

The Impact of Learning Buddhist Values on Graduates of the College of Language and Culture Studies in Trongsa, Bhutan

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ABSTRACT

The significance of Buddhist values in promoting moral and human values has gained considerable attention. Incorporating these values in education has numerous impacts, and this study aimed to explore the advantages of studying Buddhist values among graduates of the College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS) at Taktse, Trongsa. The study sampled 244 respondents, and quantitative data was collected through online survey questionnaires. Additionally, four in-person interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions for ethnographic insights. Descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS, along with thematic analysis.

The research findings demonstrate that learning Buddhist values had various positive effects on individuals. Participants reported using right speech, upholding right action, and exhibiting right conduct as a result of studying Buddhist values. Moreover, individuals were able to contribute to societal welfare and strengthen their interpersonal relationships by applying values such as mutual respect, social responsibility, integrity, and honesty. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate the human values exemplified in Buddhism into the curricula of schools, colleges, and training institutes in Bhutan. This approach serves two important objectives:

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promoting value-based education and equipping future generations with the necessary foundations to lead moral and ethical lives.

Key words: Learning, Buddhist values, impacts, individuals, interpersonal relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Bhutan's connection with Buddhism dates back to the 7th century. Buddhism has influenced its culture, society, economy, and politics of Bhutan throughout its history. Prominent figures like Guru Padmasambhava (8th century), Phajo Drukgom Zhippo (12-13th century), Terton Pema Lingpa (15th century), Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (17th century) and many other personages had played vital roles in promoting Buddhist teachings in Bhutan.

Bhutan is often referred to as the last Vajrayana Buddhist kingdom. The spiritual heritage of Bhutan promotes Buddhist values such as non-violence, compassion, and patience. Religious institutions in Bhutan have been entrusted with the responsibility of preserving and promoting these sacred values, and they have been successful in doing so.

Given the significance of Buddhist values in Bhutanese society, it is crucial to instil these values, particularly in the minds of the younger generation. By incorporating Buddhist values into the school curriculum, Bhutan can nurture culturally responsive citizens who carry forward the nation's heritage. Understanding and cultivating Buddhist values also contribute to building a society driven by positive principles.

This study seeks to explore the impacts of including Buddhist values in the school curriculum. It will shed light on the advantages of teaching these values and propose key Buddhist values that should

be imparted in schools. By embracing these values, Bhutan can thrive as a harmonious society.

Problem Statement and Significance of the Study

Traditional communities in Bhutan have long embraced Buddhist values, including compassion, non-violence, and interdependence. These values were deeply embedded in their daily lives, leading to stronger social cohesion, mutual respect, and a deep appreciation for all forms of life. However, with the advent of modernization and globalization, Bhutanese society has faced challenges that have eroded these precious cultural values and led to undesirable complications (Phuntsho, 2013). Greed, jealousy, corruption, and selfishness have become more prevalent, replacing the sincerity, openness, and patience that were once valued (Phuntsho, 2013). This negative shift can be attributed to the loss of touch with traditional values.

Recognizing the need to restore and promote these values, Bhutan has emphasized the importance of value-based education, particularly among the youth. His Majesty's edict on education reform explicitly calls for holistic development that nurtures caring, dependable, and honest individuals who possess a strong sense of pride in their Bhutanese identity:

As we prepare to educate and equip children with competencies for the twenty first century, we must equally prioritize their holistic development so that they become caring, dependable and honest human beings as well as patriotic citizens. We need to embed in them the conviction and sense of pride as a Bhutanese by grounding them in our country's history, culture, tradition, and value system. (Royal Kasho on Education Reform, 2020).

It is evident that the degeneration of Buddhist values among the Bhutanese population poses a significant threat to the nation's well-being. As Bhutan relies on its unique values rather than military

strength or economic power, it becomes crucial to rewind the education curriculum and reintegrate Buddhist values to safeguard the nation's existence.

Therefore, this research aims to explore the impacts of studying Buddhist values among the graduates of the College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS). By understanding these impacts, valuable insights can be gained to inform policy actions and guide the incorporation of Buddhist values into the school curriculum. This endeavour is essential for preserving Bhutan's distinct cultural heritage and promoting the well-being of its people.

