

# How Can A Values-Based Leadership Intervention Improve Distributed, Ethical, And Participatory Leadership In Class IX At Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School?

Ms. Phuntsho Lhamo

Education Specialist & Advisor, Ministry of Education, Bhutan, Education

## Abstract

This study examines how a values-based leadership (VBL) intervention can enhance student engagement, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and agency in Bhutanese secondary classrooms. Conducted over five weeks with Class IX students at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School (YHSS), Thimphu, the study employed a qualitative action-research design guided by the Think–Try–Check (TTC) cycle. An insider–outsider partnership involving school leadership and an external advisor co-designed and implemented the intervention to ensure contextual relevance and theoretical rigor. Data were collected using three complementary tools: baseline survey- daily observation logs (student leadership journals), focus group discussions. Thematic analysis, triangulation, and member checking enhanced trustworthiness. Findings indicated improvements in five themes: active engagement, collaborative learning, student agency, ethical responsibility, and GNH-aligned leadership. Students participated more readily when given structured leadership roles, demonstrated greater collaboration and equitable participation, reported increased confidence in proposing ideas and making classroom decisions, and increasingly practised fairness, respect, and conflict resolution. Teachers also reported a shift from control-oriented to facilitative and distributed leadership. Limitations include the single-site context, five-week duration, and predominantly qualitative evidence. The study recommends scaling the intervention, integrating quantitative indicators, and providing sustained professional development. Overall, VBL demonstrates potential to bridge policy aspirations and classroom realities by cultivating competence with conscience in Bhutanese education.

**Keyword:** Values-Based Leadership; Student Empowerment; Student Agency; Student Engagement; Distributed Leadership; Action Research.

## Introduction

The demands of contemporary education extend far beyond the efficient management of schools. In the twenty-first century, education is no longer understood merely as the orderly administration of timetables, examinations, and resources. Rather, it is increasingly seen as the cultivation of holistic human beings who can navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world with both competence and conscience. Leadership, in this sense, cannot be reduced to technical tasks or bureaucratic efficiency. It must embody a vision that is at once academic and moral, pragmatic and philosophical. Leaders in education today are called upon to deliver academic results while also cultivating moral integrity, cultural sensitivity, and a

sense of shared responsibility among all members of the school community (Glickman & Burns, 2020). This dual responsibility highlights an evolving expectation that leadership in schools must balance the pursuit of excellence with the nurturing of values that prepare young people to live meaningful, ethical, and resilient lives.

Globally, this expanded view of leadership reflects deeper concerns about the future of education in an era of social, economic, and environmental uncertainty. International frameworks such as UNESCO's Futures of Education report (UNESCO, 2021) emphasise that education must nurture not only skills and knowledge but also empathy, solidarity, and moral reasoning to ensure sustainable and equitable futures. Leadership that prioritizes only efficiency and examination results risks failing the broader purpose of education in the twenty-first century. Instead, schools are increasingly called upon to be spaces where young people can cultivate values alongside competencies, preparing them to engage as compassionate, ethical, and responsible citizens.

The present study, titled: *How Can A Values-Based Leadership Intervention Improve Distributed, Ethical, And Participatory Leadership in Class IX at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School?* Emerged against this backdrop. It documents and critically analyses a five-week values-based leadership intervention conducted with Class IX students at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School (YHSS) in Thimphu. The intervention was supported by the school Principal, who served as the insider with intimate knowledge of the school's culture, and an external educational specialist / advisor, who contributed comparative perspectives and theoretical insights. This insider–outsider partnership ensured that the intervention remained contextually relevant while also informed by broader academic discourse (Schein, 2017).

The insider's perspective provided sensitivity to the cultural dynamics, expectations, and challenges within the school, while the outsider's role offered opportunities to introduce new frameworks, tools, and comparative insights. Such partnerships have been shown to enrich educational interventions by combining local wisdom with global knowledge, producing initiatives that are both grounded and innovative (Anderson & Herr, 2015).

At its heart, the intervention aimed to bridge the gap between the aspirations of GNH and the compliance-driven realities of Bhutanese classrooms. It sought to create a space where values such as empathy, respect, collaboration, and accountability could be practiced rather than merely preached. The intervention was modest in duration but ambitious in intent: to reimagine the classroom as a space where students are empowered as leaders, where teachers embrace distributed leadership, and where values are lived rather than confined to policy documents.

Students engaged in structured dialogues, collaborative projects, and reflective journaling, all designed to cultivate voice, responsibility, and ethical decision-making. Teachers, meanwhile, experimented with releasing control, inviting student-led facilitation, and modeling ethical leadership in their interactions. Preliminary reflections suggested that students began to articulate stronger ownership of their learning, while teachers reported greater appreciation for distributed leadership practices

### **Problem Statement**

Despite Bhutan's strong emphasis on learner-centred and holistic education, there remains a need to examine how such aspirations are translated into everyday classroom practice. In particular, opportunities for students to exercise voice, participate in decision-making, collaborate with peers, assume responsibility, and demonstrate leadership may remain constrained by teacher-directed instruction, examination pressures, and established hierarchical classroom relationships.

A particular problem is that values-based leadership practices are not always explicitly operationalized within classroom processes in ways that enable students to exercise meaningful voice, responsibility, collaboration, and agency. Values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, fairness, and cooperation may be promoted as desirable educational outcomes, but their translation into concrete classroom practices requires deliberate opportunities for students to participate in decision-making, assume leadership roles, work collaboratively, and reflect on the ethical consequences of their actions.

Research increasingly indicates that student voice is closely connected with student agency, engagement, and shared leadership. Holquist, S. E., Mitra, D. L., Conner, J., & Wright, N. L. (2023) for example, conceptualise student voice as a form of distributed leadership in which students participate in and influence educational decisions. Their framework identifies structures and relationships—including access, roles, and responsiveness—as important conditions for meaningful student voice. Similarly, Conner, J., Mitra, D. L., Holquist, S. E., & Boat, A. (2025) found that classroom practices involving student input and feedback were associated with stronger student engagement and agency, particularly where teachers demonstrated receptivity to students' ideas.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore not simply the absence of values education but the gap between values as educational aspirations and values as lived classroom practices. There is a need to explore how values-based leadership can be operationalized through classroom interactions and pedagogical practices so that students can actively participate, assume responsibility, collaborate with others, and exercise agency.

The present study addresses this gap by examining a five-week values-based leadership intervention with Class IX students at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School. It investigates how classroom practices informed by values-based leadership can enhance student engagement, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and agency.

## **Literature Review**

### **Student Engagement, Voice and Agency**

Student engagement is an important dimension of learner-centred education because meaningful learning requires students to participate actively in the learning process. Engagement involves behavioural participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment. When students are provided with opportunities to make decisions, express their views, and take responsibility for aspects of their learning, they are more likely to develop ownership of the learning process. Recent empirical research strengthens this argument. Conner et al. (2025), using data from 1,751 middle and high school students, found strong associations between teachers' use of student voice practices and student engagement. The study also found that student agency was greater where students perceived teachers as receptive to their ideas. These findings are particularly relevant to the present study because the intervention seeks to move beyond simply asking students for their opinions towards creating classroom conditions in which their contributions are taken seriously and influence classroom practices. Holquist et al. (2023) further argue that student voice can be understood as a form of distributed leadership. Their framework positions students not merely as recipients of educational decisions but as participants who can influence decisions affecting their learning and the wider school community. This provides an important conceptual link between student voice, agency, and the distributed leadership dimension of the present study.

