

## The Value of Research Culture in Bhutan

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# Introduction

The Druk Journal contributes to Bhutan's growth as a democracy and as a modern nation. It is a vibrant public space in which we encourage our contributors to expand our national discourse by introducing new ideas and concepts into the Bhutanese conversation.

Through regular publications, an interactive website, and open discussions after each edition, we engage Bhutanese society in conversation so that all citizens can exchange open and frank views on national policies and issues relevant to Bhutan.

The Druk Journal hopes, not only to inform citizens, but to build a community of people who will take an active role, as individuals and as a community, in the development of analytical attitudes toward national policies. It is our hope that participation in such a community will encourage individuals to engage in policy research that can be made available to the government and larger Bhutanese society.

The Druk Journal thus serves as a vehicle for the development of a society which is concerned about national issues and want to participate in the development of policy by thinking publicly and through conversation. Such a community of thinkers will also draw on the experience of other countries in those areas of political, social, economic and cultural experimentation that are relevant to our own concerns.

The Druk Journal is a nonpartisan publication. Our purpose is to serve the national interest through the development of serious conversation on issues from every possible constructive point of view. We have no editorial position of our own. We believe that our stated objectives and the means we will use to achieve them are the best way in which we can serve our country and His Majesty The King.

We invite all interested citizens and friends of Bhutan to join us. We wish you Good Reading, Good Thinking, and Good Conversation.



## Editorial

### **Educating Bhutan – Nurturing a Society That Learns to Learn**

The theme for the Spring, 2019, issue of The Druk Journal reflects the long-term vision provided for Bhutan’s growth by His Majesty the King. On education, His Majesty said:

“...as I serve my country, I have a number of priorities. Number one on my list is education. Education is empowering - it’s a social equaliser and it facilitates self-discovery, which leads to realising ones full potential. Good education gives you confidence, good judgment, virtuous disposition, and the tools to achieve happiness successfully... That’s why I believe in education.”

When 2015 was declared “National Reading Year” in Bhutan, His Majesty advised students:

“Look for knowledge beyond your textbooks... You must look beyond the education you receive in school – a degree alone is not enough. To be a knowledgeable person, the pursuit of knowledge must be life-long.”

This issue of The Druk Journal looks at education beyond the formal education system, beyond qualification – at the broader concept of knowledge and learning. We are looking at education, not just as preparation for jobs or even for life but, perhaps, as the purpose of life itself.

There are many questions to be asked and many are being asked in different sections of our society about the education system and about educating Bhutanese for personal and professional development and growth as well as for the future of the country. There are also many experiments like the central school system, free education up to Class XII, new colleges being announced, Bhutanese going overseas to study/work. These ideas and initiatives are also raising more questions than answers.

This is a critical time to think about the education of Bhutanese society. A new government has taken the helm and appears to be in a “questioning” and “thinking” and “searching” mode. Thus the focus of this issue is

on education. We want to ask Bhutanese society, as a whole, to think honestly and openly and deeply about learning, within and beyond the education system.

Is the current thinking on education too narrow in its concept and the objectives too short term? Are we devoting our attention to just preparing to be competitive economically in the world market? Has this been “incarnated” in the emphasis on Mathematics and English in the education curriculum? That is to say, is the education curriculum derived from a primary premise that the purpose of education is to prepare the students for the market?

Such a premise has validity, but not long-term or profound validity. It is a necessary but not sufficient expression of what education is about. It assumes, in actual fact, that GNP takes primacy over GNH in education although we are yet to understand “GNH education”. GNH has become secondary to Economics and Math, on the one hand and, on the other hand, we have thought of it as sets of courses rather than as a holistic vision from which we can derive courses.

Bhutan needs, not just the skills necessary for individual survival or for attempting to improve our GDP numbers (Math and English, competitive skills). We need to start from the knowledge that is necessary to establish that Bhutanese identity which will prepare the nation for its long-term survival and to impart the knowledge and wisdom that are necessary for the survival of all sentient beings in an era when that is coming into question and this includes, of course, the survival of the nation in an era and a place where environmental change threatens the nation’s existence. This encompasses history, environmental studies defined in a uniquely Bhutanese way, the social and humanistic sciences.

This argument does not, in any way, preclude or diminish the importance of English and Math. But it argues that we need to think of the educational programme holistically, not in terms of courses, but with a vision which will then find its immediate expression in courses. What we are now doing is piling up courses and thinking that somehow there is a national vision to be found from the list. And that is where we have failed because that is not possible.

The content of this issue will, broadly, be in two parts. The first part aims to encourage policy formulation for the future. Here the articles should be more theoretical and visionary. It will be “education for a GNH society” in a real sense, not the adhoc experiments that we have conducted so far. We will argue that Bhutanese education needs to be envisaged not just in terms of immediate economic competition and GNP. It needs to be envisaged in a long-term perspective - what kind of nation do we want to be in 50 years or in 100 years and how do we need to fashion our educational programme today to reach the vision that we have?

We will discuss the need for History, the Social Sciences, Humanities, as a programme constitutive of our national and social future. We will discuss Buddhist education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century... what the purpose of Buddhist education in Bhutan should be, how should that be accomplished and why. And we will discuss “social education”, ranging from non-formal education to adult education to education outside of the formal school and university system, and how that will contribute to the vision of the future of the nation.

The second part of the issue is a critical analysis of where we are today... “Bhutanese education today”. The articles here will look at the absence of a research culture in Bhutan, tertiary education and the role of RUB, politics and education, skills versus academics, education through media and ICT, a case of world’s best learning traditions (Finland).

We are inviting thinkers and writers to share their ideas... What is the purpose of learning? What should we learn? What are methods of learning? What does Bhutanese society need? Parenting and upbringing. Traditional and conventional schools. Vocational training and institutions. Skills versus academics. Aptitudes and attitudes of young Bhutanese.

# Buddhist Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*Lopen Lungtaen Gyatso*

## Introduction

The world has seen unprecedented progress in the fields of science and technology, transforming life on a scale unimaginable a few decades ago. Nations across the globe are exploring ways to enhance human life and experience through innovative economic and social activities. Universities and other educational institutions are either investing heavily in hard-core science and technology to create powerful economic engines, or investing in soft sciences to run the economic engine. Today, success is determined largely by the ability to contribute towards economic and physical growth and, therefore, money is deemed the absolute power. Because of enhanced economic growth, a substantial percentage of the world's population enjoys physical comforts and conveniences never even imagined in the past.

On the other hand, there is an increase in human conflict and human crises at all levels. Just as there are individual problems in a family such as lack of trust, disrespect, debt, prejudice, bullying, oppression, exploitation, domination, sanctions, and impositions, nations too are experiencing the same problems, albeit on a larger scale. These days, many countries are targets of terrorism, violence, crime, drugs and human trafficking. In reality, we are in a world of crises in every sense that we can possibly imagine: environmentally, socially, politically, and spiritually.

Thus, there is an immense need for a holistic solution that can address many of the world's crises. Since the majority of the man-made crises are created by the human mind, the only solution is to educate the mind. This article aims to inform and provoke policy makers to think of alternative approaches to educating the mind by introducing Buddhist education that is relevant to the times we are living in.

## Purpose of Life

The natural state of the mind is pure consciousness which is the Buddha nature that is intrinsic to all beings. The Buddha said that happiness is intrinsic in nature and suffering is purely our creation - it does not exist if we do not create it. So we should turn inwards and shut down the manufacturing unit of suffering. For most of us life revolves around our jobs, our families, our businesses, status, authority, power, careers, wealth, and how to win. In the process we forget the very reason for our existence. The purpose is to live a full life, not a life filled with stress and discord.

## Purpose of Education

Educationists, social scientists, and thinkers from all religions and belief systems are beginning to see that there is a need to re-evaluate the very purpose of education. Different societies have defined the purpose of education in various ways but the general consensus seems to be to broaden the horizons of human perception and “to bring people to as full a realisation as possible of what it is to be a human being.”<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, education is largely seen as an avenue to facilitate the capacity to climb up the socio-economic ladder, whether or not we produce sensible, conscious, and joyful individuals. When indicators of success in education are purely mundane, limited and exclusive, our emphasis will naturally be towards fulfilling those conditions. As a result, the growth of other dimensions of the human experience is totally ignored. We are producing graduates to fit into the economic engine that we have created. Moreover, we are teaching them the skills to compete with each other because we have created the idea that they will not reach their full potential unless they are in competition with others instead of teaching them the tools and skills to be inclusive. It is always about “you versus me.” The question is how and when to develop cognitive and other life skills in our learners. Perhaps the most holistic and effective way is by inculcating mindfulness and self-awareness in every student as the foundation to all other aspects of human development. This is what the Buddha’s teachings have stressed over thousands of years.

<sup>1</sup>Arthur W. Foshay, “The Curriculum Matrix: Transcendence and Mathematics,” *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 1991

## **What is Humanity Really Suffering From?**

To find a holistic solution to human problems, we must first identify what the world is suffering from today. If we reflect deeper into the nature of our problems, whether it is the natural calamities triggered by climate change or human activities such as terrorism, war and crime, they are all manifestations of the human mind. We are either suffering from the expressions of our human minds (terrorism, war, crime, etc), or are suffering in our own minds (afflictive emotions). Fundamentally, our suffering is our creation because if we spend the whole day filled with negative emotions such as anger, irritation, agitation, frustration, stress, depression, hatred, jealousy, grudge, or animosity, we live in a disturbed state of mind. The Buddha said that the primary source of most human suffering is our afflictive negative emotions and thoughts, irrespective of our race, nationality, power, status, religion, belief systems, and educational background.

## **What can 21<sup>st</sup> Century Buddhist Education be?**

Post 21<sup>st</sup> century education should be relevant to the times we live in, especially with the arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML). Education, in the form of accumulating information and reproducing it without spiritual intelligence,<sup>2</sup> will become irrelevant. Therefore, humanity should strive to focus on things that only human beings can do, such as developing individuals who have love and compassion. And the pedagogy to teach and learn should be on the basis of first person enquiry which is explorative, investigative, and contemplative in nature so that learning is not just a transaction of information but is a continuous experiential and transformational process.

One of the most effective ways to make holistic education accessible and relevant to the masses is to impart skills that ensure peace and happiness that align with success in work and business. If we are able to use the skills of happiness in all aspects of life, especially in the economic process, family life, material success, we will be able to do the same things joyfully. The purpose of Buddhism is to create a heightened level of awareness in every human being to end suffering and ensure the continuity of happiness from within, without any input from outside. Only when one is happy and joyful from within is one able to access greater possibilities in life

<sup>2</sup>Holistic understanding of human needs in terms of need of the mind as well as the body and fulfilling them accordingly.

and Buddhism offers that opportunity in a myriad ways. When we hear the term Buddhism, the first thing that comes to our minds is “religion,” and people tend to think it is a belief system like any other religion. But Buddhism is essentially an educational training system that facilitates the transformation of human civilisation that leads to excellence and well-being. The following are some of the basic Buddhist teachings that are relevant to students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- Spiritual Intelligence: Understanding Human Needs;
- Loving Kindness: the First Baby Step;
- Identification of Primary and Secondary Causes of Happiness;
- Mindfulness and Consciousness: Tools for Managing the Mind;
- Identity: The Basis of all Human Doings;
- Mindful of Our Mortal Nature; and
- Assessment: Looking for Success Indicators.

### **Spiritual Intelligence: Understanding Human Needs**

Spiritual Intelligence is fundamentally about the understanding of human well-being. One of the effective ways to understand human well-being is by understanding true human needs. The body is a material unit that coexists in perfect harmony with the mind which is a consciousness unit. The needs are physical: wealth, property, transport, housing, clothes, equipment, food, water, air etc. Therefore, as long as we have a body we need business, industry, and technology to produce and maintain these needs. The other dimension of life is happiness, joy, peace and exuberance, which are beyond mere survival. True happiness and joy is possible only through feelings of love, compassion, respect, devotion, reverence, etc.

The quality of life is not decided by what car we drive, or by our bank balance, or by how big a house we live in. Rather, it is determined by how peaceful and joyful our experience of life is. So our ability to distinguish the separate needs of our body and mind is the very foundation of our well-being. We are also able to see that if the primary causes of happiness (love and compassion) are sustained, then happiness is also sustained even if our wealth is limited. In order to fulfill those needs one has to employ a higher order of intelligence which is beyond one’s sensory perceptions. This is what spiritual intelligence means: intelligence that explores within.