Research Question

This study aims to address the individual-level and the interpersonal-level impacts of studying Buddhist values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Buddhism upholds values that are shared across various schools of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha encompass a set of fundamental principles that leads its followers toward a mindful and compassionate living. These principles serve as the cornerstone of Buddhist teachings and practices, guiding individuals towards spiritual development, harmony, and liberation from suffering. Some of these core values are compassion, wisdom, ethical conduct, mindfulness, generosity, and equanimity. Buddhism encourages the practice of critical thinking, distinguishing itself from Abrahamic and other faiths. There are noticeable resemblances between Buddhism and critical thinking, with many Buddhist principles complementing and enriching critical thinking skills, and vice versa. This interplay between Buddhism and critical thinking underscores a significant relationship, which, contrary to common perception, has the potential to elevate one's cognitive abilities significantly. A fundamental similarity between critical thinking and Buddhism lies

in ethical deliberation. Critical thinking emphasizes fairness and ethical conduct, underscoring its significance in guiding individuals towards morally upright actions (Zhang, 2018). However, this study deals with five broad topics: mental health, morality, selflessness, self-respect, and environment.

Mental health

Mental health is intertwined with Buddhist values. Individuals who embrace Buddhist values tend to possess a stable and positive mindset. Self-compassion in Buddhism encourages kindness towards oneself during times of hardship, rather than ignoring or criticizing oneself. It also involves recognizing that suffering and personal failure are part of the shared human experience (Kalra et al., 2008). Buddhist practitioners emphasize mental training, which contributes to a healthier mental state. By being present in the moment without prejudice, individuals can approach reality in a non-reactive manner, developing resilience to life's challenges (Zou, Wu, & Fan, 2016). Deep inner reflection helps transform neutral or negative thoughts into positive ones, fostering mental resilience.

Social harmony is another significant aspect of Buddhist values. Buddhism acknowledges the interdependence of all phenomena, asserting that everything in the world exists in relation to one another. This perspective, known as "dependent origination," instils a sense of responsibility, appreciation, and empathy for others (Yen, 2006). By recognizing the interconnectedness of all beings, individuals cultivate principles such as non-violence, selflessness, and loving kindness. The contemplative nature of Buddhism encourages individuals to be considerate of others' internal values, promoting respect, attentiveness, and diligence in acknowledging their suffering (Rockeffell, 1994). This relational perspective fosters a sense of unity and collective identity, moving beyond the notion of "I and them" to embrace an inclusive "us and we" mentality.

By embracing Buddhist values, individuals can enhance their mental well-being and contribute to social harmony by promoting empathy, compassion, and interconnectedness. Incorporating these values into daily life can lead to personal growth and a harmonious society.

Morality

Upright living is a fundamental aspect of the Buddhist way of life. In the face of prevalent moral decadence and the pursuit of desires through outrageous and immoral means, Buddhism's humanistic perspective is needed more than ever (Tan, 2014). Buddhist teachings discourage practices of deceit, robbery, and unethical behaviour, and emphasize the adoption of a noble path guided by non-violence in thoughts, actions, and countenance (Brantmeier, 2007). By following the eightfold noble path, a society can dismantle the causes and existence of immorality. Wang (2020) suggests that Buddhist principles can address various social problems and global issues arising from scientific advancement and modernization.

Selflessness

The essence of dharma, according to Buddhism, lies in prioritizing others and their needs over one's own. Buddha taught selflessness as an antidote to destructive mental defilements that hinder individuals from following a noble path. Renouncing worldly attachments, Buddhism aims to cultivate a sense of altruism devoid of personal gain (Shiah, 2016). Mind training in Buddhism focuses on developing empathy for others and helping them alleviate the causes of suffering to find lasting happiness (Lama, 2014). Providing assistance to those in need without being prompted, driven by an altruistic perspective, exemplifies the essence of Buddhism.

Self-respect

Buddhism emphasizes the value of self-respect. Each individual is considered the master of their own aspirations and how they wish to be treated by others. Self-respect involves reciprocal or mutual consideration. Buddhism teaches the importance of self-confidence, which means respecting oneself even when others do not (Wisadavet, 2003). Individuals with strong Buddhist values do not allow others to take advantage of them or coerce them into engaging in unvirtuous actions. Understanding one's strengths and capabilities empowers individuals to pursue their dreams and contribute to making the world a better place to live. People who are aware of their abilities but fail to apply them to achieve what they deserve undermine their own self-respect (Meshram, 2016).