Research also indicates that student voice must be accompanied by meaningful teacher responsiveness. Asking students for their opinions without demonstrating that their contributions matter can undermine rather than strengthen engagement. Conner et al. therefore distinguish between seeking student input and the teacher's receptivity and responsiveness to that input. For the present study, this suggests that operationalizing values-based leadership requires teachers not only to invite student participation but also to create opportunities for students' contributions to influence classroom decisions.

These findings provide a stronger empirical foundation for examining student engagement and agency in the Bhutanese context. They also reinforce the rationale for the intervention at YHSS, where students were provided with opportunities to participate in classroom decision-making, assume responsibilities, collaborate with peers, and reflect on their experiences.

### **Values-Based and Ethical Leadership**

Values-based leadership emphasises the relationship between leadership practice and moral principles. Leadership in educational settings involves more than achieving organisational or academic outcomes; it also involves demonstrating fairness, respect, responsibility, empathy, integrity, and concern for the well-being of others. Recent research on ethical leadership development supports the importance of deliberately developing ethical leadership capabilities. Dean, B. P., Sharma, A., & Sigler, T. H. (2025) examined an evidence-based ethical leadership development initiative and reported positive leadership-development outcomes from a theory-grounded educational intervention. The study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that ethical leadership can be intentionally developed through structured educational experiences rather than treated merely as an assumed personal quality. This perspective is important for the present study because values-based leadership is conceptualised as something that students and teachers **practise**, rather than simply something that schools declare. Ethical responsibility can be developed through everyday classroom practices such as fair allocation of responsibilities, respectful dialogue, listening to others, accepting accountability, resolving disagreements constructively, and considering the consequences of one's actions. Within Bhutan, this ethical dimension can also be connected with the broader aspiration of Gross National Happiness, particularly its emphasis on holistic development, social responsibility, relationships, and collective well-being. The intervention therefore seeks to locate values-based leadership within the everyday relationships and practices of the classroom.

### **Collaborative Learning and Distributed Leadership**

Collaborative learning is closely related to distributed leadership because both involve the sharing of responsibility rather than concentrating authority in a single individual. In collaborative classrooms, students have opportunities to negotiate roles, solve problems collectively, support one another, and contribute to common outcomes. Recent research on distributed leadership similarly conceptualises leadership as a collective rather than exclusively hierarchical process. Li, Z., Liu, W., & Li, Q. (2024) review of distributed leadership in educational contexts identifies shared decision-making, collaborative learning communities, clear responsibilities, communication, and recognition of contributions as important features of distributed leadership.

Research with adolescents has also examined the relationship between distributed leadership and student development. Li et al. (2024) investigated how distributed leadership relates to adolescents' social and emotional competence, including the mediating role of student-centred instructional practices and teacher self-efficacy. This is relevant to the present study because the intervention similarly seeks to connect

leadership practices with student-centred classroom processes. Collaborative learning in the present study is therefore not treated simply as a teaching technique. It is understood as a leadership practice through which responsibility, decision-making, participation, and accountability can be distributed among students and teachers.

### **Student Voice as Distributed Leadership**

The connection between student voice and distributed leadership provides an important theoretical basis for this study. Holquist et al. argued that student voice can be conceptualised as a form of distributed leadership because it involves students participating in decisions that affect their educational experiences. Their framework highlights the importance of both structural conditions and relationships, particularly students' access to decision-making, their roles, and the responsiveness of adults. This perspective strengthens the present study's insider–outsider approach. The intervention does not simply ask whether students enjoyed participating in activities; it examines whether classroom leadership can be redistributed so that students become legitimate participants in shaping aspects of their learning. Recent evidence also demonstrates that student voice has measurable relationships with engagement and agency. Conner et al. found that students who experienced teachers using student voice practices reported stronger engagement and agency, with teacher receptivity emerging as an important condition. Thus, student voice provides a practical mechanism through which values-based leadership can be operationalized. Giving students opportunities to express ideas, make decisions, negotiate responsibilities, and influence classroom practices translates the abstract principle of empowerment into observable classroom practice.

### **Values-Based Leadership in the Bhutanese Context**

The Bhutanese context adds an important dimension to the literature because educational leadership and classroom practice are shaped by national aspirations, cultural values, and established educational structures. The present study therefore does not seek simply to import an international model of values-based leadership. Rather, it explores how broader concepts of values-based, distributed, and student-centred leadership can be interpreted and enacted within a Bhutanese secondary school. Consequently, the present study positions values-based leadership as a bridge between educational aspirations and classroom realities. Engagement, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and agency are not treated as independent outcomes but as interconnected dimensions through which values-based leadership may be experienced and enacted in the classroom.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a qualitative action research design because the purpose was to investigate an existing classroom practice while simultaneously introducing and reflecting upon an intervention intended to improve that practice. Action research is particularly appropriate when the researcher is concerned with practical educational change and when participants are involved in examining and transforming their own practices. Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) describe action research as a participatory and reflective form of inquiry concerned with improving educational practices through collaborative investigation.

The choice of action research is also appropriate within the Bhutanese context. Rabgay and Kidman (2023), in their investigation of action research among Bhutanese secondary science teachers, found that teachers moved back and forth between phases of inquiry rather than following a strictly linear cycle.

Their findings demonstrate the importance of treating action research as an iterative and reflective process within authentic school settings.

### **Think–Try–Check Framework**

The study was organised using the Think–Try–Check (TTC) framework (Cheng, 2015). The framework was selected because it provides a practical structure for examining an existing situation, introducing an alternative practice, and examining evidence generated through the intervention. It also complements the reflective and iterative character of action research.

During the Think phase, the insider and outsider researchers examined the existing classroom situation and identified concerns relating to student engagement, agency, participation, collaboration, and classroom leadership. This stage enabled the researchers to combine contextual knowledge of the school with an external perspective. During the Try phase, the researchers implemented the values-based leadership intervention with Class IX students over five weeks. The intervention created opportunities for students to participate in classroom decision-making, undertake leadership responsibilities, collaborate with peers, engage in reflective activities, and exercise greater ownership of learning. During the Check phase, evidence from the intervention was examined to determine how classroom practices and student experiences had changed. Reflection on this evidence provided the basis for understanding what appeared to work, what remained problematic, and what might require further modification. The TTC framework was therefore not treated as a rigid sequence. Consistent with the findings of (Cheng, 2015), the researchers remained open to revisiting earlier decisions as new evidence emerged during implementation.