## **Loving-kindness: the First Step**

Love and compassion are essential tools for human happiness. Even for social order and enlightenment, love and compassion are the key requisites. One needs to develop a thought process which goes, “I want to make the other person happy”, whoever that person is. When you think of making someone happy it already makes you feel good. When this intention is deliberate there is a subtle change in our mannerisms and behaviour. To cultivate this loving kindness, we need to train our minds to always think of making the other person happy. First, start the day by aspiring to make two people happy, then three people, four people, then gradually 10, 20, and eventually anyone you meet that day. This is the Boddhichitta mind - what we think is what we feel, and what we feel is what we do and this can make a difference in the world.

## **Identification of Primary and Secondary Causes of Happiness**

Many of us know that suffering comes essentially from our pursuit of happiness that is based on material well-being. But the understanding of well-being differs from person to person for some, well-being means one's own happiness, while for others it is their family, community, society, nation, and for a few, it is inclusive and all-encompassing - everyone and everything on the planet. Therefore, it is important to understand what the primary and secondary causes of happiness are. Sensual pleasures - the secondary causes of happiness - will either lead to discomfort or lead to more craving. Therefore, pleasantness derived from the outside or from material things is, in many ways, limited, and temporary, misleading and deceiving because it is not capable of creating lasting happiness, even though it may appear so initially.

## **Mindfulness and Consciousness: Tools for Managing the Mind**

Mindfulness means to be mindful of whatever we are doing so that we do not suffer and, at the same time, we create pleasantness within. When we are happy, we are more forgiving than when we are agitated. So mindfulness is observing the activity of the mind to detect any afflictive emotions and be conscious that when we create any negative thoughts or emotions, we suffer. We become mindful of our physical actions: we will not engage



in any misconduct that would bring unpleasantness to ourselves and the people around us. A conscious mind may, depending upon one's culture and convenience, choose to recite aspirational prayers or chant mantras as a mechanism for inner transformation. When this happens, calmness and peace becomes the way our mind rests. So our education should include training in the skills to become more mindful and conscious.

### **Identity: the Basis of All Human Doings**

One of the core Buddhist tenets is ego-less-ness or selflessness or anaathma. It is about identity. How we identify ourselves. Today, modern education places so much emphasis on material well-being and the notion of success being about me and mine and limiting our identity to ourselves or our family, our religion, and our race. In a world where human beings are empowered with technology, such divisions can be even more disastrous.

In contrast, Buddhism teaches us to identify ourselves with all sentient beings. The concept of universal brotherhood and sisterhood, and the Boddhichitta, encourages us to be inclusive - foster positive feelings in relationships, embrace – express these feelings through one's behaviour, and engage – relate to others with love, compassion and respect. Therefore, if the leaders of affluent nations, with all their economic, political, ideological and technological power, would become a bit more inclusive and embrace the world with love, they have the potential to transform the world into a better place. Instead of investing heavily in warfare, military exercises, exploitative business regimes or unfair power equations, they could invest in education.

Similarly, resource depletion and pollution are also the result of our limited identity. Thinking that nature is an inexhaustible source solely meant for human consumption, has led to excessive and mindless exploitation and a wanton mastery over nature. A sensible person is able to see that he does not exist in isolation and, therefore, he should identify himself with everything around him: the trees and mountains; the rivers and the sky, the moon and the solar system; and the galaxy and space.

He will look at everything as his lifeline and see that nature is our golden goose and not harm her. This is one of the values that should be inculcated in children from a young age. Identity is also trainable.

## **Mindful of Our Mortal Nature**

Awareness of life's impermanence is a fundamental value in Buddhism and Bhutanese culture. We know that our body comes with an expiry date but, unlike goods in the store, the exact date of expiry is unknown. It follows that we should treasure every moment of life and make it as meaningful, productive, and dynamic as possible and not squander it on doing unwholesome things. The awareness of the preciousness of life and the imminence of death ought to be part of a child's holistic education that fosters an understanding and appreciation for life, and where skills and abilities are developed to live that life in a constructive and natural way.

## **Assessment: Looking for Success Indicators**

Behaviour is a natural, outward expression of a person's inner thoughts, emotions, and values. Therefore, the observation of behavioural patterns would give us a measure of those expressed values. In the classroom, teachers could assess the behaviour of their students by observing their interactions with others and taking note of any significant variations to the norm. If anything unusual should happen, the teacher could talk to students about the experience and relate it to their behavioural patterns, thus making them more mindful and aware of their experience.

Another method of gauging the values and inner thoughts of the students could also be through journal writing, essay assignments or speaking in class about their daily activities, highlights of their day, pleasant experiences or incidents that triggered negative emotions such as anger, hatred, jealousy, etc, with a focus on what they had gained from the encounters. Taking time to reflect is part of experiential learning. This exercise in mindfulness will help the students understand that their lives are largely determined by their experience and not necessarily by what they do.

## Conclusion

The most desirable outcome of education is the creation of a conscious and sensible human being. However, the tragedy with modern education is that we produce highly competitive graduates who know a lot about their discipline and the world, but have little or no knowledge about self and life. The most important part of education - human transformation - is neither taught nor demonstrated.

Human success is all about the progressive realisation of knowing who we are and the ability to love and have compassion and be joyful and exuberant within ourselves without any physical input from outside. As a real definition of success, 21<sup>st</sup> century education should ensure that this is taught. Children should be instructed and given the skills to collaborate and live together harmoniously rather than compete with each other. Love, compassion and respect should be extensively used as efficacious instruments instead of aggression and competitiveness in all facets of life. The measure of success of an education should be the student's ability to be joyful, conscious, and mindful human beings.

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## Real Learning Endangered

*Reflections on nature, sanity, and education from an ashamed  
Indian well-wisher*

*Kabir Saxena (Bhikshu Sumati Sasana)*

One of the similies for the Buddha Nature, or the basic goodness, that we are all said to possess is like pure gold that has been lost by the side of the road which then gradually accumulates so much waste and dross around it that it cannot be recognised any more. It lies there, useless, waiting to be released from its filthy tomb.

When I remember my first and only visit to Bhutan a few years ago, in my mind's eye, I feel Bhutan is like gold, in danger of being lost amidst an ignorant and feverish, slinking and insidious so-called progress, unleashed in large part by the industrial revolution over 200 years ago, and later aided and abetted by the subcontinent's experience of material and mental colonisation, hastened recently by uniquely modern technology, hubris, and violence.<sup>1</sup>

Sadly, unlike the Buddha Nature which never degenerates Bhutan can, and perhaps is already doing so, though what the country represents for me, and others no doubt (which I hope will become increasingly clearer as you read on) can, thank heaven, never pass away completely from this universe.

My visit in 2016 to this precious realm was prompted by the kindness of both Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, who suggested casually in a café in New Delhi's bustling Khan Market that I should go, and who generously facilitated the visit in so many ways, as well as by my Guru Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who had recently revisited Bhutan and had almost 60 years ago benefited greatly from the kindness of some Bhutanese people when fleeing Tibet. I understand that Rinpoche has a Bhutanese "mother."

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<sup>1</sup>M.K.Gandhi. Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad. 1938. Many editions exist. Ashis Nandy. The Twentieth Century: The Ambivalent Homecoming of Homo Psychologicus. Multiversity and Citizens International. 2004. Dharampal. Section 3 on European Dominance in Rediscovering India. SIDH. 2003.  
John Mohawk. A Basic Call to Consciousness, Indigenous People's Address To the Western World. Citizens International. 2002.  
Samdhong Rinpoche. Uncompromising Truth for a Compromised World. Edited Donovan Roebert. World Wisdom, 2006.

So I too set out in their footsteps, (reckoning that two Rinpoches couldn't be wrong, especially if one added the great Kuenchen Longchenpa to the list), lazily forsaking the long walk in favour of an amazing Druk Air flight from Kathmandu to Paro on a day when the Himalayas revealed themselves in, what one might call, an epiphany of majestic beauty, when one began to be conscious of something of vital importance that had hitherto been smothered by self-centred habitual patterns in unholy alliance with the traffic, aggression, shallowness, ugliness and noise of urban living.

What I found over the next 10 days, like a beggar finding the proverbial jewel in the garbage pit, blew my cramped metropolitan mind as well as giving occasional pause for concern, and that's why I, and many others, would suffer a grief, feel an unutterable loss, were this land of near-pristine wooded hills and healthy flowing waters, of dharma practitioners and *dzongs*, to be bartered to the modern hydra-headed juggernaut of selfishness, carelessness, speed and consumerism in return for a short-lived "progress" and its comforts.

I'm well aware of the dangers of romanticisation but I have a strong feeling that a modernism-induced<sup>2</sup> ignorance and cynicism has numbed our ability to even understand what the ingredients of an integrated, healthy, and beneficial life are. What might they be?

To answer this let's look at the question by investigating, first, why I've introduced myself in the title as an ashamed Indian well-wisher.

I live in a country that has all but laid waste not only the foundations of its former spiritual integrity and healthy economic self-sufficiency, but also the means for its viable future survival. I feel shame when I read the inspiring words of the great translator, Marpa, who states that he visited India three times "without concern for life or limb" because he felt he'd been born in an "inferior land," meaning Tibet, and that the place he went to, India, was "supreme."<sup>3</sup> Let's look at some aspects of what has happened between Marpa's time and the present.

<sup>2</sup>Rajan Venkatesh. Learning at Bodhshala. Re-orienting the School to its Community. Other India Press and SIDH. 2015, p. x.

<sup>3</sup>Tsang Nyön Heruka. The Life of Marpa the Translator. Nalanda Translation Committee. Shambhala. 1982, 1999. pp. 116-117.

To help in this let me quote Sri Aurobindo, a wise sage in tune with the Indian *parampara*, (authentic lineage of true sanity sprung from the wisdom mind of kindly sages), who wrote some memorable words in 1909:

“The nineteenth century in India was imitative, self-forgetful and artificial... it aimed at a successful reproduction of Europe in India... better the law of one’s own being though it be badly done than an alien dharma well-followed; death in one’s own dharma is better, it is a dangerous thing to follow the law of another’s nature.”<sup>4</sup>

If Indian teenage students are to memorise anything, I’d say to have them carve the above words indelibly into their smartphone-bewitched memory banks. I’d have Bhutanese children as well learn by heart: “Beware the successful reproduction of the West in Bhutan, dragon-land blessed by Guru Rinpoche!”

What’s the essence of the “alien dharma”, the so-called civilisation of Europe and the west? It involves, among other things, a relentless war against, and a conquest of, the natural ecology, the destruction of small communities and their local markets embedded in nature, cooperation, conviviality and creativity.

Above all, it believes that the endless multiplication of wants, rather than the purification of human character, is the mother of all answers to what human beings really need.<sup>5</sup>

It tears humans apart from the source of their spiritual and economic satisfaction and happiness. It leads to governments and large segments of a nation congratulating themselves for blowing a satellite out of the sky with indigenous missile technology. It elevates cleverness and specialisation over a caring wisdom and sacred overarching perspective that would promote and enhance human happiness and goodness.

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<sup>4</sup>Aurobindo. The Awakening Soul of India. Karmayogin: Weekly Review. 26<sup>th</sup> June 1909-No.2.

<sup>5</sup>E.F. Schumacher. Small Is Beautiful. See Chap. 4 on Buddhist Economics. Sphere Books. 1975. pp. 45-46.

For Mahatma Gandhi, true civilisation meant “good conduct.”<sup>6</sup> In modern India, what does civilisation mean? More shopping malls, less forest cover, hundreds of extra cars per day introduced onto Delhi’s roads alone,<sup>7</sup> and a ceaseless drift from the villages to towns and cities. It means top rankings for a host of Indian cities in a World Table of the most polluted. Ironically, Gurugram, village of the Guru, (Gurgaon), being one of the worst offenders.

