



Interview with a Bhutanese
QRM Expert:

Qualitative Research Methodology in Bhutan

Added value of investing in QRM:

All faculty members will be trained in QRM, and they will enhance research knowledge, skills and culture

Research on Research:

HAPPY Project reminded me of how much I enjoyed conducting interviews

Perceptions of participants:

The first Training of Teachers on QRM

HAPPY Project Milestones

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!



@EUhappyproject



@HappyProject_EU



https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdaldIX_Jfo07TwYAAh8YNw



@Happy_project_EU

OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

www.happy-project.eu

PREFACE

“It’s been almost a year and we still haven’t seen each other in person,” commented one of the Bhutanese project partners during the so-called ‘virtual coffee break’ in our HAPPY Training of Teachers course delivered in the second week of December. *“Well, I also could not believe that we would’ve been able to accomplish so much in such a short time, considering the fact that we were stuck in front of our screens and traveling solely in a virtual mode from our offices and living rooms,”* I replied with mixed feelings in my head. Still, it is possible. The Sensitization workshop for Bhutanese higher education management and the Training of teachers’ events demonstrated just that: if there is a need and a strong will to raise the awareness and promote qualitative research methodology in higher education, then no barrier or excuse can stop us from bringing about this change. And we are very much proud of jointly building this capacity – although limited to remote settings. In this second newsletter we provide some exciting insights into our most recent activities, along with some personal reflections from our project partners and experts.

A HAPPY 2022 reading to you all!

Gregor Cerinšek, Slovenian HAPPY Coordinator

CONTENT

Qualitative Research Methodology in Bhutan

Interview with a local Bhutanese QRM expert

1

Sensitization for Higher Management

Interview with the president of CLCS

3

Research on research

Written by dr. Dolma Choden Roder

5

The first Training of Teachers

Written by Esther den Hartog

7

Project Milestones and What is still to come

8

Qualitative Research Methodology in Bhutan

An interview with a local Bhutanese Qualitative Research Methodology Expert.

Dr. Phanchung is Director General of the Department of Research and External Relations (DRER) under the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). Earlier he worked as the Manager for the Programmes Teaching and Learning under the Department of Academic Affairs. Before joining the Office of the Vice Chancellor, Dr. Phanchung served as Assistant Professor, Dean Academic Affairs, Principal and Head of Department at the College of Natural Resources.

The interview focuses on the past and current status of Qualitative Research Methodology (QRM) and how educational institutions/bodies can help enhance it.

As the Director General of the Department of Research and External Relations (DRER) at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), what are your views about the scope and need of qualitative research in Bhutan?

With more than 60 percent of the University Awards offered in Arts and Humanities, Education and Business programmes, I see qualitative research method has big potential to influence the mindset of academics in grooming the graduates of the university. Qualitative research can be applied effectively to science, technology, engineering, applied sciences, fundamental sciences, and natural sciences. Therefore, in my own assessment as the head of the Research Department of the University, I see the future of qualitative research in our higher education programmes to

produce skilled manpower with critical thinking, sensitivity to Bhutanese culture and traditions, and responsive citizen. However, we need to incorporate significant credit hours on research modules in our undergraduate projects and Master Dissertations.

What are some of the current research gaps in the country that can be enhanced by qualitative research?

Bhutanese people live in a mountain ecosystem that is ecologically fragile, culturally rich, traditional practices still being adopted, and have a strong community vitality leading to well-being and self-containment. Despite all existing values, no significant investment is done in the promotion and preservation through evidence-based studies. As an academic, I see a research gap in legislation, judiciary,

and executive governance since the formulation of policies and five-year plans in all sectors does not show that systematic research has really influenced the planning and policies processes. We, therefore need to appreciate the publication culture on QRM at all levels so that it can be used for sound policy formulations.

Are there any recommendations you would like to suggest to improve the quality of the research environment in Bhutan?