### **Insider–Outsider Positioning**

The study adopted an insider–outsider approach because the research problem is closely connected with the culture and everyday practices of the school. The Principal served as the insider researcher, bringing knowledge of the institutional context, school culture, teachers, and students. The external educational advisor served as the outsider, providing an alternative perspective and opportunities for critical examination of assumptions and practices. This positioning was particularly appropriate because values-based leadership requires attention to both contextual meaning and critical reflection. The insider perspective helped ensure that the intervention was culturally and institutionally relevant, while the outsider perspective helped question taken-for-granted practices and provide a degree of critical distance. The combination of insider and outsider perspectives also strengthened the credibility of the inquiry by allowing interpretations to be discussed and examined from different positions rather than being generated exclusively from a single perspective.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted at Yangchenphug Higher Secondary School in Thimphu with Class IX students. Class IX was purposively selected because students at this stage of adolescence are increasingly developing autonomy while simultaneously experiencing significant academic expectations. A total of 70 students from two sections participated in the intervention. Two subject teachers, the school Principal as insider researcher, and an external educational advisor as outsider researcher were also involved. The participants were selected because they were directly connected with the classroom context in which the problem was identified and the intervention was implemented. This purposive selection is consistent with

the action research orientation of the study, where the purpose is to understand and improve a particular practice rather than to produce statistically generalisable findings.

## Data Collection Methods and Their Justification

Multiple qualitative data sources were used because no single source could adequately capture the complex dimensions of values-based leadership, student engagement, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and agency. Multiple sources enabled the researchers to compare what was observed in the classroom with what participants recorded or reported about their experiences. Classroom observations were used to document changes in student participation, interaction, leadership behaviour, collaboration, and teacher–student relationships. Observation was appropriate because several of the outcomes under investigation involve visible classroom behaviours that may not be fully captured through participant self-report. Reflective journals were used to provide evidence of participants' experiences and reflections during the intervention. Reflection is central to action research because it allows participants and researchers to examine not only what happened but also how they interpreted the changes taking place. The use of reflective processes is consistent with the participatory and reflective foundations of action research. The use of these complementary sources enabled triangulation, whereby evidence from observation, reflection, and participant perspectives could be compared to identify convergence, divergence, and changes across the intervention. Rather than relying on a single measure of improvement, the study therefore considered multiple forms of evidence to develop a more credible interpretation of the intervention.

## Data Analysis

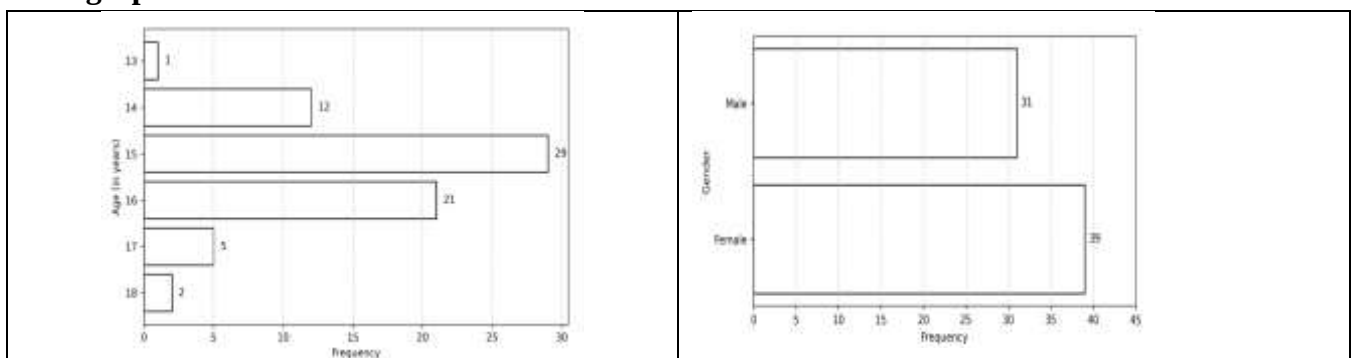
The qualitative data generated from survey, observations and reflective journals. The analysis involved organising the data, identifying recurring patterns, coding meaningful segments, and developing themes related to the four central dimensions of the study: student engagement, ethical responsibility, collaboration, and agency.

The analysis was undertaken iteratively so that emerging interpretations could be compared across different data sources. Evidence that converged across observations, reflections, and participant accounts was considered particularly useful in understanding changes associated with the intervention, while contradictory evidence was retained for critical reflection rather than being discarded.

This approach is consistent with the action research orientation of the study, in which analysis is not separated completely from reflection and action. Instead, evidence from one stage informs interpretation and subsequent decisions.

## Findings, Limitations, Suggestions, and Conclusions

### Demographic Studies



## Age and Gender Distribution

The sample comprised 70 participants, with ages ranging from 13 to 18 years. Age 15 had the highest representation (29 participants; 41.4%), followed by age 16 (21; 30.0%) and age 14 (12; 17.1%). Participants aged 17 accounted for 5 (7.1%), while ages 18 and 13 had the lowest representation, with 2 (2.9%) and 1 (1.4%), respectively. Thus, the sample was concentrated predominantly among 15- and 16-year-olds (71.4%).

Gender distribution showed a relatively modest difference, with 39 females (55.7%) and 31 males (44.3%). Females therefore outnumbered males by 8 participants (11.4 percentage points).

The sample was predominantly composed of mid-adolescents, particularly those aged 15 and 16, with relatively few participants at the youngest and oldest ages. The gender distribution was comparatively balanced, although females were slightly more represented. Given that the committee noted that the graphical presentation conveys information that could be more efficiently presented in a table, a frequency and percentage table would provide a clearer and more precise presentation of the demographic distribution.