Environment

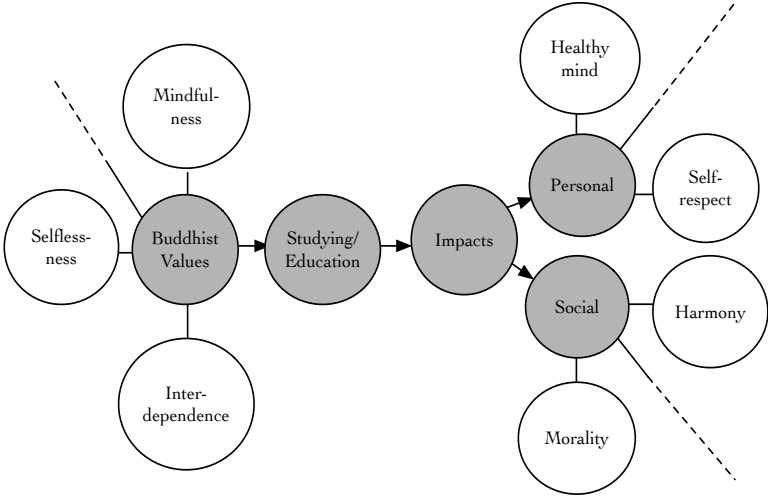
Buddhism promotes respect for nature and the physical environment that surrounds us. The principle of not causing harm to others encompasses all environmental elements such as rivers, lakes, mountains, soil, trees, and more, without which the survival of sentient beings would be compromised (Tashi, 2004). Disturbing the ecological balance or exploiting nature excessively is believed to lead to human suffering and catastrophes. Buddhism embraces a holistic view of the world and emphasizes environmental ethics (Silva, 1998). It encourages a non-violent approach towards all ecological aspects, including living creatures. Furthermore, it discourages the unnecessary exploitation of natural resources for economic gain, which is referred to as "the rape of nature" (Silva, 2009).

While various literary works highlight the positive influence of Buddhist values on people's perception of life and their approach to worldly problems, there is limited research on the inclusion of these values in the education system. This study aims to examine the

impacts of value-based education in the Bhutanese context, exploring the potential advantages of incorporating Buddhist values in the education system.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study presents some prominent Buddhist values such as mindfulness, selflessness, and interdependence. The empty line above indicates the potential for identifying and adding other significant values during the course of the research. The three ellipses symbolize the indefinite number of values that can be incorporated.



The framework also highlights the potential impacts of incorporating Buddhist values in education. These impacts are tentatively categorized as personal and social. Personal impacts include a healthy mind and self-respect, while social impacts encompass harmony and morality. The line with three ellipses projecting from each category indicates that the study aims to explore and identify the full range of impacts resulting from the

incorporation of Buddhist values into the Bhutanese school curriculum.

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts an interpretivist research paradigm to examine the impacts of studying Buddhist values among graduates of the CLCS. By interviewing different participants, this interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand and interpret their subjective responses, drawing conclusions about the topic under study (Bhattacharjee, 2012).

The research approach is inductive in nature, aiming to understand the impacts of Buddhist values based on the collected data. Responses from the participants are analysed and evaluated to gain insights and draw conclusions, leading to necessary recommendations.

Type of Research and Study Design

This study is an exploratory descriptive study, seeking to understand the impacts derived from studying Buddhist values. The survey research design is employed, utilizing online survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with the target population. This approach is chosen for its convenience in data collection.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection are employed. Qualitative methods, such as open-ended interviews, generate data from participants targeted for qualitative analysis. Quantitative methods, including online survey questionnaires, gather data from participants who may be geographically distant or have time constraints.

The data collection is cross-sectional, conducted once to gather information from participants. A longitudinal survey is not necessary as the participants' responses are expected to remain consistent over time and situations. The subject of the study is likely to produce similar results and findings at any given time or circumstance, making a one-time research approach sufficient to obtain the required information.

METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

The participants for this study were selected from graduates of the last five years (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 & 2020) who studied Bhutan Language and Literature programme at the CLCS in Trongsa. These graduates were chosen as the target population based on two factors. Firstly, they had received education on Buddhist values during their course and were expected to have a better understanding of them. Secondly, their outlook and behaviour would have been influenced by Buddhist values, making them suitable to share their experiences regarding the impacts of Buddhist values in their daily lives.

Sampling Method

Stratified sampling was employed to select the respondents, as it provides a more representative sample (Stat Trek, n.d). Due to feasibility constraints, it was not possible to include all the graduates. Therefore, the study focused on the graduates of the last five years. Graduates from 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 represented the different strata in this study. The required number of respondents from each stratum were chosen through a systematic random sampling. The respondents who responded first were automatically selected from each stratum.

Sample Size

Out of the total of 874 graduates, 250 respondents (107 females and 137 males) were selected for this study. The sample size was determined to be close to the one calculated using Slovin's Formula. According to Ellen (2020), this formula calculates the sample size based on the known population and the desired margin of error.

Slovin's formula is as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2) \qquad n = 748 / (1 + 748 * 0.05^2)$$

n = no. of samples $n = 260$

N = total population (748)

e = margin of error (0.05)

In Table 1, it is shown that there was a total of 874 graduates, with 158 in 2016, 176 in 2017, 179 in 2018, and 173 in 2020. Since the population could be divided into five strata, 50 respondents were chosen from each stratum, resulting in a required sample size of 250. However, the study was unable to gather the required sample size from the 2016 and 2017 graduates, falling short by 15 and 4 respondents, respectively. To compensate for this, additional respondents were taken from the 2020 graduates, as they were easier to contact. However, only 13 respondents answered, leaving the final sample size at 244, which fell short by 4 respondents from achieving the required sample size.

Table 1

Sample size

Strata of sample	Population	Required sample size	Sample size achieved
2016	158	50	35
2017	176	50	46
2018	179	50	50
2019	188	50	50
2020	173	50	63
Total	874	250	244

Data Collection Methods

An online survey questionnaire was used to gather data from the students of the CLCS. The questionnaire was designed to capture relevant information related to the impacts of studying Buddhist values. In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted with a select number of graduates. Prior appointments were scheduled with the interviewees, and the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure that no important details were missed out. Permission was obtained from the interviewees before recording the interviews.

Questionnaire Reliability Test

To assess the reliability of the Likert scale survey questions in the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of reliability ranging from 0 to 1. A higher alpha value indicates greater reliability and consistency of the items in the scale (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Generally, an alpha value greater than 0.5 is considered acceptable or reliable. In this study, the 25 items on the scale demonstrated reliability, as indicated by the test results.

Table 2

Reliability

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.959	25

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to the required ethical standards in research. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. The participants were selected randomly based on their voluntary willingness to participate in the study. They were provided with information about the research objectives and their participation was entirely voluntary. To ensure participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for interview respondents, and survey questionnaires were designed to allow participants to answer anonymously. Every effort was made to prevent any harm or discomfort to the participants throughout the study.

DATA FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

The demographic information of the respondents included in this research encompassed various factors, such as gender, region, parents' education level, presence or absence of religious figures in the family, and year of graduation.

Gender

Out of the total 244 respondents, 107 were female, accounting for 43.9 percent of the sample, while 137 were male, accounting for 56.1 percent. The male respondents outnumbered the female respondents by 30, representing 12.2 percent more males in the sample.

Table 3

Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	107	43.9	43.9
Male	137	56.1	56.1
Total	244	100.0	100.0

Region

Out of the total respondents, 149 individuals (61.1%) were from rural regions of Bhutan, while 95 respondents (38.9%) belonged to urban regions. It is notable that the number of respondents from rural areas was 22.2 percent higher than those from urban areas.

Table 4

Region

Region	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Rural	149	61.1	61.1
Urban	95	38.9	38.9
Total	244	100.0	100.0

Parents' Education

Out of the 244 respondents, 163 reported having uneducated parents, while 81 respondents had formally educated parents. This means that 66.8 percent of the respondents had parents who were uneducated, while 33.2 percent had parents with an education.