I cannot comment on the quality of research when I cannot have access to a quantity of research papers on an open-access platform. Many so-called studies are in the form of a report that is not validated with available literature and not shared in a public forum. If research culture in Bhutan has to improve, my own view is that we need to put some mechanisms in place in the system itself. I would suggest an independent national-level body under the government system to prioritize national research areas adequately supported with the annual fund as many advanced nations invest certain GDP annually. The most crucial I see is the need to mainstream research and development in our national plans which can then be translated into sectoral research plans and policies. I also wish that agencies in Bhutan can appreciate the impact of research and institute a professional career so that



Dr. Phanchung,
Director General of
the Department of
Research and External
Relations (DRER) under
the Royal University of
Bhutan (RUB).

researchers can facilitate and enhance research culture in their respective agencies. If all or at least a few are institutionalized in the system, I can see the future of research in Bhutan. Otherwise, research and development will be individual and sectoral driven that may not necessarily contribute to nation-building.

According to you, how can the HAPPY project enhance the use and quality of qualitative research in the HEIs and Bhutan generally?

First of all, the HAPPY project has already brought together four major Colleges offering programmes in Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Language and Culture, and Business which is commendable. Not many university campuses share similar views and thoughts to venture into joint projects. This was a breakthrough and I congratulate all staff involved in this joint project to come together and share each experience face-to-face. I am aware that this project has reputed and credible team members from European partners with professional backgrounds in Anthropology and Social Sciences. Through mentorship and professional exchange of ideas and knowledge, I am optimistic that the HAPPY project will bring happiness, peace, and prosperity to all collaborators. I only wish that the global COVID19 pandemic is contained sooner and all partners benefit from mobility programmes from both sides.

written by Jamyang Choden

Sensitization for Higher Management

What is the added value for the College of Language and Cultural Studies in investing in Qualitative Research Methodology?

We conducted the interview with Lungtaen Gyatso, President of College of Language and Cultural Studies on what is the added value for CLCS.

Mr. Lungtaen has a Masters degree in Buddhist Studies and an additional Masters degree in Sanskrit Literature. His primary research interest is 'wellbeing and spirituality'. Currently, he teaches Universal Human Values, Personal Transformation, and Buddhism in the College. He co-authored The Light of My Life, English-Dzongkha Dictionary, Dzongkha-English Dictionary and has published several articles on philosophy, language, well-being, and culture.

As head of the institution, what does the HAPPY project, with its focus on qualitative research methodology mean to you?

Our College focus of study is mostly humanities and social sciences, and the kind of research methodology applicable is largely qualitative research methodology. Most of our faculty members have been conducting research mostly using qualitative research methodology. Although they have been applying QRM, they are not formally trained to use the methods and tools of QRM. Since the focus of the HAPPY project is to train all the faculty members in qualitative research methodology, they will be better prepared in using QRM in a more scientific manner, get hands-on skills to apply tools to have a deepened knowledge of society, and its communities, and the issues around them. I believe, they will be able to better connect, appreciate and articulate people's lives and the social phenomena that they are part of

in a more structured way.

How far do you think this project will contribute to the enhancement of qualitative research in particular, and research culture in general in the College?

For a research work to be inclusive and complete, especially research work on humanities and social sciences, researchers need to be thorough with the qualitative research processes starting with theoretical knowledge, tools of qualitative research that largely focuses on design, sampling, data collection and most importantly the analysis so that the research output is substantiated by empirical investigation leading to creative breakthroughs. Once the researchers are well-informed about qualitative research methodology and ensure the right skills which they have been struggling to use without any formal training till now,

after the training on qualitative research methodology, I hope to see tangible transformative shift characterized by authenticity, creativity, and inclusivity in their work, and a strong level of confidence and clarity to make research to the next level. This will also boost their morale ultimately leading to vibrant research culture in the College.