## A. STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

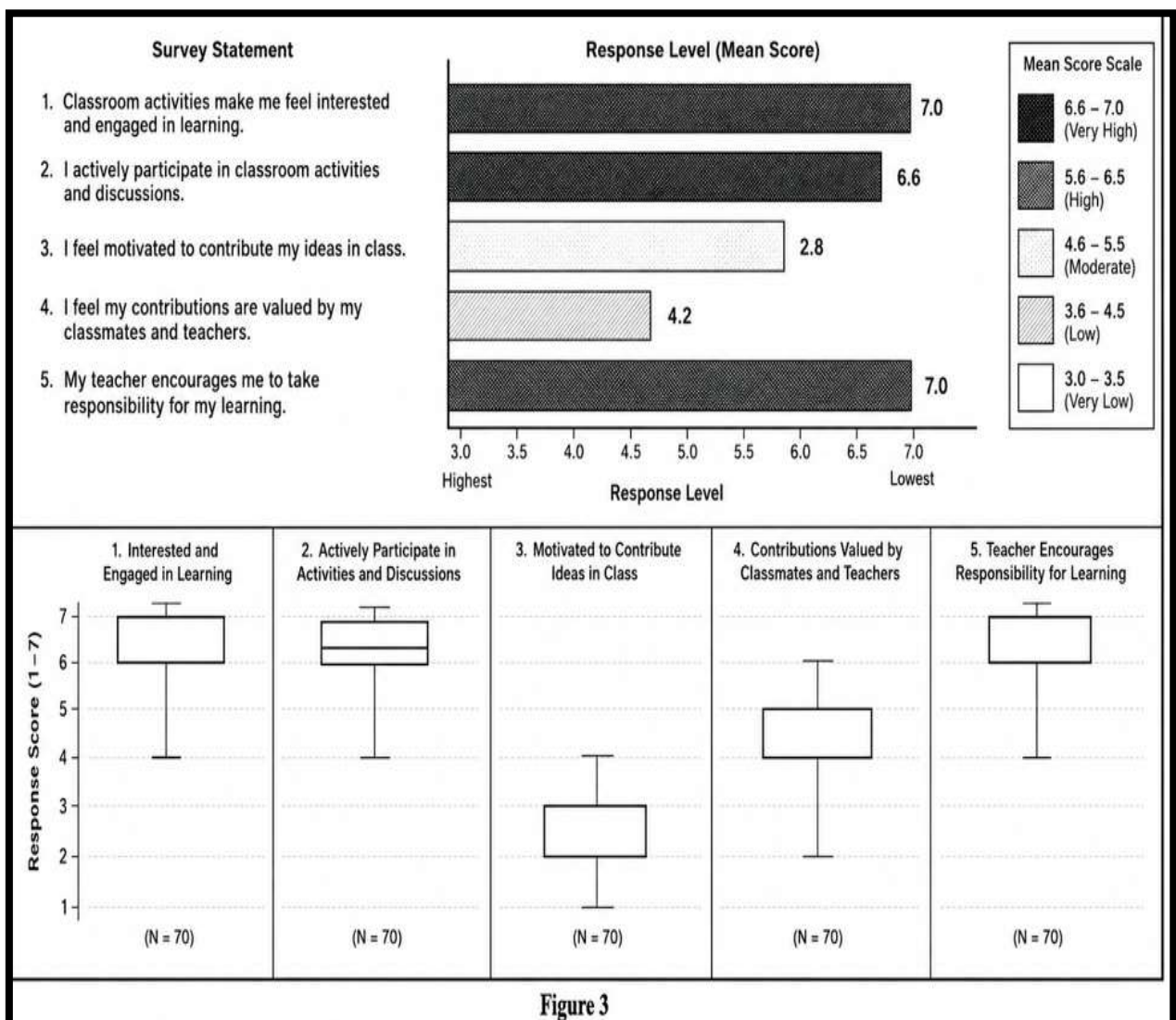


Figure 3

Figure 3 integrates mean scores and boxplots to illustrate students' perceptions of classroom engagement and leadership after the intervention. The five statements show a mixed pattern. Students rated classroom activities as highly engaging ( $M = 7.0$ ) and reported strong participation in activities and discussions ( $M = 6.6$ ). Teacher encouragement to take responsibility for learning also received the highest rating ( $M = 7.0$ ), indicating strong perceptions of teacher support. However, motivation to contribute ideas in class was considerably lower ( $M = 2.8$ ), while feeling that contributions were valued by classmates and teachers was moderate ( $M = 4.2$ ). This suggests that although students were interested, participated actively, and perceived strong teacher encouragement, they remained relatively hesitant to express their own ideas. The boxplots reinforce these patterns. Responses for engagement, participation, and teacher encouragement were concentrated at higher levels, whereas motivation to contribute ideas showed lower and more varied responses. Perceptions of whether contributions were valued also demonstrated considerable variability, suggesting differences among students. Overall, the findings reveal a gap **between** being engaged in classroom activities and confidently expressing one's ideas, highlighting an important area for values-based leadership intervention. Although the survey was administered both before and after the intervention, Figure 3 presents and interprets only the post-intervention results.

## B. ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

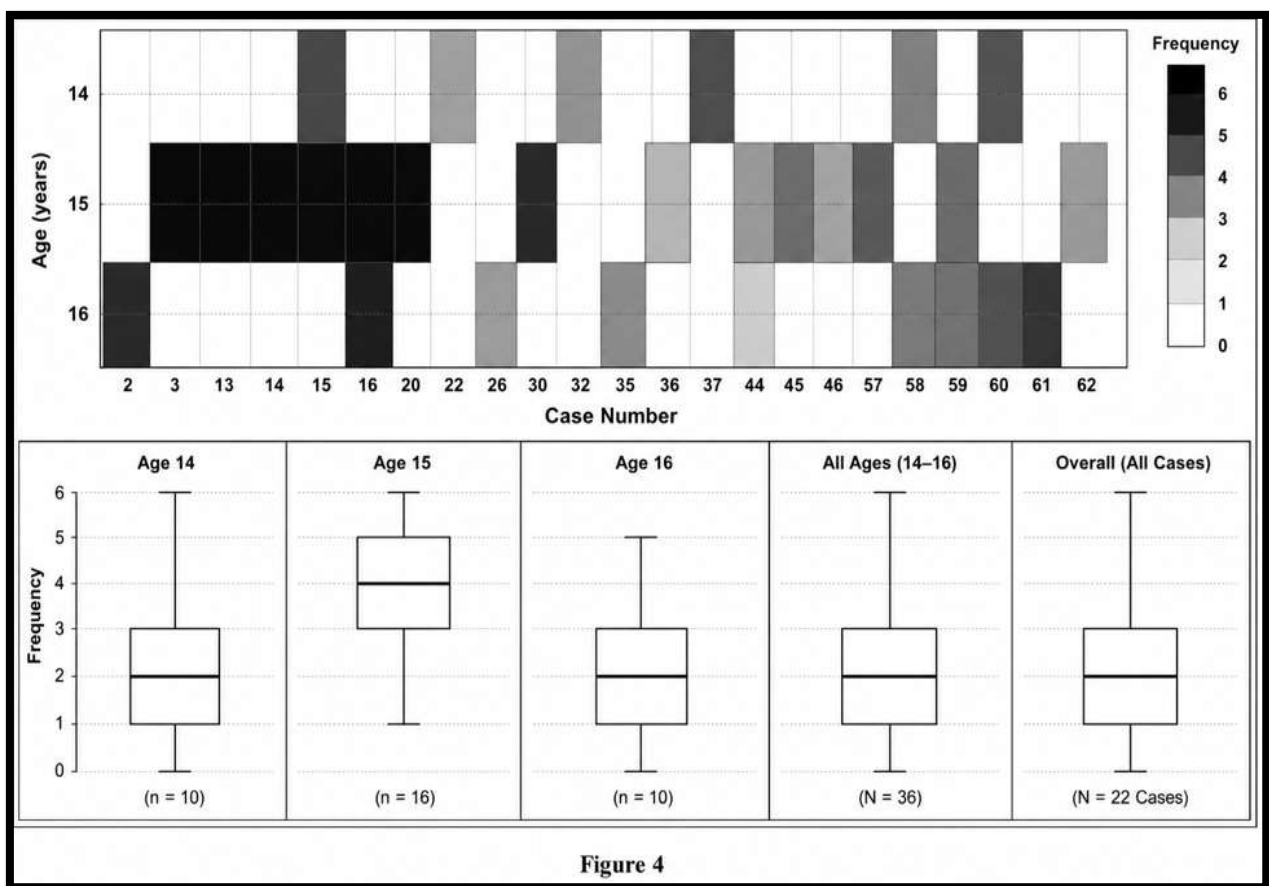


Figure 4

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of cases across ages 14–16 and case numbers, with the greatest concentration occurring among 15- and 16-year-olds. Deep dark areas are particularly evident across cases 2–16 and around cases 30–32, indicating higher concentrations, with age 15 showing the most consistent clustering. In contrast, age 14 is less represented, as reflected by the sparse and lighter areas. From

approximately cases 44–62, patterns appear more continuously across ages 15 and 16, suggesting steadier mid-level concentrations than the sharper peaks observed in earlier cases.