Rather than constantly looking to the west to define what our future economic, social and political trajectories should be, might it not be better to carefully question the very viability of this imitative behaviour and reflect on what we already have which is of lasting value? When his people suffered the consequences of the steamroller of careless capitalism, John Mohawk, a Native American, categorically stated:

“... the way of life known as Western Civilisation is on a death path on which their own culture has no viable answers.”<sup>8</sup>

If we are unaware of this, it is largely because our so-called education has not taught us even the most basic discriminating intelligence and also because we are being so craftily entertained, from one corner to the next, by a network of devices unknown a generation or two ago. We “uninstructed worldlings,”<sup>9</sup> unawakened humans, are easily entranced by short-term gratification and excitements, however unsatisfactory they may eventually turn out to be. Have we also, perhaps, lost that innate understanding that more rooted cultures had, namely that human life, divorced from a wise and nurturing relationship with the natural world and other sentient beings, is an invitation to hell on earth, a *koyaanisqatsi*, a shattering of the fragile balance, of both the manifest and the hidden ties of interdependence? We’ve truly been self-forgetful in this regard.

<sup>6</sup>Gandhi. op.cit. p. 53.

<sup>7</sup>Delhi Economic Survey: Number of vehicles on Delhi roads over 1 ... <https://auto.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/.../number-of-vehicles-on-.Delhi-roads/6812>. The figures are frightening. About 10 million motor vehicles on the roads, showing a growth rate of 5.81% from 2017-2018. A report of 13-2-2014 mentions a figure of 1400 cars being added to Delhi Roads daily. Unsurprisingly, bicycle usage is down 7% for 2017-18.

<sup>8</sup>John Mohawk. op. cit. p. 15.

<sup>9</sup>Bhikkhu Bodhi, Editor. In the Buddha’s Words. An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon. The Tribulations of Unreflective Living Section. pp. 32-33

“We should be happy,” says Kagyu Master Tai Situ Rinpoche, “that we are not all in a state of total nervous breakdown or insanity,” given, he says, that our modern, artificial environments make us forget that life can be basically simple. Love, caring for oneself and others, healthy balanced relationships, and discipline become very complicated and problematic in these circumstances. Basic emotional states, birth and death, all become big deals, full of pitfalls and frustration. Rinpoche goes on to say that people who have grown up with nature might not have seen any books, and they might not have the ability to explain what love, respect or kindness are but “they know and feel these principles in a way that gives them stability.”<sup>10</sup>

I watched “Travellers and Magicians”, by Khyentse Norbu<sup>11</sup> for the second time. It’s amazing what one forgets from the first viewing! The film so felicitously clarifies the tussle between the slow, hard-working rugged stability and sanity of the “old ways” and the restless and frustrating modern search for an imagined “dreamland” where money and forbidden pleasures invite one, seductively, to enjoy the fruits of craving-driven aspirations.

My limited understanding suggests to me that Bhutan is like the one surviving sober member of a world club of addicts. There, one is able to confront space and wild places where, like a wounded deer, we head to so as to be healed and from where we return with a fresh perspective on our human economy and cramped urban abodes.<sup>12</sup> There is, yet, a beauty, a natural outcome of balance and harmony, where man-made objects do not jar the sense but blend with the landscape. In a world intoxicated by economic growth and novelty, Bhutan needs to continue to be the disloyal one, the brave nonconformist. I say it’s Bhutan’s duty to the human race.<sup>13</sup> In a world gone, increasingly insane, Bhutan must continue to stand alone, if necessary, an essential reminder of what it means for humans to live in balance with the natural world.

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<sup>10</sup>The Twelfth Tai Situpa. *Relative World, Ultimate Mind*. Penguin. 1992, 1999. pp. 40-41.

<sup>11</sup>Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche. *Direction and Script*. Released 21st April 2004.

<sup>12</sup>Wendell Berry. *The World-Ending Fire. The Essential Wendell Berry*. Edited and Introduced by Paul Kingsnorth. Penguin 2017. Essay Entitled “Getting Along with Nature.” pp. 170-171.

<sup>13</sup>J. Krishnamurti. *Think on These Things*. KFI. 2017. Chapter 5 on Creative Discontent. pp. 45-46. Also see the intriguing Story “Under the Garden” in *A Sense of Reality* by Graham Greene. 1999 for refreshing comments on disloyalty. p. 48



Why do I mention all this? I hear the message, “are we in Bhutan not the first to introduce GNH above GNP? Why are you, of all people, a Delhi-wallah, who are already damaged goods, preaching to us, as the yet unviolated?” A pertinent point, but surely if I am damaged, am I not duty-bound to warn Bhutan of the perils that have led to my woe?

What I hear from others, and what I’ve seen for myself during my visit, leads me to believe that some damaging changes are indeed already occurring in your porous land. Television and the Internet seem to have brought mixed blessings and are accelerating a move towards consumerism and further hastening the end of pastoralism and rural economy already in decline for a century or more.<sup>14</sup> With drug addiction and crime on the rise in the urban areas, as well as the physical and mental move westwards of many fine young minds, a road-widening drive creating ecological damage, as well as more and more cars in evidence,<sup>15</sup> how long can Bhutan resist what some consider the irresistible? How long, heaven forbid, before the outskirts of Thimphu begin to resemble the worst aspects of Gurugram, Kanpur or Patna in India?

Near the entrance to the Jamba *Lhakhang* (monastery) in Bumthang on August 14, 2016, I found a shop that sold packet crisps among other items so familiar street-side in India. An intriguing girl of magisterial demeanour, 10 or 12 years old perhaps, forcefully informed me it was “junk food.” On the very same shop verandah a kind young man, Kelsang la, secretary to Dasho Karma Ura, unexpectedly gave me a copy of the latter’s “Longchen’s Forests of Poetry and Rivers of Composition in Bhutan.” A supremely meaningful conjunction of events within minutes of each other!

Therein I read, regarding Bumthang: “The land is unlike a land of people, but a paradise transplanted.” Further on it said: “Character is gentle and befriending is easy... Here, morality is not just adventitious, people exude loving kindness. Wherever one goes, there is no need to carry travel-provision.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Karma Phuntsho. *The History of Bhutan*. Random House India. 2013. pp. 30-31.

<sup>15</sup>Conversation with Neten Zangmo which suggested that the Bhutanese were purchasing cars, that many could not properly afford, simply to keep up with the Joneses.

<sup>16</sup>Karma Ura. *Longchen’s Forests of Poetry and Rivers of Composition in Bhutan*. The Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research. 2016. p. 67.

I am wondering if Bhutanese, given to reflection on such matters, consider whether this basically gentle and ethical character has changed already, or will do so in the next few decades or less, once the shiny, widened roads have brought into the interior their full complement of speed, traffic, heavily packaged material stuff of all kinds, chemicalised medicine, modern “education” - in short, all the kaleidoscopic fragments of modernity and artificiality in all their guises? This is not a rhetorical question. A road is not just a road... they have multiple consequences and, like roads to hell, are paved with good intentions.

It’s time to introduce another mantra-like quotation with the potential, perhaps, to begin a process of restoring sanity and balance anywhere on the planet and which may act as a lodestar for some fortunate, eccentric, “disloyal” sons and daughters of the land:

“Slow down. Pay attention. Do good work. Love your neighbours.  
Love your place. Stay in your place. Settle for less, enjoy it more.”<sup>17</sup>

These are words from the introduction to some writings from an American farmer-author, a “modern Thoreau”, Wendell Berry, who, please note well, eschewed the glamour, fame and financial promise of New York in favour of intelligent, caring and patient hard work on his land in Kentucky. My own, no doubt biased opinion, is that these words serve as a quintessential life and soul-preserving mantra for our times, as vital for long-term happy flourishing as are the Mani or Guru mantras - for happiness, liberation, and the full awakening of Buddhahood.

Each short phrase begs a commentary of its own, but might one dare say the purpose of these words encapsulate the essence of what an education should be?

“Education should help the individual to discover the true values which come with unbiased investigation and self-awareness...

What is the good of learning if in the process of living we are destroying ourselves?”<sup>18</sup> My strong hunch is that a fair amount of modern education has proved to be a convoluted and ignorant way of increasing our ability to destroy ourselves and our planet, birthed, as it were, as a necessary partner

<sup>17</sup>Wendell Berry, op.cit. Introduction, p. x.

<sup>18</sup>J. Krishnamurti. Education and the Significance of Life. p.15.

to the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution, which heralded the raising of the machine above humans, an ignorance of how much is enough, when to stop economic growth and start actually living.

Such education enlarges our desires, the “psychological holes in our stomachs”,<sup>19</sup> rather than nourishing an appreciation of our basic goodness and its accompanying beneficence. These can only arise out of an education that promotes greater self-awareness, compassion, and a skillful engagement with the world based on a thorough appreciation of our interdependence. In other words, a social and emotional intelligence nurtured through investigation, patient inner scrutiny and self-respect that then flows naturally outwards, towards others in a meaningful and beneficial manner.

We would do well to consider education as the primary means to prepare human beings for good, lifelong, wholesome and creative (not repetitive mind-numbing), work with these three characteristics:

First, work that gives a person the opportunity to develop and utilise beneficial qualities such as kindness/compassion, patience, courage, forgiveness, integrity, generosity and gratitude, among others. Second, work that enables a person to overcome his or her egocentricity by uniting with others in the fulfilment of common tasks; and third, work that enables one to create the goods and services needed for a satisfying and non-violent existence.<sup>20</sup> Gandhi said that true education is “an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man’s body, mind, and spirit.”<sup>21</sup> The current farce of education, on the other hand, ensures that “The higher he goes, the farther he is removed from his home, so that at the end of his education he becomes estranged from his surroundings...(it is) calculated to wean him from his traditional culture.”<sup>22</sup> Hence, for Bhutan, proper education would be the means to “link the children, whether of the cities or villages, to all that is best and lasting”,<sup>23</sup> to paraphrase Gandhi.

<sup>19</sup>A phrase used by Lama Thubten Yeshe, founder of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, one of my teachers.

<sup>20</sup>Schumacher. op.cit. p.45. Also Rajan Venkatesh’s profoundly important work already cited.

<sup>21</sup>M. K. Gandhi. *Towards New Education*. Navajivan Publishing House. 1953, 2005. p. 38.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>23</sup>M.K.Gandhi. *Constructive Programme*. Navajivan. 1941, 2006. p. 14.

This also means that teaching any subject whether it be English, Science or Mathematics outside of a local and appropriate cultural and natural wisdom context, is not going to help Bhutan preserve its unique wisdom, culture, and its many languages, nor help people love and stay in their places but rather to flock to dirty overcrowded cancers called cities in search of office jobs hunched in front of computers. How about thinking along the lines of an education that generates a sense of inner richness, rather than impoverishment? That only happens when children are nurtured in an atmosphere of love and safety and in the right environment by kind and skilful bearers of the authentic *parampara*.

Rabindranath Tagore felt forest schools to be a vital learning environment since he saw that human beings learned best amongst nature. To establish this kind of learning would be a huge, but essential task, demanding that we let go of preconceived notions of what a school should look like. Some, like Ivan Illich, even go as far as to cogently argue for the total de-schooling of Society so that education can naturally occur in home and community living with the result that the one-dimensionality and inequalities - endangered by normal schooling - can be avoided.<sup>24</sup> But, for that, we require healthy homes and communities which are increasingly rare.

I witnessed just this week a home-taught child responding to the question of how they were being educated at home, saying that it was like a “wild school.” Cultivation of a sane wildness, an independence of spirit, allied with respect for a life in balance with the natural world is what, I suspect, will save Bhutan from making the same mistakes as almost every other country in the world. But for this to happen the dangerous alliance with modernity and its delights will have to be deeply, and critically, pondered upon. That requires not only a thorough understanding of the shortcomings but also a trust in the alternatives. Sometimes the media itself helps push us in the right direction, witness this from the Guardian website:

“Why bother designing robots when you can reduce human beings to machines? Recently Amazon acquired a patent for a wristband that can track the hand movements of workers. If this technology is developed, it could grant companies almost total control over their workforce.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ivan Illich. *Redefining Education. Why We Must Disestablish School*. Citizens International. 2003.

<sup>25</sup>George Monbiot. “As Robots take our jobs, We need something else. I know what that is.” Article in Opinion section of Guardian website. 7<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

To prevent a large-scale descent into such a techno-dystopia will require students to develop a robust, discriminative intelligence, allied with a warm-heartedness that stops the war we're waging within ourselves and inflicting upon the planet Earth. I firmly believe that Bhutan has to be the primary torchbearer in this regard and keep lit a flame of awareness that burns up the dross that is currently preventing a worldwide flowering of goodness.<sup>26</sup>

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# Educating for Life

*Dr Yang Gyeltshen*

“At this moment in time, circa 2018, it is clearer than ever that a new approach to education is key to the survival of the world in general and of Bhutan in particular. This is no exaggeration. The world’s current education system is not only outdated and even obsolete but is literally destroying the world.” Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche, Bhutan Observer, 12 February 2018.