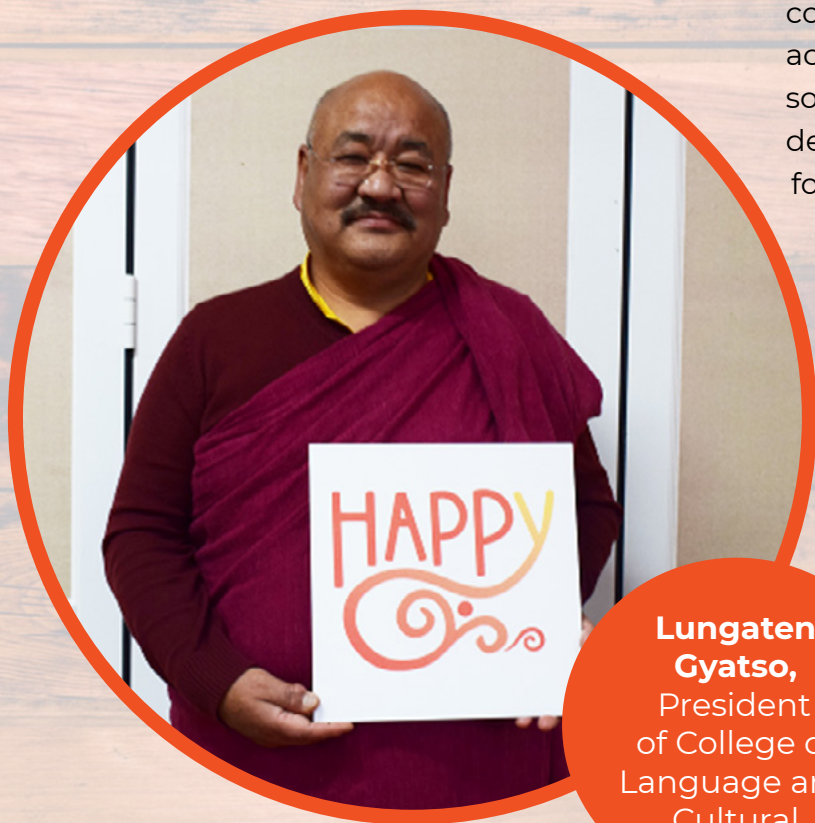
How different do you think the HAPPY project is going to be from other projects the College has handled so far, especially with regard to making immediate impacts at the College level?

The ultimate goal of the HAPPY project is to reach the entire faculty members of the College, and through the well-trained faculty in QRM, I hope to see the knowledge and skills of QRM transferred to the students. Since almost all the faculty members are already engaged in conducting research, training them in qualitative research

methodology will give them the fresh impetus to their motivation and research zeal. So, with the HAPPY project two-fold benefits will be visible; all faculty members will be trained and having a team of well-grounded faculty in QRM will also contribute to enhancing the research knowledge, skills, and culture in the students as well.

What crucial improvements or changes, in particular, do you expect to see after the completion of the project?

This kind of QRM training is happening for the first time. I would like to believe that all our faculty members will have learned the skills of qualitative research methodology through the HAPPY project and apply it in their work. With enhanced knowledge and skill in carrying out qualitative research, the quality and rigor of research output are expected to be much more at CLCS. Hopefully, there will be a heightened level of confidence and a strong sense of academic achievement. As a result, I want to see that some of the research outputs will provide decision-makers the basis and perspectives for developing policy interventions and designing strategies for ensuring social wellbeing. Moreover, their performance in the classroom is expected to be transformative, and create enabling factors in students to carry out research as well. All in all, I hope that the training will also change their performance in teaching and learning. Hopefully, the trained faculty will be able to create a learning environment that enhances analytical and critical thinking in the students.



Lungaten Gyatso,
President
of College of
Language and
Cultural
Studies

written by Jamyang Choden

Research on

Doing research on research turned out to be much more fun and interesting than I anticipated. I used to secretly suspect that I enjoy teaching research and guiding student projects more than I enjoy conducting my own research. However, being part of the team from Royal Thimphu College that took responsibility for the Happy Project needs assessment study reminded me of how much I enjoy doing interviews as well as the pleasure of data analysis in a team setting.

In anticipation of the sensitization and training on qualitative research methods, each of the four Bhutanese colleges involved in the Happy project conducted a needs assessment at their own college. We talked

to the management, faculty, staff, and students to collect information. The idea was to produce a clear picture of where each college stood in terms of knowledge, capacity, experience, and attitudes towards qualitative research methods before planning the next steps. Then, in July we met in person to consolidate our findings, compare our experiences and start to build recommendations for sensitization and training based on our actual ground realities.

I really enjoyed the data collection phase particularly the lively focus groups we had with final year students and alumni. I learned so much that was new and surprising about the experiences and views and aspirations of the people I work with and the students I teach. Making sense of our findings, sitting with the rest of the RTC team to discuss, reflect, compare and debate was equally satisfying. As some-

research

one who has often taught research classes as well as guiding student research projects, this was one of the first times that I spent substantial time deliberately, systematically reflecting on the teaching of research both from the perspective of students as well as the faculty teaching research. I think whatever happens with this project this experience has already helped me to improve the way I teach research by offering new insights and new strategies.