The accompanying boxplots further demonstrate variability in the distribution. Some subsets show relatively tight clustering, whereas others display greater spread and identifiable outliers. Overall, the figure indicates that ages 15 and 16 constitute the dominant age groups, while the distribution across cases is uneven, comprising both concentrated clusters and more consistent patterns across later cases.

## C. COLLOBORATIVE LEARNING

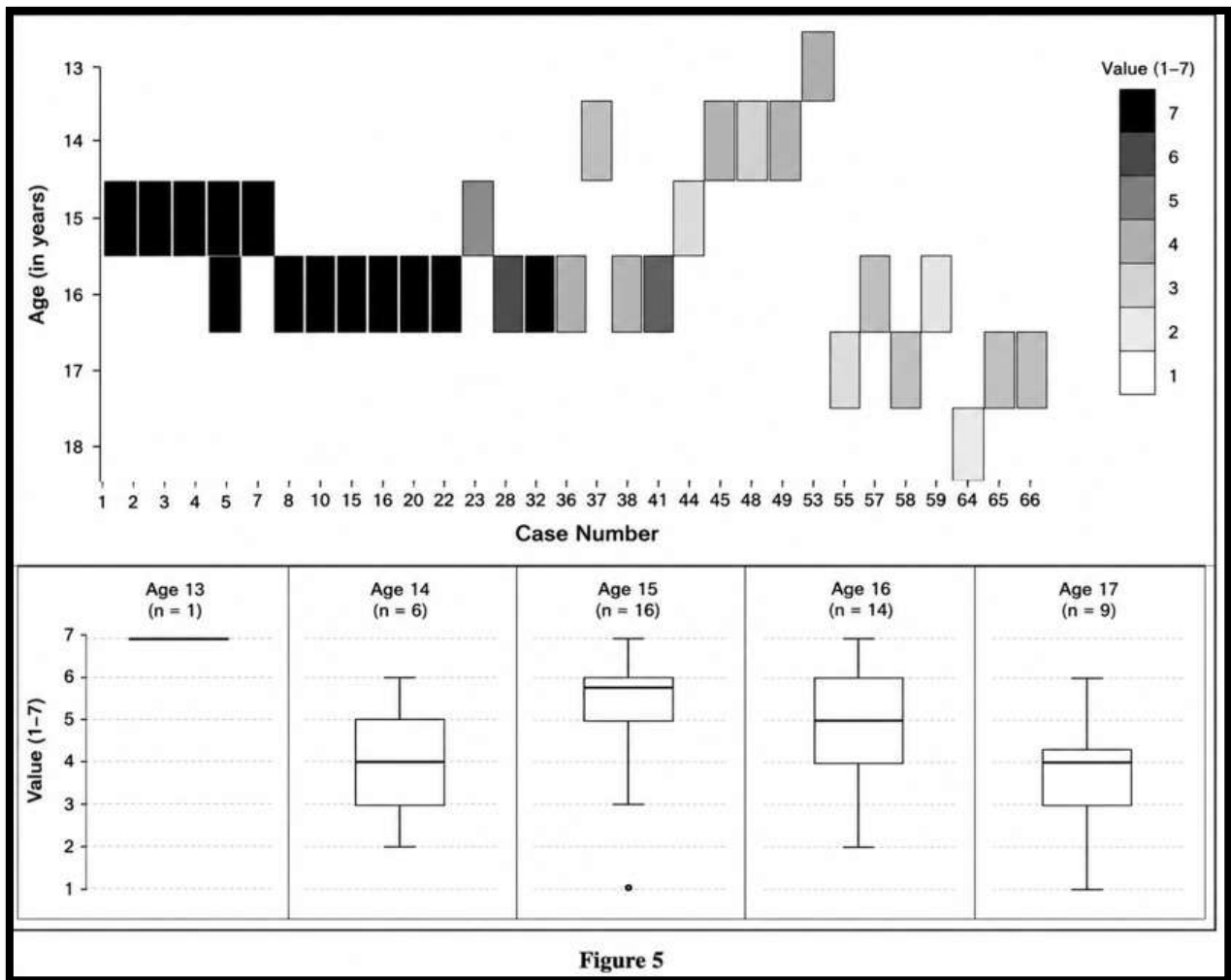


Figure 5 shows a concentration of high values (6–7) among students aged 15 and 16, particularly across early case numbers such as 1, 5, 8, 10, 16, and 22. This creates a clear band of higher ratings, suggesting that mid-adolescents report more positive experiences with group work, peer collaboration, and teacher encouragement. In contrast, lower values (1–3) are more evident among older adolescents aged 17–18, particularly in cases 44, 48, 49, 53, 59, and 64. Moderate ratings (4–5) occur in several cases, including 28, 36, and 57, indicating variation in students’ experiences of collaborative learning.

The boxplots reinforce these patterns by showing differences in the distribution and variability of responses across age groups. Some groups have relatively narrow interquartile ranges and higher medians, indicating greater consistency in positive responses, whereas others show wider distributions and outliers, reflecting more heterogeneous experiences.

The findings suggest that group learning is particularly positively experienced among students aged 15–16, while responses among older students are more varied and generally lower. This highlights the potential value of age-sensitive pedagogical planning, combining collaborative approaches with increasing opportunities for autonomy and self-directed learning as students' progress through adolescence.