## **Rinpoche’s Aspiration**

“If I ever have the opportunity to create a school for children, I want them to learn what it is to be human ... I want to teach children how to make a fire, and that the source of water does not come from the tap. The aim of this education is to refine ourselves so that we will see the world in a different way so that we can help others and, through helping others, make ourselves happy and content. Therefore, what we are learning is not to get jobs but to refine and make ourselves elegant both outwardly and inwardly.” Rinpoche, in his talks, often echoes this wide gap that exists between school education and genuine knowledge and wisdom.

## **Introduction**

How to get out of this redundancy of job-oriented robot-like, skill-based education? Should it not be the other way round that, to do a job better, one should be creative, sociable, compassionate, and a critical thinker? These qualities do not spring from a standardised, competitive factory model education.

While not dismantling totally the mainstream education foundation, the learning approach needs to be holistic. This paper briefly describes how this can be done - the concept and the curricular approach that is needed, with some thematic examples.

## **Holistic Education - Educating the Whole Child**

The “education of the whole child” is referred to as “holistic education,” and is not a new concept. This concept is rooted in writings and teachings from time immemorial . This philosophy is based on the belief that every person realises meaning and purpose in life through connections with the natural world, community interactions, and humanitarian values such as compassion and peace. Essentially, what we all want our children in schools are to:

- Be fully literate and able to benefit from and make use of the power of written and spoken language, in various forms and media;
- Understand mathematics and science at levels that will prepare them for the world of the future and strengthen their ability to think critically, carefully, and creatively;
- Be good problem solvers;
- Take responsibility for their personal as well as others’ health and well-being;
- Develop effective social relationships such as learning how to work in a group and how to understand and relate to others from different cultures and backgrounds;
- Be caring individuals with concern and respect for others;
- Understand how their society works and be prepared to take on the roles that are necessary for future progress; and
- Develop good character and make sound moral decisions.

The last six of these bullet points are generally referred to as character education, service learning, citizenship education, emotional intelligence, and the like. In Bhutan, it is known as “value education,” propagated through monastic traditions and social and cultural settings. No matter which word or phrase we use, all of these come under a single concept - “Social Emotional Learning” (SEL), intrinsically an effective endeavour. To stress the importance of compassion and ethics in classroom education, the Atlanta-based Emory University in association with the Dalai Lama Trust, have incorporated “Ethics” into “Social Emotional Learning” which then is “Social Emotional and Ethical” (SEE) learning - from SEL to SEE learning. This form of education, when added to academic learning such as described in the first two bullet points, provide educators with the possibility of capturing the balance children need.



In terms of knowledge and skill, the scientific revolution as we know it has conquered the moon and beyond; the whole world is going digital. Going digital has degenerated the socio-emotional or the ethical aspects of human life, the very cement that bonds the social fabric of any society. In his worldwide humanitarian advocacy, His Holiness Dalai Lama stresses the time to educate the heart and that learning must be holistic and transformational. This is within the modes of the Buddhist Wisdom Tools - རྗོལ་ བསམ་ སྒྲུབ་ (Hearing, Contemplating, Meditating).

### Contemplative Modes of Teaching and Learning

Whatever one ventures into, be it classroom learning, household chores, or a business project, the plan must be well “meditated on”. One can only “meditate on” what one has “reflected on.” One can only “reflect on” what one has “heard” properly in the first place. This traditional mode of instruction and learning is compatible with western instructional approaches such as “Knowing, Understanding, and Doing” and the learning hierarchy of “Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analysing, Evaluating, and Creating.”

One must “listen” attentively to “hear” properly and “know” what is being transmitted through a lecture or by reading so that the information is “transmitted” properly by teachers or from reading material to begin with. Given the digital and related information distractions, gaining the attention of students has become a teacher’s nightmare these days. That is why adequate attention must be paid to the first pathway to educating for Gross National for Happiness, which is “Meditation and Mind Training.” According to Rinpoche, there is only one problem in practicing Buddhism - “distraction” - and therefore only one solution - “meditation.”

Having “heard” properly, one must then “contemplate reflectively” to “understand” the underlying deep meanings and nuances. At this stage, attention must be paid to whether or not a proper “transaction” has taken place from “རྗོལ་པ་—knowing” to “བསམ་པ་—understanding.”

One might have heard and understood, but it would be futile if the knowledge and understanding is not put to practice — སྒྲུབ་ལེགས་— doing, bringing to habit. It is only by “doing,” “putting to practice what is learned, that the transformation takes place. The key terminologies here

are the “transition, transaction, and transformation” through “knowing, understanding, and doing,” compatible with the three “Wisdom Tools”—  
ཐོས་ བསམ་ སྒྲུབ་ གསུམ་

## Cooperation Not Competition

The idea of reward and punishment, competition, promotion of high self-esteem if not addressed properly in schools is contradictory to the ideals of caring, loving, compassionate, and decent human beings of a happy nation. Reward engenders pride, punishment engenders fear and psychological trauma, competition engenders jealousy, and high self-esteem engenders narcissism. To transcend from such practices of mundane affairs are the “Six Perfections” or the “Paramitas”—  
ཕ་རོལ་ཏུ་ཕྱིན་པ་བླུག་— the wings of excellence or means to cross over to the other shore, to higher ideals:

- སྤྲོན་པ་ — Generosity: to cultivate the attitude of generosity;
- རྒྱལ་ཁྲིམ་ — Moral Practice: refraining from harm;
- བཟོད་པ་ — Patience: the ability not to be perturbed by anything;
- བརྩོན་འགྲུས་ — Enthusiastic Effort: to find joy in what is virtuous, positive, or wholesome;
- བསམ་གཏན་ — Meditative concentration: not to be distracted;
- །ཤེས་རབ་ — Wisdom: the perfect discrimination of phenomena, all knowable things.

These perfections can be part of classroom practices and modern life. In the classroom, if students are “generous” in sharing their resources it will enhance each other’s work and learning. This comes with certain “moral practices” such as abstinence from rude behaviour and maintaining polite gestures. While in a group under certain working conditions, some physical, mental, or social discomforts are bound to occur. The “patience” to tolerate and endure such discomforts can be rewarding and will promote communal harmony. Not all that one hears and the activities expected to be carried out in the classrooms can be interesting so some “enthusiastic effort” must be made to make it enjoyable by reflecting on its merits. Especially when discussing complex issues, when its inherent concepts or meanings are not easily apparent, it requires “meditative concentration”, a crucial factor in any serious learning. Finally, having perfected the first five *Paramitas*, one should practice one’s “wisdom” judiciously in discriminating what is right and what is wrong.

## The Organisation of Subject Matters a Thematic Approach

In a thematic approach to teaching, each subject area is brought together under the banner of a certain theme or topic such as the four elements — ས་ ལྗ མེ་ ལྷན་ (earth, water, fire, air). The topic is then studied in depth from the perspectives of reading, writing, math, science and social studies, as well as the arts for a well-balanced curriculum. The hallmark of this approach to teaching is to let students relate to real-world experiences, by building on prior knowledge of a topic. The following themes briefly illustrate the discussion.

**Water:** Just as children who live in high-rise metropolitan cities who have never seen a farm house or a slaughterhouse think meat comes from supermarkets, if asked where the water comes from, most of our children would instantly say it comes from a tap or a shower head. What children need to learn and be aware of is how does water gets to the taps in the first place - its journey.

At Chokyi Gyatsho Institute in Dewathang the study of the Unit on Water begins with a Field Trip. Prior to the field trip, water source related conceptual vocabularies such as falling rain, ground water, river systems, water reservoirs, treatment plants, and the like are discussed.

The whole field trip becomes an event by itself. Besides specifically assigned jobs, students study the whole water trail ecosystem - the vegetation and its habitats as well as human footprints. Some are assigned to map the water trail from the institute to the source and to find the direction of the flow and the elevation at the source and at the destination (Geography). Some work out the distance of the trail in kilometres and learn about conversion of the unit as well (Math). Some do the water quality test at the source as well as at the destination to check for any contamination (Science). Some interview the local water management personnel and learn conservation norms as simple as the importance of closing the water tap after use (Civic Duty). While discussing the importance of watershed management, the invocation of water deity, Mamaki, and other guardian spirits such as the *Naydag* and *Zhidag* cannot be ignored.

The belief is that watersheds are one of those sacred places guarded by those spirits and if encroached destructively, those spirits could strike back. Perhaps out of fear or veneration for those guardian spirits the usual practice is to light some incense and sprinkle fresh milk and say some prayers. This is, however, one of the best ways to keep the natural environment intact (Spiritual Motivation).

Fire: Fire, one of the life-giving as well as destructive forces of nature cannot be ignored. To rethink prehistory, it goes back to the hunter-gatherers, how they harnessed the use of fire. “Necessity is the Mother of Invention.” As claimed by Plato, the Friction Fire — the drill was one of the greatest wilderness survival inventions of the time. The science behind is simple - friction generates heat and heat generates fire. The irony is that in this 21<sup>st</sup> century digital age most will not be able to make friction fire, the most basic fundamental survival skill.

One of the projects in this unit on fire is to make friction fire using bow drill. What does it take for students to do this? Sure enough, the project is not as simple as it sounds. Even in groups, it takes two to three experiments at the minimum to succeed - the kind of appropriate bow to make in terms of material choice, size, and strength. Choice of socket that fits comfortably in the palm to apply downward pressure to the spindle while drilling. Spindles being one of the key pieces to the drilling set, it cannot be made from any wood. The kind of wood that works best has to be found. Same goes with the fire board. Next is the coal catcher, how best to transfer the coal to the tinder after it is produced from the drill. The right choice of tinder will ignite the coal sparks that will ignite the actual fire.

This achievement is proven by going for class picnics without the matchboxes. Students carry a bow drill which they proudly learn to use with full confidence. Should these students face similar life situations in future they will have no problems.

Gardening: As the Chinese saying goes, life begins the day we start a garden. Food, as we know, is a basic need along with clothing and shelter to survive. Knowing how to grow food was the single most decisive factor that made it possible for humankind to settle as permanent communities. In this day and age of science, technology, and mass production, not everyone is expected to grow food but we should not forget the source of human sustenance -

soil, water, plants, animals - the whole ecosystem. It is tilling the land and blending the soil, planting the seed, watering, seeing the germination of the flower and then the fruit, harvesting, sharing, and celebrating that make us human. Humans appreciate life as it is - the toil, beauty, sense of communal responsibility. In gardening, through hands-on experience, students see the interaction of the natural elements - earth, water, heat, air (རྟོན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ་ cause and effect) all phenomena originating from causes. When a seed is sown it causes a plant to germinate.

The soil, water, light and heat, air are the conditions that promote the growth of the plant. Here, everything is connected with everything else -Dependent Origination or Dependent Arising (Buddhist concept). As an organised activity, the art of gardening gives students the opportunity to see the spiritual aspect of the environment - connecting us back to nature, social aspect of gardening - the harvest celebrations and offerings, food and nutrition - the choice of what crops to grow for healthy food and the ecosystem - civic sense of care and conservation.

As the seeds germinate, bloom, ripen, and are harvested, it not only reveals the seasonal changes, it brings to light the cycle of life and death as well. The four elements - earth, water, fire, air - each dissolves into each other, one by one, and finally into space. While living, that energy is being shared, making everything possible, from a tiny blade of grass to giants such as bulls and elephants . Each grows, lives, gets worn out, and eventually meets the inevitable – death - dissolving into space.

This cycle of birth, life, growth, death, and rebirth is what students learn to contemplate in the garden ecosystem. The natural cycle, making way, nature's recyclers, the balancing act, the food chain, all of which provide a rich venue for reflective contemplation to express what they observed and realised through writings and visual arts such as drawings, paintings, and photographs.

## Conclusion

Human life is precious and sacred. Once born, every child has the same needs as others, the most basic being love and care. The most vulnerable stages of our lives are at the beginning and the end. It is not only the innate duty but also the moral responsibility of parents to take the utmost care of their children while young and so the reverse role of children to care for their parents in their old age. These mutual love, understanding, and moral responsibilities are the humane forces that bring people closer in compassionate and harmonious societies. In addition to the family and community, schools play a critical role in helping children transform to become loving, caring, compassionate, and decent human beings. To practice and foster such transformative learning, the following conditions must be created but not be limited to:

- Ideal learning conditions that promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust;
- Effective instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach;
- Exploratory learning activities that encourage alternative perspectives, problem-posing, and critical reflection; and
- It is the responsibility of educators embraced by every stake holder to make these conditions available for children in every learning centre and institution.