Table 5

Parents' education

Parent's education	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Educated	81	33.2	33.2
Uneducated	163	66.8	66.8
Total	244	100.0	100.0

Year of Graduation

Out of the total 244 respondents, the distribution of respondents based on their graduation year is as follows: 63 respondents (25.8%) graduated in the year 2020, 50 respondents (20.49%) graduated in 2019, another 50 respondents (20.49%) graduated in 2018, 46 respondents (18.85%) graduated in 2017, and 35 respondents (14.3%) graduated in 2016.

Table 6

Year of graduation

Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
2016	35	14.3	14.3
2017	46	18.85	18.85
2018	50	20.49	20.49
2019	50	20.49	20.49
2020	63	25.8	25.8
Total	244	100.0	100.0

Impacts of Learning Buddhist Values at the Individual Level

Individual Mental Impacts

As shown in Table 7 below, 205 respondents (84.42%) agreed to Buddhist values keeping them aware of their thoughts, with 7 (2.8%) disagreeing and 31 (12.7%) rating neutral.

Table 7

Rating of individual impacts

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Buddhist values keep me aware of my thoughts leading to a positive inner state	3	4	31	125	81
Buddhist values keep me aware of my emotions leading to a positive inner state	3	7	23	100	111
Buddhist values have made me more mindful of what I am about to do	2	9	18	81	134
I manage my stress better because of learning Buddhist values	2	10	33	100	99
Learning Buddhist values have made me more tolerant of the problems of life	2	7	27	93	115
Buddhist values have made me more appreciative of myself	6	5	29	76	128
Buddhist values make me inquisitive	3	4	37	98	102
Buddhist values make me more rational	4	8	30	90	111
Buddhist values help me recognize my body as precious	6	6	35	85	112
Buddhist values help me to value the preciousness of human life	3	2	18	75	146
SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree					

Similarly, the number of respondents agreeing to other statements were as high as 211 (86.47%) to Buddhist values making them aware of their emotions, 215 (88.11%) to making them more mindful of their action, 199 (81.56%) to better stress management, 208 (85.25%) to heightening their resilience, 204 (83.6%) to developing self-respect, 200 (81.96%) to making them inquisitive, 201 (82.37%) to making them rational, 197 (80.37%) to recognizing their body as sacred and 221 (90.57%) of them to Buddhist values helping them value the preciousness of human life.

Environmental Conservation Impacts

The data analysis revealed that the mean ratings of the 244 respondents were consistently higher than 4 out of 5, indicating a positive perception of the impacts of learning Buddhist values. When converted to a percentage scale, these mean ratings exceeded 80 percent. Specifically, the mean rating for the statement “Buddhist values make them bear higher responsibility for environmental conservation” was 4.15, which translates to 83 percent on the percentage scale. This indicates that a majority of respondents recognized the role of Buddhist values in promoting environmental conservation and taking greater responsibility for preserving the environment.

Table 8

Environmental impacts ratings

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I have greater regard for environmental conservation because of studying Buddhist values	244	4.15	.924
2. Buddhist values reminds me of taking care of my own wastes	244	4.15	.944
3. Buddhist values made me more caring towards the environment	244	4.13	.949

Similarly, the mean ratings for the statements “Buddhist values lead to better waste management” and “Buddhist values promote care towards the environment” were 4.15 (83%) and 4.13 (82.6%), respectively. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of respondents acknowledged the positive influence of Buddhist values in improving waste management practices and fostering a sense of care and concern for the environment.

Overall, the high mean ratings and percentage scores demonstrate the perceived impacts of learning Buddhist values in relation to

environmental conservation, waste management, and environmental care among the surveyed respondents.

Behavioural Impacts

Among the total of 244 respondents (100%), a significant majority, 91 percent, agreed that Buddhist values guide them in having right aspirations in life. Only 2.4 percent of respondents disagreed with this statement, while 6.6 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. This high agreement percentage indicates a strong recognition among the respondents that Buddhist values play a significant role in shaping their aspirations and goals.

Similarly, for the remaining statements, the percentage of respondents who agreed was consistently high, exceeding 75 percent, while the percentage of those who disagreed was less than 10 percent. Specifically, 87.7 percent of respondents agreed that Buddhist values enable them to embrace every second to engage in pious deeds. Additionally, 85.2 percent agreed that Buddhist values help them find purpose in life, and 85.8 percent agreed that Buddhist values contribute to discovering meaning in life. Furthermore, 77.9 percent of respondents agreed that Buddhist values encourage them to undertake voluntary work for social welfare.