## D. STUDENT VOICE AND AGENCY

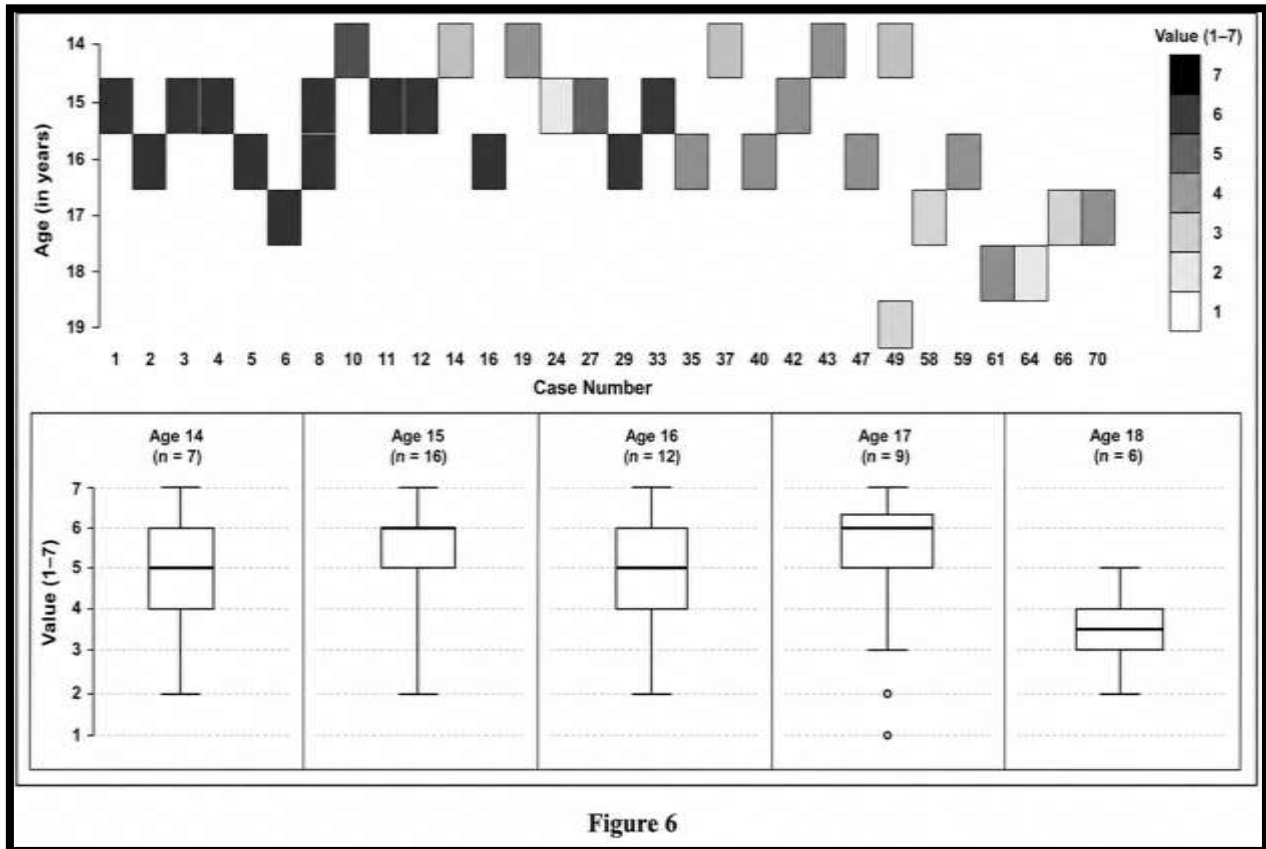


Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of cases across ages 14–19, with darker concentrations at ages 15–16, indicating greater clustering during mid-adolescence. The pattern suggests that this age group represents an important stage in which academic, social, and developmental challenges may become more pronounced. Earlier concentrations at ages 14–15 may indicate the emergence of difficulties during this period, whereas the lighter and more dispersed patterns at ages 17–19 suggest comparatively lower and less concentrated values.

The boxplots complement the heatmap by demonstrating variability across age groups. Differences in interquartile ranges indicate that students' experiences are not uniform, while the presence of outliers points to individuals whose experiences differ substantially from the broader pattern. In some groups, medians are positioned toward the higher end of the scale, suggesting a tendency toward elevated values. Taken together, the map and boxplots indicate that ages 15–16 show the strongest concentration of cases, while considerable individual variation exists within age groups. This finding indicates that targeted support may be particularly relevant during ages 15–16, with preventive measures beginning earlier. The variability also highlights the need for age-sensitive and individualized approaches that respond to both common patterns and students with distinctive needs.

## E. VALUE BASED LEADERSHIP

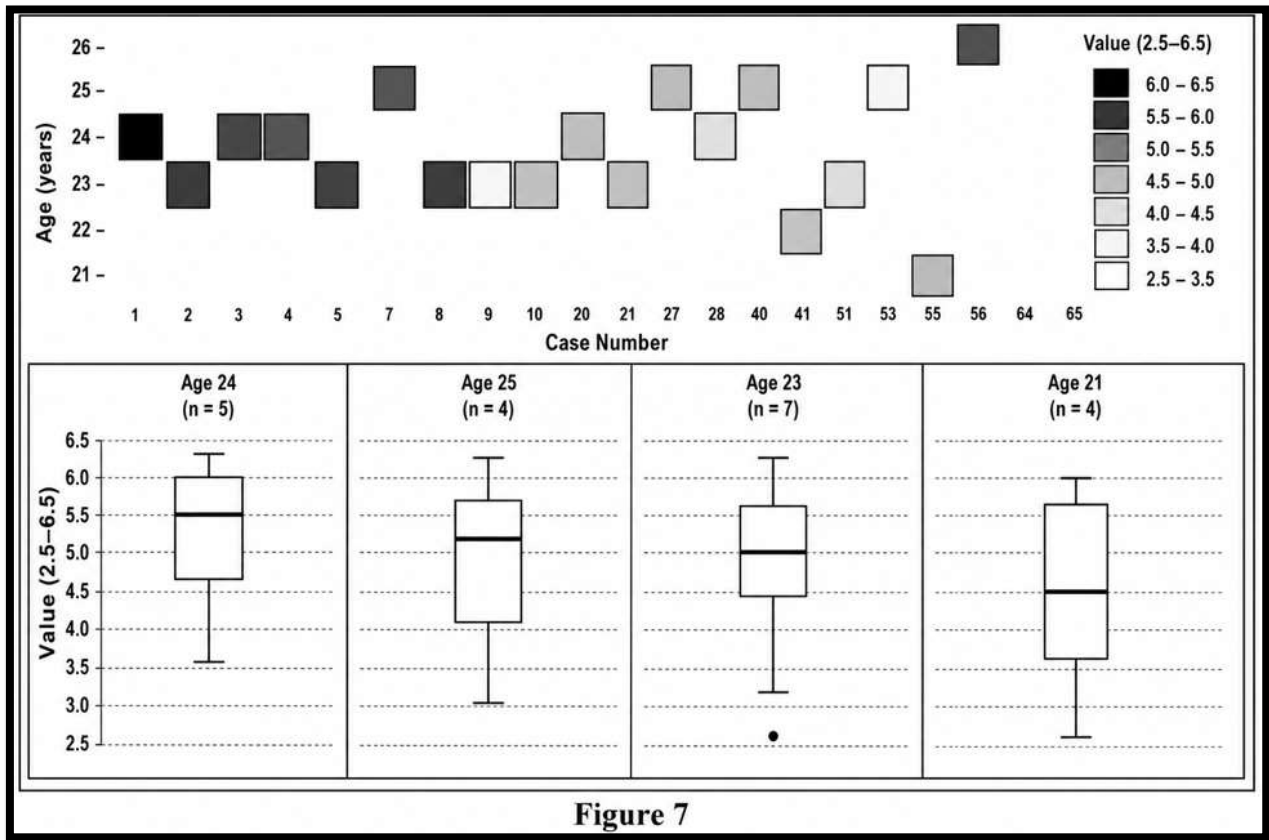


Figure 7

The Figure 7 in the upper panel provides a clear visualisation of how case numbers are distributed across different age groups, with intensity represented by color shading. Darker shades denote higher values, concentrated mostly among 15–16-year-olds, indicating that this age group is more frequently associated with the measured phenomenon. The lighter shades, especially among older adolescents, suggest a lower frequency or lesser concentration. This clustering pattern points to a developmental stage where adolescents are more vulnerable or more actively engaged, making it a crucial age bracket for intervention. The box plots below further complement the map by presenting the spread, central tendency, and variability across different dimensions or indicators. They show the median values, interquartile ranges, and the presence of outliers. For example, some box plots appear tighter, suggesting consistency in responses, while others are more spread out, pointing to variation among participants. Together, they highlight which dimensions are stable across the group and which demonstrate divergence, offering insights into where variability in experience or perception is strongest.