# Educating for Happiness

*Chencho Lhamu*

## Introduction

What is educating for happiness? It is certainly not cerebral studying of the four pillars, the nine domains, and the 72 plus indicators of Gross National Happiness (GNH). But many people may intuitively refer to the domains and pillars of GNH on encountering the above question. My doctoral research on conceptions of happiness grounded in the realities of urban youth (Lhamu, 2018) reveals that educating for happiness is much more than the current centrally determined concept of GNH. The study points to a chasm between Bhutan's educational vision of educating for happiness and the realities of the schools.

The goal of my research on youth conceptions of happiness was to contribute to realising the ideals of GNH. The premise of the research was that, for the ideals of educating for happiness to translate into everyday life, the conception of happiness must be grounded in the lived experiences of youth. An externally imposed conception would make little sense in the absence of philosophical resonance and disconnect with the realities of youth experiences (Schneider, 2014). Youth is also a complex stage of human development with unique challenges and opportunities. Rapid physical and cognitive development (Eryilmaz, 2012) marks the stage. Defiance of authority and norms, gravitation towards peer influences, and heightened exploration and formation of identity (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999; Waterman, 1982) mark the characteristics of youth. Hence, I contend that the understandings of happiness gleaned from centrally defined notions cannot be uncritically applied to youth. The nature of social context, priorities and needs vary across life's stages and so may their forms and effects on happiness (Kroll, 2014).

There are two interrelated questions that remain critical to the agenda of educating for happiness: i) What does happiness mean to youth? ii) How do schools serve youth happiness? My inquiry into youth happiness sheds light on complex conceptions of happiness. I discuss one of the constructs

of happiness in this article – happiness as realising one’s potentials – and extend on the policy recommendations for holistic curricula and agency as the bedrock of educating for youth happiness.

## **The Centrally Constructed Notion of Happiness**

Bhutan launched “Educating for Happiness” towards the end of 2009 with an international conference attended by educators, academics and intellectuals from both within and outside Bhutan. The GNH paradigm that proposes to balance socio-economic, cultural and environmental conservation (Thinley, 2009; Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012) serve as the founding philosophy underpinning the educating for happiness agenda. As envisioned under this initiative, the educational goals are to:

- Develop the understanding of reality as an interconnected whole;
- Nurture predispositions that are caring and respectful of self, others, nature, and culture;
- Develop right attitude and competencies to deal effectively with change and increasing materialism; and
- Help youth make right choices of livelihood and participate in community engagements (Hayward & Colman, 2010).

Even a cursory analysis reveals that the above educational goals are heavily imbued with Buddhist existential belief of interdependence, and that mind training and ethical groundings are promulgated as approaches to abiding happiness. Perhaps, given the subjectivities and fluidity around the concept of happiness, Bhutan takes an imprecise stance and does not explicate what happiness means in definitive terms in any of its policy documents. Taking an ethical stance and Buddhist approach, Thinley, (2009, p. 6), comes close to furnishing an official definition of happiness. He asserts, “happiness is not fleeting, pleasurable ‘feel good’ moods.” He argues that “... true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realising our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds.” This, however, is a partial attempt; the emphasis continues to be on what it is not and what one ought to pursue (harmony, wisdom, taming the mind) to attain happiness without clearly stating what it is. Given the strong influence of Buddhist philosophy on the GNH paradigm and educating for happiness agenda, it is safe to surmise that the centrally defined happiness is a state of mind characterised



by tranquillity, calmness and contentment. The onus of its attainment lies with the individuals; and the pursuit of it is an inward journey rather than comforts, security, and satisfaction from external sources.

### **Flow: the State of Youth Happiness**

Interviews with high school students in my research reveal happiness as a state of complete engrossment in an activity that matches their potentials and interests. When asked to describe the happy state, most youth relate those moments to doing an activity that they are interested in and have the talent or the aptitude for. Their descriptions of such a state include – being engaged and engrossed, forgetting the world outside and occupying a different figurative world, feeling free and having no interrupting thoughts arising, and feeling great or satisfied afterwards. Such descriptions of the state of happiness correspond closely with Csikzenthmihilya’s (1997) concept of flow -- intense engagement in a challenging activity that optimally utilizes one’s potentials and competencies, and that encompasses a loss of consciousness of self and of time. Similarly, it concurs with Seligman’s (2011) proposition that activities that optimally use one’s strengths enhance happiness.

Happiness as a state of flow resulting from harmony between one’s potential and demands of an activity of interest points to the challenges of schools in catering to youth happiness particularly when the school curricula is centrally determined and is highly exam-oriented. If the agenda of educating for happiness were to be taken with seriousness, happiness as “flow” ought to provide students with experiences that allow self-discovery and employment of their strengths (interests, abilities and potentials) in activities that optimally challenge them. However, my research points to curricular realities of the school in discord with the educational goals and the youth conception of happiness as realising their potentials.

The Freedom for Choice and Voice – Preconditions for Youth Happiness point to freedom of choice and voice in academic learning and wider experiences as important preconditions of happiness. The freedom of choice in co-curricular programmes gives much happiness while limited student voice and choice in academics curtail similar experiences.

Co-curricular programmes add to the variety of youth developmental contexts. It broadens the opportunity for them to experience a sense of competence that is important for their self-esteem. School clubs, concerts, and sports, when given the autonomy to choose on their own, serve as a context in which the youth can explore and nurture their potentials and express themselves as competent dancers, singers, or athletes. In pursuing their interests, youth get to assess themselves more favourably outside of the stringent academic standards of the school. Because of this validation, they experience a sense of competence that has a positive effect on their self-esteem.

Co-curricular programmes as a source of happiness lies in the fact that the youth enjoy certain level of autonomy (freedom) to choose as well as determine the activities for themselves, which in other words means “agency”. The freedom to choose and decide for themselves increases the likelihood of finding a better match of the activities with their interest and potential which, in turn, increases the prospect of good performance and engrossment.

Co-curricular programmes in the Bhutanese education system are traditionally intended to complement the overall goals of the prescribed curriculum. Club activities are supposed to be organised on a weekly basis, and they are expected to allow for exploration of interests outside the prescribed academic curriculum. However, this research suggests that the youth find their school experiences narrowly focused on academics over which they have no autonomy or influence and school clubs are often sacrificed for academics.

All the research participants value academic performance but they also report that overemphasis on academics stifles their happiness. Alluding to the monotony of studies and lamenting limited opportunities that cater to their nonacademic interests, a participant said: “school is literally kind of a hell-type-of-feeling because all we have to do is study, study, study.” Another participant upset with school management for thwarting a student-led project to build a stupa as his batch’s legacy said, “we have a lot of talented people... and their talents are killed by education sometimes... they do not get the platform.” Similarly, another student claims, “Academics is not the only thing that is important to students, they need to learn

something different.” The youth disgruntled for stalling his stupa project claims: “What we have forgotten is that there are people who have more talent in other things than education [sic]...a great singer might be dying living [working] in office, but we don’t see that because we are all diverted towards education.”

Consistent with Aristotle’s eudaimonic notion of happiness (Huta & Ryan, 2011; Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2006), the participants’ accounts strongly indicate the realisation of their full potentials, variously defined, as equating with happiness for them. But the narrow academic curriculum, pointed out as a happiness constraint in this research, leaves no room for other pursuits that are equally important in life. A narrow emphasis on academics restrains the youth from exploring potentials and realising capabilities. What the school values is what is examinable and examined; rest of the important life skills – self-directedness, independent planning, organising groups, mobilising resources, and so on - are on the fringes of school curricula.

An education system that expects everyone to excel on narrowly defined academic standards and provide limited choices is unfair for a diverse group of students who may come with different talents, interests, and abilities, and is a detriment to their happiness. Education for happiness ought to give the freedom and autonomy to explore latent interests, bring out the best in each individual, and value life skills and knowledge not in the academic curriculum of the schools.

## Revisiting Education Goals

Tracing the original ideas behind education in Latin as “educare” and “educere” (Brass & Good, 2004), education includes continuation of already accumulated knowledge and preparation for the unknown world and realisation of potentials.

As is apparent from the youth’s narratives the purpose of education is of paramount significance in relation to the educating for happiness agenda. Evidently, nurturing of potentials is an important educational goal facilitated by social conditions of freedom to voice and choice (agency). In coherence with this conception of happiness, Noddings (2012a) contends that a good education system aiming to promote happiness should prepare

students for “things that all students should know and be able to do” but also should “help them discover what they might want to do... and evaluate their own aptitude in an area of choice” (p. 778).

The qualities of a GNH graduate (Ministry of Education, n.d) lays out a comprehensive set of ethical standards in all spheres of life beyond the economic domain. It includes descriptions of how a graduate should be as an individual, a family member, an employee or a colleague, a community member, and a citizen. What these goals imply is an educational experience that nurtures not just academic and intellectual abilities but gives equal status to socio-emotional, ethical, and spiritual nourishment. While this holistic development goal of education seems to share some resonance with youths’ expectations of the school, the autonomy of students to influence the content and learning processes are constrained by centrally determined narrow curricula with heavy emphasis on academic performance. Youth’s notion of happiness as realising their potentials calls for a deliberation on a number of questions related to school curricula and pedagogy, teacher preparation, and school culture and so on.

### **Curricular Implications of “Happiness as Realising Potentials”**

Based on the findings of youth conception of happiness as realising their potentials, I furnish two inter-related recommendations in materialising happiness goal into a reality: holistic curriculum and agency in education.

#### **a. Holistic curricula - Balancing academic and non-academic goals**

Culture and social contexts shape human values and aspirations, however, diversity is natural as personal experiences and presuppositions equally influence human development (Crotty, 2010). Students come with multiple and diverse interests and potentials; some with greater academic inclination while others find their strengths in creative fields of performing arts, sports, culinary, construction and interpersonal relations. Heavily academic oriented education system is not only unfair but can be crippling because it forces students to excel in fields that lay outside of their continuum of strengths and interests.

Holistic education includes attending to socio-emotional and ethical development (Cohen, 2006; Noddings, 2003) as from cognitive preparation. Bhutan's educational goals (Ministry of Education, n.d) reflects similar intent but, there is a discrepancy between espoused holistic educational goals and curricular practices. Holistic educational goals cohere with the students' desires for wholesome development and to realise what they view to be their potentials, but the school curriculum limits that growth. The social, cognitive and emotional learning outcomes, invisible and nebulous to many, are often overlooked and undervalued compared to academic achievements.

As discussed earlier, co-curricular programmes contribute to youth happiness but are regarded less important in Bhutanese schools. The understanding that non-academic curricula expand the developmental contexts of the youth wherein they hone socio-emotional skills, explore latent potentials, develop cognitive skills, cultivate self-directedness, and develop positive self-esteem is not evident from the treatment of co-curricular activities in Bhutanese schools. Perhaps this awareness was lost over the years as the education system became highly examined -- examined on textbook contents.

The debate on “educare” (to transmit tried and tested knowledge and practices) and “educere” (to bring out the best in preparation for an unknown future) goals of education (Brass & Good, 2004) is relevant now in discussion. The former goal presupposes the containment of all knowledge, wisdom and practices in textbooks and the predictability of future. The latter, on the other hand, recognises the future as unknown and therefore the need to nurture competencies such as analytical, critical and creative minds. Considering the interconnectedness of the world and rapid pace of change more now than ever due to technological advancement, it calls for a balance of “educare and educere” goals of education lest we produce future citizens who are high achievers in tests, but are ill prepared to cope with today's fast-changing world.

Balancing educational goals means more than the obvious equal division of instructional hours between academic and non-academic learning. A holistic development goal of education is best achieved through the right choice of instructional approaches. An intentionally organised learning taken beyond textbooks and classrooms, and connected with messiness

of the real world nurtures a complex set of skills and values aside from theoretical conceptual understanding. For instance, how can one teach youth a sense of “belongingness” to their community? Cerebral teaching leads to high examination scores and superficial compliance bereft of genuine application. One way to do it is by facilitating experiential learning that helps them connect and learn more about their community, know the people, explore things that they may value, and discover those issues that they can play a role in improving. The time is ripe, if not late, for the Bhutanese education system to review and revamp its curricula, assess its relevancy, currency, and alignment with its visionary goals.