These findings demonstrate that a significant proportion of the respondents recognized the positive impact of Buddhist values on various aspects of their lives, including their aspirations, engagement in pious deeds, sense of purpose and meaning, and involvement in voluntary social work. The high agreement percentages indicate the perceived impacts of incorporating Buddhist values in shaping personal values and guiding individuals towards a meaningful and virtuous life.

Table 9

Behaviour impacts ratings

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Buddhist values guide me in having right aspirations in life	0.4	2	6.6	36.1	54.9
Buddhist values remind me to take every moment as an opportunity to cultivate pious deeds/merits	0.8	1.2	10.2	39.3	48.4
Buddhist values help me to find purpose in life	1.2	2.5	11.1	33.6	51.6
Buddhist values help me find meaning in life	0.8	2.9	10.3	38.7	47.1
I volunteer in social activities because of learning Buddhist values	2.5	5.3	14.3	38.1	39.8
SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree					

Social Impacts

According to Table 10, the interpersonal impacts of Buddhist values were widely recognized by the respondents, with more than 80 percent (200 respondents) agreeing to all the statements. The percentage of respondents who disagreed with these statements was less than 6 percent (15 respondents). However, there was a slightly different trend for the statement regarding Buddhist values preventing them from committing sexual misconduct. Approximately 79 percent (193 respondents) agreed with the statement, while 9.4 percent (23 respondents) disagreed. It is noteworthy that a common observation among the respondents' ratings was a strong agreement with the statements. In each statement, more than 100 respondents (40%) expressed strong agreement. The frequency of respondents who strongly agreed ranged from 103 to 146. Similarly, the number of respondents who agreed with the statements was consistently high, with a range of 76 to 105. These findings indicate a significant level of agreement among the respondents regarding the interpersonal impacts of

incorporating Buddhist values in their lives. The majority of the respondents recognized the positive impact of Buddhist values on their interpersonal relationships, highlighting the value of these values in promoting harmonious and ethical interactions with others.

Table 10

Social impact ratings

	SD	D	N	A	SA
Buddhist values have made me more considerate of others	3	1	17	82	141
Because of studying Buddhist values, I am aware of others' emotional states while interacting with them	3	8	25	99	109
I have become more considerate of attending to the needs of others by learning Buddhist values	5	5	23	89	122
When in conflict with others, Buddhist values help in resolving the conflict in a friendly manner	2	5	29	105	103
Buddhist values encourage me to be honest with others	2	5	15	76	146
I use decent and respectful words with others because of learning Buddhist values	3	9	30	94	108
Buddhist values prevent me from committing sexual misconduct	7	16	28	78	115
SD=Strongly Disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly Agree					

DISCUSSION

The impacts of studying Buddhist values extend beyond the individual level and have implications for societal relationships as well. The findings from this research align with existing literature on Buddhism and its impacts, highlighting the positive effects of Buddhist values on personal well-being and social interactions.

One significant impact reported by the respondents was the development of a positive mindset. By cultivating awareness of their thoughts and emotions, individuals were able to transform negative or neutral states into positive ones. This enabled them to effectively manage and navigate through a range of detrimental emotions such as anger, sadness, and excessive excitement. This finding underscores the role of Buddhist values in promoting emotional well-being and equipping individuals with the tools to regulate their emotions.

Another important aspect of Buddhist values is their contribution to enhancing resilience. Participants expressed that the teachings of impermanence in Buddhism helped them to bounce back from setbacks and challenges in life such as failure, death of a close one, divorce, loss of possession, etc.

One respondent said, “Buddhist values helped me confront any loss and setback because it has ingrained in me the belief that everything is impermanent and even sufferings will come to an end.” Whenever they encountered problems and obstacles, they were able to accept it as a part of life.

According to Hagan (2020), the Buddhist philosophy of impermanence guides individuals to perceive the transitory and fleeting nature of all things. This understanding fosters resilience by acknowledging the ephemeral nature of issues. In a study, 208 respondents (85.24%) found that meditation provided them with the mental resources necessary to navigate life’s challenges, granting them a sense of mental freedom. Agarwal and Dixit (2017) argue that meditation is centered around cultivating awareness. Therefore, the mental freedom mentioned by the respondents encompasses liberation from unprocessed, automatic thoughts that often lead to burnout, stress, and fixation.

Buddhist values also enabled the individuals to become more appreciative of themselves. Just as Wisadevat (2013) asserts, individuals were able to understand the importance of self-confidence and self-uprightness. This meant that individuals respected themselves even when others failed to do so. One of the interviewees said, "I have learnt to maintain my self-respect, which is the greatest benefit I drew from studying Buddhist values. A particular Buddhist quote that prevents me from yielding to other people when they try to engage me in unvirtuous things: "While one is the refuge of oneself, one is also one's own adversary. When engaging in virtuous and unvirtuous deeds, one is the witness."

Self-respect can be manifested through the realization of one's full potential. According to Meshram (2016), individuals who fail to strive towards actualizing their achievable dreams are not exhibiting self-respect. Buddhist values promote the pursuit of righteous aspirations in life and encourage concerted efforts towards their realization. By avoiding laziness and complacency, individuals decrease the likelihood of failure, while cultivating diligence increases their chances of success.

Buddhist values have played a significant role in cultivating curiosity and rationality among individuals. An impressive 81 percent of respondents agreed that Buddhist values have enabled them to be passionate and seek out new ideas. Likewise, 82 percent expressed that Buddhism encourages them to delve into the realms of right and wrong, fostering a probing mindset. One respondent shared, "Before engaging in any action, I ensure that it aligns with what is right, thereby avoiding any form of wrongdoing. Even Buddha emphasized the need to thoroughly examine his teachings before accepting them." Interestingly, the focus among individuals was not solely on acquiring knowledge and ideas, but rather on acquiring wisdom. While knowledge is widely accessible from various sources like books, television, and newspapers, wisdom involves utilizing the power of the mind to make meaningful use of

that knowledge. Individuals demonstrated the ability to discern valuable information and ideas from the insignificant ones. This enabled them to make rational decisions by emphasizing the three levels of wisdom: the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of thinking, and the wisdom of contemplation.

Another notable benefit reported by individuals was the development of a heightened consideration for the environment or nature. They became conscious of the natural resources surrounding them and gained a deep appreciation for their role in their own survival. This newfound appreciation led them to respect all natural phenomena and take necessary measures to prevent the degradation of natural resources and the exploitation of ecological existence. One respondent stated, "Reducing waste and reusing reusable items became second nature to me at an individual level." Another respondent mentioned, "Buddhist teachings on considering the environment as a living entity encourage me to participate in tree plantation programmes and initiate waste collection initiatives, thereby promoting social awareness on waste management."

This emphasis on environmental consciousness can be attributed to Buddhism's holistic view of existence, which recognizes various environmental elements such as rivers, lakes, mountains, and trees as essential forces for human survival (Tashi, 2004). By being aware of and appreciating nature, individuals were able to fulfil their constitutional responsibility stated as, "Every Bhutanese is a trustee of the Kingdom's natural resources and environment for the benefit of present and future generations" (Parliament of Bhutan, 2008).

With a positive mindset, right aspirations, and right thoughts, individuals were able to cultivate and maintain better relationships with others. A significant aspect of their mental training focused on developing empathy for others and actively seeking ways to help them avoid suffering and attain lasting happiness (Lama, 2014).

One intriguing finding was that these individuals consistently prioritized the needs of others above their own. Whenever they had the means to assist others, such as providing financial support or engaging in voluntary social activities (*jug pa'i sems bskyed*) they readily offered their help. Even when they didn't have the immediate means to assist, they expressed their aspirations (*smon pa'i sems bskyed*), which eventually translated into reality as soon as they acquired the means to fulfil them.

This selfless attitude and commitment to helping others showcased their deep compassion and genuine concern for the well-being of those around them. By embodying these values, they were able to build and maintain harmonious relationships grounded on empathy, kindness, and support.