At this stage, between the kick-off and the many online meetings in-between it feels like meeting old friends whenever we get to see our Bhutanese colleagues in person and our European colleagues online, and certainly that was true of the 3 days of data consolidation we had in July. However on the first day as each of the very different colleges attempted to wrangle and explain their data, things felt very chaotic, it was hard to imagine how we could bring it all together. Despite my initial misgivings already by the second day when each college presented their own college's findings there was a growing sense of shared pur-

pose and shared concerns. Some of the emerging common sentiments were certainly a sense of opportunity and optimism as well as a willingness to learn and improve. I think I am not just speaking for myself when I say this workshop has made me eager for what the next stage of the project can offer us as we continue to work towards improving not only our teaching of research but also nurturing and expanding the research culture at each of our colleges.

written by dr. Dolma Choden Roder



Dolma is an associate professor of anthropology with experience in teaching qualitative research methods to undergraduate students.

Basic Training of Teachers (ToT) on QRM

Qualitative research methods allow researchers to investigate the challenges that people face in their everyday lives, the ideas they cherish, their beliefs, and the values which they adhere to. Still, there is a disjuncture between the desire for qualitative research data and the absence of knowledge, skills and technical infrastructure to teach qualitative research methods.

The Basic Training of Teachers (ToT) on QRM took place from 13-17 December 2021 with 37 participants from 4 HEIs. It provided a range of qualitative research methods and was intended to meet the needs of individual institutions and faculty who are working to build this capacity. By strengthening the competencies of academic staff in QRM a first foundation has been created to enable them to teach QRM, to su-

pervise students using QRM, to integrate innovative QRM components into existing courses, and to enable academic staff to carry out research-based consultancies. Phase 2 of this ToT consists of working on a research home assignment. Phase 3 consists of another one-week training which is planned to take place at the end of January 2022.

As a result of the ongoing travel restrictions due to Covid-19, the ToT took place in a 'hybrid form'. This entailed that the Bhutanese participants and local QRM experts gathered together at RTC in Thimphu whereas the international QRM experts participated online. During the morning sessions the participants met and worked on assignments with the assistance of local QRM experts. The afternoon sessions were facilitated by international QRM experts via ZOOM.

"I learnt many new insights on the qualitative research for a beginner like me. I am hopeful that at the end of the workshop I will become a qualitative friendly researcher."
- ToT participant

"I already learnt that qualitative research deals with thick data and explores in-depth knowledge on a phenomenon. Also qualitative research is unpredictable."
-ToT participant

*written by Esther den Hartog,
HAPPY Project Manager*



Milestones & what is still to come

Milestones

19-21st July 2021

Joint consolidation meeting at NRC by Bhutanese partner HEIs to discuss HAPPY baseline needs and assessment.

June & July 2021

Study (via focus group discussions, questionnaire and data collection) to understand the current status of QRM capacity and education at the Bhutanese partner HEIs.

August 2021

QRM Baseline and Need Assessment Report

September 2021

- Beginning of procurement process for QRM related investments
- Beginning of development of Training of Teachers on QRM.

October 2021

- WP Leaders Meeting (online),
- Inventory of topics for Learning Management System (LMS) and development of LMS guidelines,
- FM meeting with institutional coordinator for the first internal financial reporting.

November 2021

- QRM sensitization workshops for Higher Management at RTC in Thimphu
- Establishment of Steering Committee
- Draft Quality Assurance Plan

December 2021

- Basic Training of Teachers in Qualitative Research Methodologies

Still to come

Phase 2 and Phase 3 of Basic ToT in QRM

HAPPY Project Partners:



The Netherlands

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)

<https://www.vu.nl/en/>



Slovenia

Institute for Innovation and Development of University of Ljubljana

<http://iri.uni-lj.si/en/domov-2/>



Bhutan

Sherubtse College

<https://www.sherubtse.edu.bt/>



Bhutan

Norbuling Rigter College

<https://www.nrc.bt/>



Bhutan

Royal Thimphu College

<https://www.rtc.bt/>



The Netherlands

Universiteit Leiden

<https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/>



Bhutan

Royal University of Bhutan

<https://www.rub.edu.bt/index.php/en/>



Slovenia

University of Ljubljana

<https://www.uni-lj.si/eng/>



Bhutan

College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS)

<https://www.clcs.edu.bt/>



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Project reference number: 618793-EPP-1-2020-1-NL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP