bhutanese leaders and educators, over the apparent deterioration of human values among youth in Bhutan. GNH Education was regarded by the Government of the day as critical for the sustained development of Bhutan. With GNH Education in place, the intention was that GNH values and principles would eventually be deeply embedded in the consciousness of every youth in Bhutan through implementation of an holistic approach to student development led by principals and teachers as key change agents. This study investigated the nature of principals’ and teachers’ self- and collective efficacy beliefs with respect to capabilities for GNH Education. Also of interest were their lived experiences, as they were involved in implementing GNH Education in its early stages and their relationships to different facets of GNH Education school contexts. Knowledge generated from this study was intended to contribute to an understanding of how schools (principals and teachers) have responded to the GNH Education challenge in local and national contexts.

This study was guided by a conceptual framework informed by the three interrelated constructs: Bandura’s efficacy beliefs, Mezirow’s transformative learning and Fullan’s dynamics of change. Prior research into various domains of interest in international contexts has demonstrated that a robust sense of both self- and collective efficacy beliefs is likely to successfully facilitate transformation and reform efforts. In order to address the efficacy beliefs of principals and teachers and their lived experiences of implementing GNH Education, the study followed an exploratory sequential mixed method approach that allowed both within- and between-paradigm triangulation of findings.

Data in the first quantitative phase were mainly gathered through a nation-wide self-administered survey from a total of 155 schools (Teachers (n = 1633), and Principals/Vice principals, (n= 244). Both the Principal (93 items) and Teacher (90 items) questionnaires each measured five multidimensional constructs (self-efficacy for implementing GNH Education, collective efficacy for implementing GNH Education, perceptions of importance of GNH Education, perceptions of GNH Education support systems, and perceptions of GNH Education actions and impacts). Survey data were analysed using SPSS v. 20.0. Due to the large sample size and also to control Type 1 error, multivariate statistical tests were used wherever possible coupled with setting the decision criterion for significance at $p = .001$. The analytical approach mainly
involved hierarchical cluster analysis that grouped the schools into four clusters exhibiting varying
degrees of collective efficacy. MANOVAs were conducted to understand the relationship and
characteristics of each cluster in terms of various demographic variables. MANOVAs were also
conducted to examine the nature of principal and teacher self-efficacy beliefs and their perceptions
of importance, support systems, and actions and impacts of GNH Education. Furthermore,
 hierarchical multiple regression analyses predicted the level of Principal and Teacher actions and
impacts and also impacts on students of GNH Education.

For the second qualitative case study phase, the study employed expert advice that helped to
identify two case study schools, one ‘efficacious’ in terms of being perceived (by the experts) as
displaying high collective efficacy beliefs for realising GNH outcomes and the other ‘inefficacious’
in terms of displaying low collective efficacy beliefs for realising GNH outcomes. The other two
case study schools, one ‘efficacious’ in terms of having a relatively high level of collective efficacy
belief for GNH implementation and one ‘inefficacious’ in terms of having a relatively low level of
collective efficacy beliefs for GNH implementation, were selected based on a cluster analysis of
their collective efficacy score assessed at the school level during the quantitative phase. The cluster
analysis also supported the judgments of the experts. Semi-structured interviews and teaching
lesson observations at each of the four selected case study schools, (Teachers (n = 9) and Principals
(n = 4), were employed as the data gathering strategies. The interview and observation data were
analysed using MAXQDA 10 to support the development of emerging themes within each case and
to facilitate cross-case comparisons and contrasts.

Overall findings showed six significant trends and provided insights into the current literature.
First, schools with higher collective efficacy beliefs were inclined to have principals and teachers
with higher self-efficacy, stronger perceptions of importance, support systems, and actions and
impacts of GNH Education. However, more than 60 percent of the schools were in the two
relatively ‘inefficacious’ beliefs clusters indicating that slightly more than half of the schools in
Bhutan doubt their abilities to implement GNH Education. Second, principals generally perceived
themselves to be more ‘efficacious’ than teachers and vice principals. This likely reflected, in part,
the positive role played by the national level workshop provided to all the principals. Third,
teachers perceived themselves to be more efficacious in infusing GNH values in extra-curricular
programmes than in their academic teaching lessons. Interestingly Dzongkha (the national language
of Bhutan) teachers showed higher efficacy for infusion of GNH values in their academic teaching
lessons. The study corroborated the current theory of a positive relationship between high self- and
collective efficacy beliefs and better performance and also low efficacy and poorer performance.
Such a finding demonstrated the importance of a robust sense of efficacy beliefs in implementing
GNH Education. Fourth, teachers and principals exhibited equally strong perceptions of importance of GNH Education. In contrast, both teachers and principals showed weaker perceptions of impact of GNH Education on students. Fifth, both self- and collective efficacy beliefs, perceptions of importance and perceptions of support systems for GNH Education contributed significantly in predicting actions, practices and impact on principals and teachers and also student impact. Self-efficacy beliefs of principals and teachers accounted for a fairly large percentage of the variance in actions and impact of principals and teachers and student impact relative to the other predictor sets. Sixth, the case studies helped to understand situational specifics and qualifications to trends and further helped contextualise the survey findings. In particular, the study highlighted some contextual issues such as autonomy, student ownership of activities, leadership, commitment, academic culture, hidden curriculum and workload that appeared to influence the efficacy beliefs of Principals and Teachers especially related to the domain of GNH values infusion in academic lessons. One could argue that without substantial attention to these contextual issues little of the vision of GNH Education to be achievable. Findings also highlight important contradictions observed between participant perceptions and their actual practices.

Implications for theory, practice, policy and methods were generated. Suggestions for further improvement of the GNH Education and possible directions for future research are also discussed.