#### b. Agency – Voice and Choice in Education

The findings of my study relate to the well-established postulation of self-determinism theory that satisfaction of the need for autonomy or a sense of agency (the other two being competence and relatedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is central to youth happiness. Environments where students enjoy agency - freedom of choice and voice - enhances the likelihood of finding an engaging activity and, as discussed earlier, complete engrossment in an activity that optimally utilises their strengths is what youth describe as their state of happiness.

Aside from the much-needed curricular diversification to provide wider choices, the pedagogical approaches and school administration need democratisation to realise the goal of educating for happiness. The education system’s continuing efforts in making learning processes student-centered need renewed emphasis with deeper understanding of how autonomy and freedom relate to youth well-being. It is imperative that educators and administrators alike understand the links between student agency, school engagement, and the happiness agenda to appreciate the value of student-centered approaches. Indeed the benefits of supportive school environment extend beyond happiness to higher engagement and learning outcomes (Christopher & Ryan, 2009).

For a traditionally hierarchical culture, the notions of youth agency can be discomforting as it disrupts the status quo of those in positions of authority as knowledgeable and wise beings. One could argue that if happiness is realisation of one’s potentials, then individuals are the best judges of their interests; the schools (and teachers) need only create environments

conducive for youth exploration and discovery of their latent talents and strengths within reasonable and safe boundaries. The centrality of the freedom to voice and choice reiterates the supposition that pedagogic approaches that values learner experience, engagement, and autonomy is conducive to youth happiness in school. Critical pedagogy, an emerging pedagogical approach (Aliakbar & Faraji, 2011; Diaz-Greenberg & Nevin, 2004), becomes relevant to the discussion here. Critical pedagogy invites learners to reject uncritical acceptance of knowledge or ways of life as a given, and to critically reflect on it and exercise one's voice to engage in critical dialogue (Diaz-Greenberg & Nevin, 2004). Such a pedagogical approach removes teachers from the position of subject experts and elevates learners to co-creators of knowledge (Aliakbar & Faraji, 2011). It is likely, given the importance of agency to youth happiness, that adoption of such a pedagogical approach, that solicits and values youth voice, may be conducive to the educating for happiness agenda.

## Conclusion

The bottom-up approach to understanding youth's conceptions of happiness is very revealing for Bhutan's education system. Youth's notion of happiness transcends the four pillars and domains of Gross National Happiness. A state of happiness for youth include a feeling of flow wherein they zoom into a mental environment created by engagement with an activity that they enjoy performing and have the potential for. In relation to this description of the state of happiness, realisation of potentials and the freedom to exercise voice and choice are social environments that promote youth happiness.

If Bhutan is serious about educating future citizens to enjoy better chances at happiness, curricular and pedagogical reformations that require strong political will and a longer term vision that extends beyond five-year term of political governments are imperative. There is a need to relook at the school curriculum and pedagogy to assess their coherence with the broad educational goals for happiness. Happiness cannot be taught directly, but the school culture (curricula, pedagogy and the administrative policy and rules) needs to be infused with values (freedom of voice and choice, autonomy) that promote youth happiness, and the purpose of education ought to transcend academic excellence alone to help youth realise what they are capable of.



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## Looking at Education in Bhutan: a View from Afar

*TW (Tom) Maxwell*

I first worked in Bhutan in 1997 for the then Department of Education and have joined others in marvelling at the progress that has been made. Working alongside educators in the Ministry of Education and the two education colleges has been a privilege. Welcoming many Bhutanese to the University of New England in Armidale has been part of the continuing story of development of Bhutanese education. We learned a lot from the batches of multi-grade teachers and the many post-grads who had been with us over the years and I think that we were able to contribute ideas and practices. But there is still much to be done.

Much of what follows takes its ideas from the writers in the book that Matthew Schuelka and I edited in 2016<sup>1</sup>. There are four sections, each of which addresses a key issue that is forward looking, and that intends to empower education in the longer term.

### **Educating for GNH Initiative**

This is the key. GNH is the goal and Educating for GNH is the guide. Yet, the greatest challenge facing the secular education system is the integration of Educating for GNH into everyday teaching. It has been claimed that teachers do not know how to do it. It may be a good idea to have an additional subject in the school curriculum, such as The Universal Human Values Education (UHVE), but the strongest way forward to Educating for GNH is to focus upon learning, not teaching. Educating for GNH is all about learning from the hidden curriculum. If you are not familiar with this term, then you will understand immediately because it is the kind of learning that takes place “at your mother’s knee”, as we say where I come from. It is tacit learning if you like.

If you are mindful of GNH, then the hidden curriculum empowers you to educate for GNH. This is a simple idea because teachers already teach through the hidden curriculum by what they do and say. If they show respect, their students observe this. If they treat their students in a sexist manner, their students observe this. If they show genuine understanding, so too will their students observe this. In other words, learning takes place, not by direct teaching, but indirectly, by “being there”.

Acts of respect, caring, honesty, kindness, compassion, gratitude, equality and empathy are noticed by students and teachers alike. Moreover, it takes seconds to commend a person for such acts. Many, if not all, parents teach their children using this approach. This means that Educating for GNH can be a part of many lessons, even maths lessons, where those in the classroom act according to the principles and values of GNH. Bhutan has already seen the benefits of teaching GNH ideas through many extra-curricular programmes (ECPs), although these ECPs are not equally available across the school population. One implication is that teachers need to be mindful of what they do and say.

Continuing capacity building in Educating for GNH, and the understanding of the importance of the hidden curriculum alongside leadership at systemic and school levels, means that change will happen, although it will take time. More work in schools and at the pre-service level is required if Educating for GNH is to be successful in the long-term rather than being looked back on as an unsuccessful slogan of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A more controversial suggestion is for GNH principles and values to be tested, formally. We know that formal testing, currently, motivates the majority of the teachers. What is more, testing assumes that what is tested is important. GNH principles and values are at the core of education. They can be tested formally. The effects of summative testing, especially when conducted at the national level, is so pervasive and seen to be so important that the term “teaching to the test” can be applied to many classrooms in Bhutan. Educating for GNH can use this to its advantage. Unfortunately, the focus upon national testing has led to spoon feeding in some classrooms such that independent learning at university is hindered.

There are some related issues. Summative testing is important but it does not help day-to-day learning because it occurs after the learning has taken place. Formative and diagnostic assessments (testing/evaluation) are also important. The former is a tool used by teachers to ensure that students are learning during the process of learning. It is separate from the summative, formal assessment system. Formative evaluation can be done simply, for example, by watching the students to see what their expressions are as they are learning. Or, students can work in small groups and talk about what has just been presented. The teacher observes and intercedes as required.

On the other hand, diagnostic evaluation in the classroom finds out the level of learning of the students before a learning sequence. This is particularly important in a new topic but also when the class is new to the teacher or when the previous lesson's learning is quickly tested, perhaps by oral questioning. Diagnostic evaluation assumes that the students are at different levels of learning and that the learning is sequenced differently for different students. Both diagnostic and formative evaluation are consistent with the idea of student-centred learning. In particular, formative-assessment - when the teacher is mindful of the process of learning and interacts with the students and checks himself/herself as necessary - is essential for Educating for GNH.

Parents and teachers are in partnership when it comes to children's learning. This is the second issue. Such a partnership is more obvious at the early childhood level (< 5years) but is no less important elsewhere. Acknowledging this partnership implies the breaking down of a culture of parental exclusion from schools. Leadership is required here. Both teachers and parents are essentially involved in Educating for GNH. Why not work together as part of policy and practice?

Another issue is the breaking down of cultural inequities. This is clearly stated in the GNH principles and values. Take one important area of inequity - sexist practices are evident at all levels of schooling especially in higher secondary school and in the tertiary sector. Changes are needed at the institutional, policy, and practice levels such that these become consistent with national policies.

## Capacity Building

If Educating for GNH is to be successful, many teachers need to change. Changing people's ways of doing things is difficult and takes time. We know from past experience that one-shot in-service capacity building is largely a waste of time and money. By "one-shot" I mean a course where people are removed from where they work and taught about something. Even the four-day training programme, that already exists for teachers to integrate GNH values into different subjects of the present curriculum, will be unsuccessful if it is not followed up. Follow up is achieved via pressure and support. Pressure is exerted, for example, through supervisors identifying the policy and requiring it to be demonstrated. The Performance School document provides the basis for the supervisors for this task. The Education Monitoring Supervisory Division needs to continue with its pressure by visiting schools as it did in the early years of the initiative.

Support is provided through having the materials that are required, having time to try it out and making mistakes and having colleagues to talk to to share ideas as well as successes and failures. Psychological support is necessary. A little praise goes a long way, especially when trying something new. Reiteration of the main ideas, and how to do them, is usually required. A current example of the on-going need for capacity building is in the area of educating the disabled. The new policy of inclusion of children with disabilities into regular schools is a demanding, but necessary, policy. In-service education for inclusion is necessary to prepare the current teachers for the new policy and should be a series of practical learnings over time rather than the less effective, one-off events. Pre-service education requires attention, such that new courses are devised and others infused with the new policy. Capacity building of pre-service staff in Paro and Samtse in the short-term is implied here to follow up on the work completed there just after the Educating for GNH initiative.

Capacity building is an on-going need. It is especially required from when a new policy is introduced until the new policy becomes part of the culture, that is, it is the norm - "the way we do things around here". Specific areas noted by the authors in the Schuelka and Maxwell book were for the Royal University of Bhutan to give greater emphasis to high quality research and capacity building. Firstly, the curriculum at the Faculty of Traditional Medicine requires long-term capacity development if it is to

become a leader in this form of medicine in the region. Secondly, although non-formal education (NFE) in Bhutan has been a success, Lyonpo Thakur S Powdyel believes that more can be done to serve the developing needs of the people. Thirdly, capacity building in early childhood care and development has begun and must continue if quality education and care (rather than child minding) is to be facilitated.

## **Vocational Education**

Dasho Pema Thinley, amongst others, has stated that tertiary vocational education is the weakest link in the Bhutanese education and training system. The need for action would appear to be a short as well as a long-term need. The results of electrical and plumbing practice that you see as you walk around any town in Bhutan are far from ideal models. The Education Blueprint has addressed this issue, so work has begun. An obvious question is: where will the teachers come from? The Educating for GNH initiative points to the dignity of labour and a positive acceptance of doing manual work. Presently the number of students attending vocational education classes is low. The quality of the practical outcomes could be vastly improved. New conceptions of how students learn in the vocational areas in Bhutan appear to be necessary, especially with attention to viable vocational opportunities for females to facilitate their entry to the workplace.

We also know that many young Bhutanese are looking for employment. The teaching and application of *Zorig Chusum* could lead to the valuing not only the 13 traditional Bhutanese arts and crafts but also the honouring of the manual creation of things that have use, including carpentry, plumbing and electrical work. Moreover, if NFE were to also incorporate the learning of English, it might result in an increase in the recruitment, training and retention of motivated young Bhutanese and would then provide an alternative pathway for the many who are looking for employment.

## **Accountability and Autonomy**

It is reasonable for educators at all levels to be accountable for what they say and do. It is also reasonable to call the government to account for societal issues. Such an issue is the consistent concern about attracting teachers to the profession, particularly those with the right qualities. Similarly, there has been a continuous call for attention to be paid to teacher salaries and

working conditions. Although initial efforts were made in the 1990s, it is hard to imagine the right people being attracted to a difficult, but important, profession when the pay and working conditions do not match up to those in other areas. Shifting the focus, does it make sense for the university sector to be expanded when the employment for graduates is more limited than, say, the employment of Bhutanese carpenters, electricians and brick layers? Again, calls for English to be incorporated into the NFE courses would seem more timely now than even 10 years ago. At a different level, a case has been made for a fully independent Bhutan Council for School Examinations and Assessment (BCSEA). The good work of the BCSEA and of its predecessors is quite well known, but more could be done if the BCSEA was independent rather than just autonomous.

Institutions need to be accountable also. We know how important international benefactors have been to Bhutan but that resources is drying up as needs are perceived to be greater elsewhere, notably Sub-Saharan Africa. The reality is that future governments will be providing almost all the resources to the education sector. Builders need to be held accountable for poor quality structures. Toilets need to work. A number of the small schools I have visited had infrastructure that was in a shocking state. Teachers and lecturers need to be in class, as stated in the timetable. Leaders can speak out about issues such as this. Supervisors have a responsibility to call those not doing the right thing to account. Calling people to account is hard to do but it is an essential part of good governance.