## NARRATIVES: QUALITATIVE STUDIES

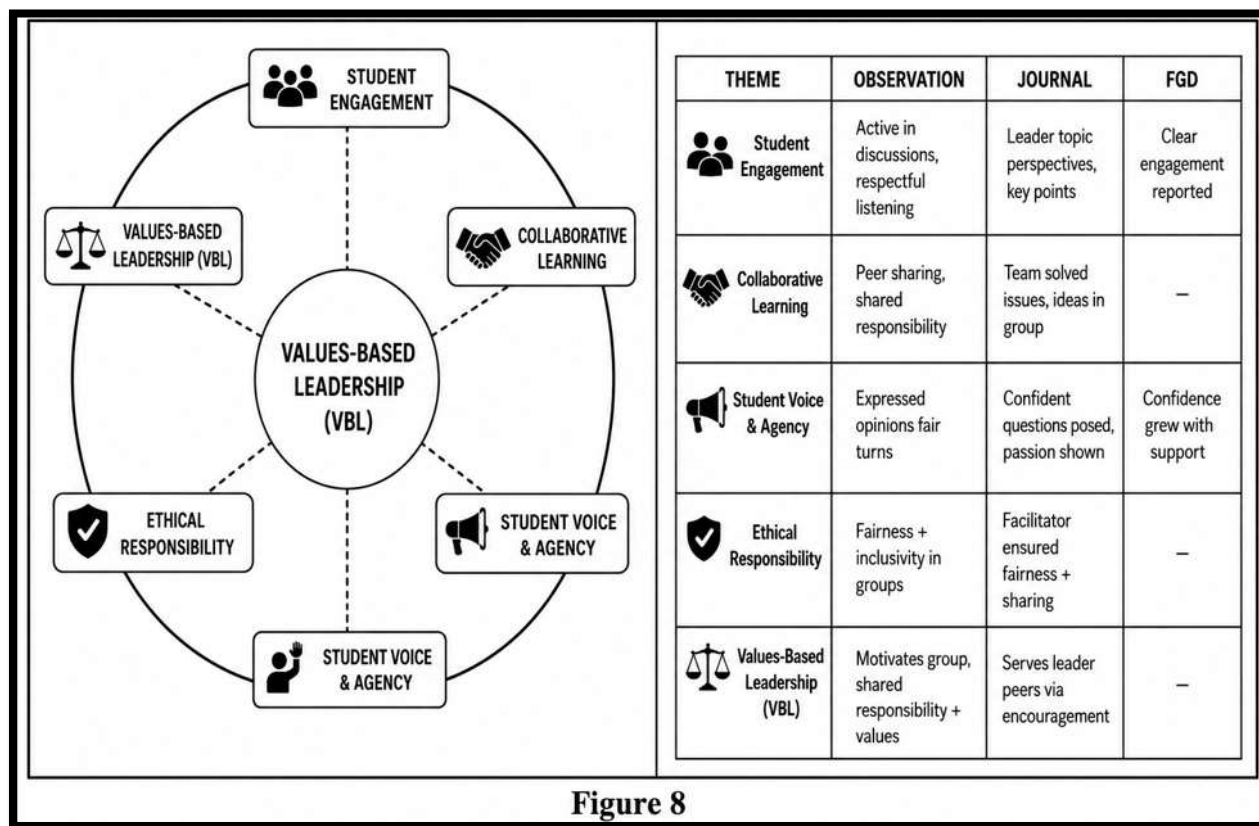


Figure 8 presents two complementary illustrations of values-based leadership (VBL). The first is a thematic wheel with VBL at the centre, surrounded by Student Engagement, Collaborative Learning, Student Voice and Agency, Ethical Responsibility, and GNH-Aligned Leadership. The circular structure represents the interdependence of these dimensions, suggesting that leadership is dynamic, holistic, and value-driven rather than linear. It also situates leadership within Bhutanese cultural and GNH principles, linking classroom practice with collective well-being.

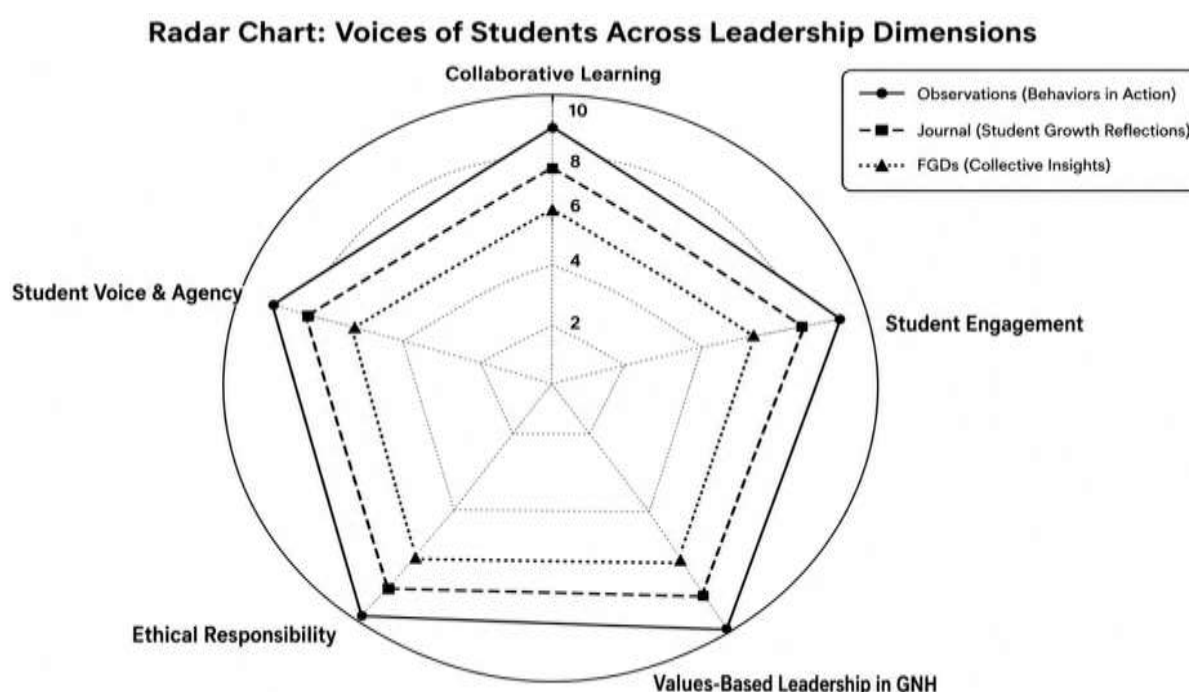
The second illustration translates these themes into evidence-based findings through triangulation of observations, journals and focus group discussions. Student engagement was reflected in active participation and supportive behaviour; collaborative learning through peer sharing, accountability, and cooperation; and student voice and agency through confidence, expression of ideas, and participation in decision-making. Ethical responsibility emerged through fairness, honesty, respect, and inclusive practices, while VBL was reflected in service, shared responsibility, encouragement, and cultural values. The Key Insights/Implications column synthesizes these findings, highlighting agency through recognition, collaboration through shared responsibility, and leadership through inclusivity and ethical practice. Together, the two illustrations demonstrate how VBL themes were translated into classroom practices and supported through multiple sources of evidence, thereby connecting values, leadership, student development, and Bhutanese cultural context.