By embracing Buddhist values, individuals were able to communicate with others using respectful and considerate language, thereby avoiding offending others. A majority of the respondents expressed that they knew what to say, what not to say, when to speak, and how to speak. This careful attention to speech aligns with the Buddhist teachings that emphasize avoiding the Four Verbal Impurities (*ngag gi mi dge bzhi*) - deceit, divisive talk, harsh words, and gossiping, as they have the potential to hurt the emotions and feelings of others (Chiang, 2003).

However, this does not imply that they used only flattery and pleasant words with others. At times, they intentionally used harsh words with the intention of persuading others for the greater good. Before speaking, they would examine whether their words were necessary, truthful, and beneficial. Remarkably, more than 80 percent of the individuals agreed that Buddhist values helped them transition from being "contemplative introverts" to what they referred to as "mindful extroverts."

It can be argued that Buddhist values served as an anchor for individuals, guiding them in adhering to what Buddhism describes as the five keys to right verbal action. Sama Vaca (2005) asserts that right verbal action is spoken at the right time, spoken truthfully, spoken affectionately, spoken beneficially, and spoken with a mind of goodwill. By embodying these principles, individuals were able to cultivate harmonious and compassionate communication with others while avoiding hurtful speech.

Wang (2020) suggests that Buddhist principles can address various social problems and global issues arising from scientific advancements and modernization. This aligns well with the findings of this research. Buddhist values prevented individuals from engaging in social crimes such as corruption, theft, embezzlement, and deceiving others for personal gain. One respondent mentioned that Buddhist values empowered them to refrain from engaging in unwanted social activities like gambling, alcohol abuse, and drug consumption, as Buddhism cautions against these actions as hindrances to right livelihood. However, it is important to note that this does not imply complete eradication of temptations towards social crimes and unethical behaviour, as expressed by the respondent. Rather, it suggests the ability to curb such negative temptations and avoid falling into their traps.

Moreover, Buddhist values contributed to individuals' faithfulness in their relationships and associations. They were constantly reminded of the moral principles of fidelity and karma. Respondents stated that these values influenced their belief that if they cheat on their partners, they would be deceived in return. This understanding stems from the concept of karma, which teaches that our actions have consequences, and good actions lead to positive outcomes while bad actions lead to negative ones (Tan, 2004). In this way, individuals were able to refrain from engaging in sexual misconduct and maintain strong bonds with their partners, friends, and other

associations. Their sincerity and genuine dedication inspired others to reciprocate the same level of commitment and faithfulness.

Overall, the findings highlight the positive impact of Buddhist values on individuals' communication, social conduct, and personal relationships. The emphasis on mindful and respectful speech fosters harmonious interactions, while the ethical principles of Buddhism guide individuals to avoid social crimes and uphold fidelity. These values not only benefit individuals personally but also contribute to the well-being of their communities and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Learning Buddhist values has had a significant positive impact on individuals, shaping their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours, and leading to more meaningful and prosperous interactions in society. By becoming custodians of their emotions, feelings, and thoughts, individuals have found inner peace, increased productivity, and deeper meaning in life. Buddhist values have fostered respect, understanding, and empathy for others, guiding individuals to avoid demeaning language and unnecessary harm. Moreover, these values have steered individuals away from unvirtuous actions such as corruption, theft, beguilement, sexual misconduct, gambling, and environmental pollution. To cultivate a society of value-based citizens in Bhutan, several actions should be taken:

1. Collaboration between the government and education fraternity: Institute and strengthen value-based education in schools, colleges, and training institutions. Shift the focus from exams and tests to the purification of mind and character, making value inculcation a core aspect of teaching and learning.
2. Develop a comprehensive framework or national guidelines: Establish a framework that includes both direct and indirect methods of imparting values to children in schools. Direct

methods involve incorporating values into the teaching-learning process, while indirect methods encompass activities such as school assemblies, clubs, games, sports, and social service programmes. These approaches can promote values like mutual respect, cooperation, interdependence, integrity, and social responsibility for the betterment of society.

3. Parental involvement: Recognize the importance of parental influence in value inculcation. Parents, guardians, and other community members should serve as role models by applying moral values in their daily lives, supporting and complementing the values taught in schools.

By implementing these recommendations, Bhutan can create a nurturing environment for the development and reinforcement of values, ensuring that the younger generation grows up with a strong moral foundation and contributes positively to society.

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