Finally, we are all accountable for our own actions. Mindfulness is critical. Reflection on actions is central to the process of being responsible for our actions because it implies that we will learn from that reflection and make changes, thus avoiding the need to be called to account.

## Conclusion

Educating for GNH has the potential to be far-reaching. I argued that teachers already have, in their make up, recognised the power of the hidden curriculum to teach GNH values and principles. Tacit learning of the kind that we all learnt at our mother's knee, and that we all use as parents, is the key process for all teachers to acknowledge and utilise. Formative evaluation is an accompanying process that teachers can use to increase hidden curriculum learning by attention to the words and deeds of the students

and themselves alike. Educators can join parents in partnership in teaching the values and principles of GNH. The policy of Educating for GNH will not be successful unless resources are available for on-going-capacity building at the pre- and in-service levels. The waste of one-shot capacity building has to be acknowledged in favour of continuous development over time. There is much to be done, as well as much to be accounted for.

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# The Importance of Questioning

*Kencho Pelzom*

As educators we want motivated students who aspire to learn, not just in schools, but throughout their lives. If we want our students to be motivated to learn and perform well, wherever they go and whatever they do, it is high time we assess why we send our children to school. How can we make their learning better so that they graduate with the right values and attitude for future endeavors? I am not going to prescribe a set of values here but it seems that our expectations from our children to compete for good grades is not enough. We end up with graduates but not necessarily with educated future citizens. Thus we must think beyond grades and jobs for the sake of our future generation. In this article, based on my decade-long teaching experience, I will argue for the need to revise our current tertiary education system to produce informed, productive, citizens.

## Motivated Learning Vs Assessment-Based Learning

Some eight years ago, one of my students asked me why they should study Aristotle when he is long dead and his ideas and philosophy are not relevant to the current Bhutanese generation? I wasn't surprised by the question. I had realised by then that many of our students in Political Science or other related programmes may have the same doubt. My answer to this student, and others who feel the same way, is that we study philosophy because it makes you examine your life and your surrounding in way that you have never thought of before. In doing so, you ask questions and learn to critically analyse various aspects of the answer.

This question was a reflection of a typical attitude towards learning among my students: why study something that may broaden my horizon but won't help me secure good grades and a job? I believe that examinations or a future job possibility is never a right motivation for students to learn. On the contrary, motivation to learn for the sake of learning is more effective if we want our students to perform better in school and after school. The rational is, if you invest in learning something well then you know it well enough to use it in the future in any form. Yet, the sad reality is that Bhutanese students learn for grades and employment prospects.

This is evident in our attachment to examination-based assessments. There is no exception, whether it's the teacher's love for having as many tests or the students wanting a course with more weightage in final examinations or midterm or unit tests.

I remember that, one time, after we had revised our curriculum in 2014, we had revised our coursework and examination weightage. It was made to make students have more coursework as they gradually progress. The reason was that, as students progress into the undergraduate level, they should be capable of independent learning, making the course more student-centered than lecturer-centered. The batch that had to do the most coursework in their fourth semester that year came to my office in a group to complain that this was not in their best interests. They had requested to go back to 50 examination and 50 coursework like the last batch. They expressed the view that coursework was much more difficult than examinations. Reflecting on it now, I think my students thought it was easier to sit for examinations because it did not require reading many pages of articles or books to do a small assessment. Yet the reality was that most did not do well in examination either because they would study for just a week before their final semester examination. According to the World Bank's report on "Learning To Realise Education's Promise (2018)", the average years spent in school has drastically increased, especially in the developing world, from 2.0 years in 1950 to 7.2 years in 2010, but the learning gap exists between developing and developed countries. Students who would be considered high performers in middle income countries would be ranked equal to average students in developed countries. The World Bank calls this the "learning crisis".

As a teacher I found this mentality of wanting to study only for examinations exhausting and frustrating. However, I can't blame the students alone because the current economic and social paradigm is such that better grades are seen to lead to better jobs and being a better person. This belief is reinforced by many practices such as in the labour market when your grades carry a higher weightage than your personality or emotional intelligence. For example, most jobs require higher grades in the first selection process, validating the current perception that grades are all that matters. Even more strange is the fact that graduates have to submit their class 12 mark sheets while applying for jobs. For me, the student I taught in the first year and the one who graduates are different. Change is constant, more true for

students that come to college as high school graduates and graduate from college as adults. The inability of our current practices to account for such intangible changes and growth in a student defeats the whole purpose of tertiary education. As a result, students end up underestimating the power of education to help realise their full potential. I wonder if that is also why we fail to build the confidence of students in their learning. A telling case of this lack of confidence is the rush to sit for the Bhutan Civil Service Examinations (BCSE) after graduation, knowing that their chances are slim. I am never surprised when most of my final year students want to sit for the BCSE.

My first question to them is, “Why”? Often their answer is that they want to do it just because everyone else is doing it or telling them to do so. Yet, most would confide that their chances of doing well was very low. There is a theory in psychology called the self-fulfilling prophecy which states that after predicting/expecting what you believe to be true, individuals usually try everything to make the prediction come true, knowing or unknowingly, fulfilling the self prediction. This was very true for most students who believed that they would not do well in the examinations. I often wondered if it was also because their initial motivation for taking the examinations were wrong.

Notwithstanding the above, I wouldn’t group all my students into the same category. While it was rare to find students who studied for the sake of learning, when such students did come along, I observed that they always out-performed students who wanted to study only for marks or examinations. No matter how hard the latter worked, the former did better in exams and after graduation. Such students have gone on to do very well in life and are always a source of joy and motivation for their teachers. Yet such students were more the exception than the norm.

### **The Need of the Hour - Space for Reasoning and Questioning**

It is a sad reality that most first year students struggle with skills beyond reparative knowledge. For most of my students, it would be their first time learning or critically analysing in their first year as an undergraduate. Most of my students would dread open, book tests and the exam section that required them to critically examine what they have studied.

Motivating students to learn beyond the test is challenging but rewarding when they finally learn how to do so. Then students realise that their informed opinion matters and that they don't always have to agree with what is written in the text. This also inoculates students from believing that what they read is not always the truth, encouraging them to investigate and validate the information they receive. This requires students to not only be rigorous readers but also question whatever they learn. Thus, I don't necessarily subscribe to the common belief that Bhutanese students lack skills for critical analysis and reasoning. While it is challenging, the three or four years of tertiary education gives us ample time to instill such skills in our students. I have seen students develop these skills in the course of their tertiary education.

However, I believe the key obstacle is that such reasoning and the resulting outcome of questioning everything is not always encouraged in our school system and our society in general. Our deeply hierarchical system sometimes misunderstand questions as a challenge to established authority. For instance, the first batch of Political Science students was once branded as “revolutionary” by a colleague because they would ask and critique whenever they did not agree with what was being said or taught. There were times when my students have asked the right questions but got into trouble because they dared to ask. I always felt guilty that they got into trouble because we encouraged reasoning as opposed to accepting things at face value.

I believe that, as a society, we need to create a safe space for young minds to explore and question established norms. We are all victims of this hierarchical school set-up. We rarely asked questions beyond what is there in the book or what is being taught. How many of us actually raised our hands when our teacher would ask at the end of the lesson if anyone had any doubts? Even more serious is how many teachers ask this question every day in their classes with genuine intentions to help students improve? I remember once a student narrated a story about one of his professor (expatriate) who would be furious if they asked questions in class. The student said that the tutor took it as a challenge for testing his capability as a teacher - it rubbed the tutor's ego in the wrong way. Why would anyone ask questions if it leads to his/her failing the course? I would be too scared to do it as well.

On the other hand, as a teacher myself, I always felt the pressure to know everything, whether one has just started or one has been teaching for while. This expectation of a teacher to know everything can sometimes lead us to be defensive and authoritarian in the way we conduct our lessons. I found that as I grew more experienced in this profession, the need to control my students learning/classroom norms were more fluid and less structured. After all there are some 50 minds in one class at a given time and no two persons think or act alike to any given topic or situation. To accept that there will be days when a teacher might not have the right answer and graciously accepting that in front of the students is a lesson I would share with people who want to be future teachers. It humanises the teacher and teaches students that it is not necessary to know everything. Accepting and wanting to learn is more important. After all teaching is a profession that requires more learning than actual teaching.

### **The Design of Tertiary Education**

This lack of space is evident in the way we design curricula that are foundational to tertiary education. The current tertiary curriculum guidelines do not always give the tutor the freedom to bring out the best in both the tutor and student. I always felt that the Royal University of Bhutan's process of curriculum design was for tutors with less experience and for someone who could follow the curriculum structure like an operational guide. I am also to be blamed for this as I was involved in creating the Political Science curriculum offered at Sherubste College.

Looking back, I feel that a curriculum should provide maximum room to bring out the best in teachers and students. For example, why should the curriculum guide a teacher on what kind of test should he/she be conducting for the students? Tests can be of any nature, essay/quiz/multiple choice questions (MCQ). I remember few years ago we were strictly asked to not make MCQ more than 10 percent of the final examination. The reasons were many: students leave early before the intended time so they disturb the other students; MCQs made by teachers did not test the deeper level learning for students; and so on. The conclusion was that no one, even if you knew how to make MCQs that would test student's deeper learning skills, was allowed to make more than the required 10 percent. This made me realise how we love uniformity and conformity and also the oddities of these values when applied in an academic setting.

Further, the huge pressure on tertiary education to create programmes that would make graduates employable is such that we invest half our resources in doing needs assessment studies on where our future graduates would be employed. Thus we make curricula on the basis of needs, almost like a commodity with a user warranty. This process has led us to focus more on skills as opposed to improving learning quality. Skills are by-products of learning and this is especially true for subjects like humanities and social sciences. If we look at the current tertiary education trends in South Asia, humanities and social science have taken a back stage.

Courses like MBA, BBA, Hospitality Management have completely taken over. I am glad that this trend has not reached Bhutan but it may not be long before it catches up. I was often confused when there was national debate a few years ago on the quality of graduates and many said it was declining. Was it declining compared with the past when we had a handful of graduates who all got jobs with the RCSC? Was it declining because we now have more graduates than jobs so they have to compete and then some got left out? Isn't competition good?

I remember everyone prescribed that we should evaluate the tertiary education system but what do you do when the diagnosis is wrong? Many mentioned that our graduates need to learn skills in schools, such as application writing, presentation, and communication. I had long discussion with my non-teacher friends on many occasions on the definition of quality and what was required for it. When the system is emphasising examination and grades, why would students learn these skills? And should we teach these skills as a subject rather than as a by-product of education? At present we are pressured into teaching skills more than the subject.

I do not have answers for these issues but I feel that we need to address them before it is too late. Most importantly, we need to ask what kind of learning culture are we teaching our future citizens? Will they have the necessary skills and the knowledge to take our country forward?

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## Finland's Success in Education

*Jouni Kangasniemi*

On April 14, elections were held in Finland for the Parliament which is the supreme decision-making authority for national decision-making. The Finnish parliament is unicameral and has two hundred members who are elected for a term of four years. Currently, the members of the parliament belong to 11 parliamentary groups.

As soon as the Parliamentary results were confirmed, the new Parliament convened its first session on April 24. In the next weeks, a new ruling Government would be formed by the winning parties so that the majority of votes in the Parliament are reached and the new Government programme can then be implemented over the next four years. A Government in Finland is always formed by several parties as none of the parties are big enough to have the majority of votes in the Parliament on their own. This calls for good cooperation among the parties for a shared vision for Finland. The ability to collaborate and agree on things is especially important when a new Government programme is formulated. At the moment, it seems likely that a new Government programme will be released by the end of May.

Finland is often referred as one of the top countries when it comes to education. It is obvious that education will be high on the upcoming Government agenda. For a country with a small population, like Finland or Bhutan, a well-functioning education system is important for long term prosperity, for a peaceful society built on knowledge and harmony, together with a sustainable future. More important, education creates well-being, promotes human rights, safeguards democracy and reduces inequalities between social groups and regions. For any peace-loving country this is the basis for all future development.

Today, one of the widely accepted principles in education is that all people must have equal access to high quality education and training. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all United Nations Member States, in 2015, says it more directly - Education is for all.