## INTERVENTION

Importantly, the intervention was implemented after the initial survey, enabling it to directly address identified needs and gaps and align strategies with student voices and contextual realities. The intervention demonstrated that values-based leadership can be embedded in classrooms through structured frameworks

such as Leadership for Learning (LfL). Students showed improvements in engagement, collaboration, and ethical responsibility, reflected in both classroom behaviours and reflective accounts. Teachers also gained confidence in facilitating shared leadership, contributing to a shift from authority-centred to learner-centred classroom practices.

Findings from multiple instruments provided triangulated evidence. Observation Logs captured active participation and leadership roles, while Student Leadership Journals documented growth in agency and confidence. Focus Group Discussions highlighted peer collaboration and ethical responsibility confirmed trust, accountability, and shared responsibility. It captured immediate reflections linking daily practices with broader values. Collectively, these sources converged around five themes: active engagement, collaborative learning, student agency, ethical responsibility, and GNH-aligned leadership, demonstrating the relevance of values-based leadership in Bhutanese classrooms.



## F1. Student Engagement

Observation logs showed active participation, particularly when discussions addressed relevant issues such as environmental sustainability. Students confidently led discussions and responded respectfully to peers. Journals indicated enjoyment of leadership but also awareness of the challenge of engaging quieter classmates. Focus group discussions (FGDs) emphasized that clear facilitation and equal opportunities increased participation, while exit slips confirmed stronger engagement when students assumed leadership roles. Peer feedback similarly indicated high levels of active contribution and communication. Together, the evidence suggests that values-based leadership fostered inclusive engagement.

## F2. Collaborative Learning

Observation logs documented students acting as peer tutors and supporting classmates. Journals indicated that teaching others strengthened their own understanding. FGDs highlighted mutual support, clear task-sharing, and peer encouragement as important for successful group work. Exit slips recorded students contributing to group success and ensuring equitable participation. Peer feedback recognized students who

supported others and resolved conflicts. The evidence indicates that collaborative learning developed from teacher-directed activity into a student-driven practice based on responsibility and care.

### **F3. Student Voice & Agency**

Students demonstrated agency by proposing creative ideas and assuming roles such as Project Coordinators. Journals reflected increased confidence alongside awareness of responsibility for motivating peers and planning activities. FGDs indicated that supportive teachers and recognition of student ideas strengthened confidence. Exit slips connected agency with values and leadership, while peer feedback recognized creativity and constructive suggestions. Thus, student voice extended beyond formal leadership roles into everyday classroom practices.

### **F4. Ethical Responsibility**

Observation notes documented fairness, respect, turn-taking, and diplomatic conflict resolution. Journals emphasized that fairness builds trust, while FGDs identified respect and honesty as essential leadership qualities. Peer feedback confirmed students' ability to listen, respect different opinions, and resolve conflicts. Exit slips further showed that leadership required balancing fairness with responsibility, indicating growing ethical awareness.

### **F5. Values-Based Leadership**

Students demonstrated values-based leadership through culturally rooted practices, including leading morning prayers. Journals showed increasing confidence and reflection on future leadership. FGDs connected leadership with Bhutanese values of inclusivity, respect, and collective responsibility. Exit slips linked classroom leadership experiences with GNH principles, while peer feedback recognized inclusive and encouraging leadership. Overall, VBL was embedded in students' cultural, ethical, and academic responsibilities.

### **Limitations**

Three limitations should be considered. First, the study was conducted at YHSS only, so the findings cannot automatically be generalized to other Bhutanese schools with different students, teachers, and school cultures. Second, the intervention lasted only five weeks. This was sufficient to observe immediate changes, but not to determine whether these changes would be sustained over a longer period. Third, although multiple qualitative tools provided rich and triangulated evidence, the study relied predominantly on qualitative data. Future research could strengthen the evidence through larger samples and quantitative indicators.

### **Recommendations**

Future interventions should first be extended to multiple schools and grade levels to examine whether VBL is transferable across different educational contexts. Second, future studies should combine qualitative evidence with quantitative indicators such as attendance, academic performance, behaviour, and pre- and post-intervention measures. This would provide stronger evidence of change and allow more meaningful comparison across contexts.

Finally, sustained professional development is needed if distributed and values-based leadership is to become part of everyday classroom practice. Workshops alone may not be sufficient; teachers would benefit from ongoing mentoring, peer reflection, collaborative planning, and opportunities to examine their own leadership practices. Taken together, these recommendations provide a practical pathway for

strengthening and sustaining VBL in Bhutanese education while retaining its cultural and contextual relevance.

## Conclusion

This study found that values-based leadership (VBL) can support a more participatory, ethical, and collaborative classroom environment when leadership opportunities are deliberately shared with students. Following the intervention, students demonstrated greater engagement, collaboration, agency, and ethical responsibility. The findings also suggest that students responded positively when teachers moved beyond directing classroom activities and created opportunities for learners to lead, contribute ideas, support peers, and participate in decision-making. In this sense, leadership became part of everyday classroom practice rather than remaining a responsibility reserved for teachers or formally appointed student leaders.

An important feature of the study was the insider–outsider partnership. The involvement of school-based leadership alongside an external perspective allowed the intervention to remain grounded in the realities of the classroom while encouraging reflection on leadership practice. This collaborative arrangement also reflected the values promoted by the intervention itself: shared responsibility, dialogue, trust, and mutual respect. The emphasis on GNH-aligned values further gave the intervention cultural relevance by connecting leadership with inclusivity, respect, responsibility, and collective well-being.

The findings should, however, be understood alongside the existing literature on distributed and values-based leadership. The observed movement from teacher-controlled practice towards shared leadership is consistent with the broader argument that leadership can be developed through participation, relationships, and shared responsibility. Similarly, the improvements in student voice, collaboration, and ethical behaviour support the view that leadership development is not separate from learning but can be embedded within ordinary classroom interactions. The present study adds a Bhutanese classroom perspective to these discussions by showing how such practices can be connected with local values and GNH.

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