For example in Finland, the same opportunities to education are available to all Finnish citizens irrespective of their age, aspirations, wealth, ethnic origin or where they live - be it in the countryside or in the city.

The current education system and its priorities in Finland did not come into reality overnight. It is an outcome of long-term education policy and decision-making together with strong implementation over several decades. A transformation of the education system in Finland was needed in the wake of a rapid industrialisation period in the 1960s. After a very controversial and heated debate, a consensus agreement was reached to provide same basic education for the whole population, for free. Looking back now, it is easy to agree that decisions made then have been right and successful for Finland. Also, against this background (and personal experience), I cannot agree more with His Majesty the King of Bhutan when he reflects on the long-term vision of Bhutan and sees education as the number one priority. When thinking in the long term a 50-year-perspective can and will make a difference in the quality of life and the success of the whole country. Finland has been ranked as the happiest nation in the 2019 World

### **Happiness Report for the Second Time in a Row**

It is also necessary to note that education reform is much more than just political reform. Those who share the inspiring new vision and implement the changes needed are the key players. The teachers in Finland, particularly, have played an important role over the years.

A well experienced teacher once said that “to teach is to touch lives”. There is a lot of wisdom in these words. Part of the attractiveness of the teacher profession in Finland is that those who are committed to the teaching profession see their roles in a much larger perspective than just someone who shows up in a classroom and teaches the specific content or to read, write, and do mathematics. The current philosophy in education is to see that “every child can flourish”. The potential of each child should and can be maximized with proper education. Educational guidance is seen as essential so that each pupil and student can perform as well as possible in their studies and be able to make appropriate decisions concerning their education and future careers.

Guidance and counselling are seen as the work of all education personnel working in schools, not just the teachers. Teachers are treating the young people as individuals and helping them to proceed according to their own capabilities. Learners together make up a larger group for learning, where learning takes place in a more collaborative way. Collaboration rather than competition among the students, we say it in Finland. It is not only the content. Learners should also experience the success and joy of learning. Something we both agree easily in Finland and in Bhutan. Also, learning to learn is a skill, which takes many years to understand and benefit from to become innovative and adaptive to new realities.

As stated above, teaching is an attractive career choice in Finland and the teaching profession has a high status. Thus, the teacher education universities can select those applicants most suitable for the teaching profession. For example, the intake for class teacher education is only 10 percent of all applicants.

Teachers in basic and secondary education are required to hold a Master's degree. The high level of pedagogic training is seen as necessary as teachers in Finland are quite autonomous in their work. Currently, almost all teachers at all levels of education have the required degree and qualifications. The base for this was set in 1976 when the primary school teacher education was moved to universities as the former two-year teacher training seminar was comprehensively upgraded and the focus of the studies shifted to promote strong learning sciences together with skills needed in the teaching profession. Since then, the schools have been transforming and evolving by using high quality knowledge and expertise for their development.

Finnish teachers can and are often active, influencing the development of education at the national level. Teachers are generally represented in the expert groups preparing education reforms and new initiatives at the Ministry of Education and Culture. They are also providing expertise for development of the national core curriculum which has become the main document for steering education. With solid support from teachers, it is easier to exchange good practice and discuss new initiatives openly - what works in schools and what does not. The teachers' union, which represents 95 per cent of Finnish teachers, is also one of the important stakeholders who contribute (and not oppose) to the development of education and training. Our way of gradually improving the education system is in many

ways shared and supported. When everyone knows their responsibility and acts accordingly, the system as a whole can be steered through trust rather than several layers of control from administration.

Finnish teachers have many opportunities to influence their work and development of schools. They decide on the teaching methods, the teaching materials used, as well as pupil and student assessment often in cooperation with other teachers. Most teachers also participate in joint decision-making, drawing up of local curricula, as well as other development needs. An administration that is flexible and supports development at school level is a strong asset. At most levels of education (except in higher education), teachers are required to update and upgrade their skills annually. Teachers are recognised as the key to quality in education. Therefore continuous attention is paid to both to teachers' pre-service and continuing education.

In Finland, education providers with schools are responsible for employing their teaching staff. They also determine the types and number of posts needed. The recruitment is an open process and the vacant posts are advertised in newspapers, professional journals, and relevant websites. Each education provider decides who is responsible for appointing new teachers. It may be the education committee or another equivalent committee, the school board or – especially in the case of short-term substitute teachers – the principal. The aim is to select a person who is both qualified and most suitable for both the position in question and the school community.

Responsibility for the daily operations of basic education schools and upper secondary schools rests with principals. The principals (rectors) of the schools are seen as the pedagogical heads and thus the quality of teaching and learning in schools is their main responsibility. The principal creates possibilities for a student-centered operational culture by his or her own involvement. This role is vital especially as he is also seen as the enabler of new innovations introduced in the schools. In other words, a student-centered school culture means that all work and activities in schools aim to provide time, space, and possibilities for new learning.

In Finland, there are 185–195 school days in a year. Teachers are not obligated to be at school on those days when they have no lessons or other particular duties. In addition to teaching, the tasks of teachers include planning of instruction and pre- and post-class work. Furthermore, the

school's internal development tasks and cooperation with colleagues, homes, and other partners such as staff in pupil and social welfare services, the local family counselling clinic, the police, business life, form an integrated part of the teaching profession. For this type of activities an allocation of three hours of work per week for teachers has been determined collectively.

Continuing teacher education is encouraged. Teachers in Finland generally have many opportunities to develop their professionalism. Finnish teachers consider in-service training as a privilege and therefore participate actively. The State also funds continuing training programmes, primarily in areas important for implementing education policy and promoting areas seen important in education reforms. Updated knowledge is always welcomed by the teachers. All in all, paying attention to teachers and their role as agents of change pays off.

## Mainstream School Education: a Critical Assessment

*Tenzin Chhoeda*

The pursuit of quality education in Bhutan dates back to the beginning of modern education system itself. All the Five-Year Plans, without exception, have devoted a section to the subject. And yet, after 60 years of development and reforms, quality education remains as elusive as ever.

The notion of quality itself is subjective. For the school administration and the citizens, quality may simply be students' performance as is measured by national examinations. For some, it refers to the values they have imbibed while for still others it may be how well the graduates are prepared for the labour market. Or it could be all of these and more. For the purpose of this paper, let us confine that notion to the results of national examinations and assessments which encompass the learning schema of our schools.

With the professional maturity of the educators, examinations have become more sophisticated, assessing more than the memory power of its pupils, including their analytical and higher level skills.<sup>1</sup> Over the last eight years, the Pupil Performance Report of the Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment (BCSEA) for Class 10 (end of basic education) show some laboured improvements in English, Economics, History-Civics-Geography (HCG) and Science and a dramatic improvement in Computer Applications.<sup>2</sup> This was, however, offset by the deterioration of student performance in Dzongkha and Mathematics.

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<sup>1</sup>Asia Pacific Journal of Education · September 2010, Evolutionary trajectories in school assessment systems: The case of Bhutan.

<sup>2</sup>It could be because of the massive investments in computer education across the grades implemented as part of the Chiphen Rigphel, supported by GOI and outsourced to NIIT. This was not pursued, for this paper, and could be a subject for research.

Subject	Mean Score		
	2010	2013	2018
English	52.61	56.73	57.93
Dzongkha	69.75	65.33	64.06
Economics	58.20	52.76	62.68
Mathematics	51.53	53.31	49.84
History, Civics and Geography	54.99	60.15	56.44
Science	49.02	53.18	50.14
Computer Applications	58.79	74.05	77.21

**Table 1: Mean scores in Class X examinations (2010-2018)**

Overall, mean scores continue to be low, with most subject scores (except Computer Applications) below 60 percent. The pass mark for subjects is set at 35 percent and, because of this, despite their low performance, 90 percent of the students pass the examinations every year. Some would argue that this practice contributes to the lack of quality as students who have not mastered the assessed level are promoted to the next class.

Even by the Ministry of Education’s (MoE) own standards, the performance of the majority of the students has been poor. The clincher came with OECD’s PISA-D results for 2017<sup>3</sup> conducted with a sample group of 15 year old students.

DOMAIN	BTN	ECU	GTM	HND	KHM	PRY	SEN	ZMB	PISA-D AVG
Reading literacy	45.34	52.66	44.50	44.74	34.62	47.03	37.37	27.88	41.26
Mathematical literacy	38.84	41.69	31.33	33.21	30.29	31.44	27.52	19.08	30.65
Scientific literacy	45.10	46.98	39.82	40.71	34.85	41.16	33.25	31.19	38.28

**Table 2: OECD’s PISA-D results 2017.**

<sup>3</sup>BCSEA and OECD, Education in Bhutan, Findings from Bhutan’s Experience in PISA for Development.

Bhutan performed poorly at 38-48 percentage points below the PISA reference countries. But, amongst countries that participated in the PISA-D testing programme, Bhutan did very well.<sup>4</sup> The question is, therefore, what standards do we pitch ourselves at? Should we be satisfied as the better performing country amongst poor performing countries of the lower middle income group or should our aspiration be for our average students to score 90 percent and above (to equate with the pass rates), and be ready to be ranked with OECD countries where our students perform well in higher conceptual learning as well as the basics?<sup>5</sup>

Whatever our goal may be, we cannot transform a less than average performing education system to a high performer overnight. We have to contend with what our system is capable of delivering. Let us look at some of the core elements that make up Bhutan's education system, and examine how one might improve them. These are:

- Enhancing the teaching pool;
- Improving student readiness for school;
- Improving teaching-learning resources; and
- Improving management of the education system.

### Enhancing the Teaching Pool

Qualification	2003	2008	2013	2018
Masters	341	436	660	1,326
PG Diploma			725	1,453
Bachelors	585	2,538	4,066	5,319
Diploma/Certificate	3,080	2,768	2,374	726
Total	4,006	5,742	7,825	8,824

**Table 3: Teacher Qualifications (2003-2018).**

<sup>4</sup>Bhutan is amongst the 9 countries which participated in the PISA-D to gain experience from this initiative to help prepare for participation in the PISA 2021 cycle. This will help Bhutan understand how the performance of students in the country compares, in relation to international benchmarks and to countries facing similar challenges elsewhere, and to identify the factors that are associated with under performance in order to effectively eliminate it.

<sup>5</sup>PISA-D report shows for example that in Reading Literacy, Bhutanese students are best on retrieve and access aspects and weakest in items that involve either "Integrate and interpret" or "Reflect and evaluate".

At face value, teacher profiles have improved dramatically over the past one and a half decade. This has been achieved through a two- pronged approach - upgrading the minimum qualification for entry into teaching to a B.Ed. Degree and upgrading the qualification of serving teachers through training, in a combination of distance learning and classroom instruction to enable those with Certificates/Diplomas to earn a B.Ed. And those with a B.Ed or Post Graduate diploma to obtain a Master's Degree in Education.

Two questions need to be posed regarding pre-service education. The first is the selection process for training. As is often pointed out, teaching does not attract the best talents, with many opting to teach as a last resort for a source of income. Therefore, how could the selection process ensure that the most promising candidates are admitted into the profession? And second, more importantly, how effective is teacher education in transforming the less-than-average performing school leavers into competent, motivated teachers? These questions have been posed elsewhere<sup>6</sup> but there appears to have been no attempts to seek answers.

Similarly, there has been no assessment of the effectiveness of the training programmes set up to upgrade in-service teachers' qualifications. Thus, while a quantum leap in qualitative improvements of the teachers have been achieved in the MoE's administrative accounting system, it has yet to be established how this has benefited the students.

Equally impressive, the rate of increase in the number of teachers has outpaced that of the rate of growth in enrolment - student-teacher ratio (STR) has halved for every category of schools over the last decade.<sup>7</sup> However, has improvement in the STR led to teachers taking greater care of the students, the provision of remedial classes for those in need, and the enhancement of student achievement levels across schools and grades?

Historically, whenever there were shortages of teachers, Bhutan relied on expatriate teachers. Currently, this continues on a smaller scale. Their numbers augment the pool of teachers and their varied cultures enrich the system. Another potential source of enrichment may come from within the country, from the local community. An increasing number of people of various backgrounds and skills who are retired or about to retire from their

<sup>6</sup>See for example A Review Report on the Quality of Education, Prepared by the Special Committee on Education for Submission to the 18th Session of National Council, 2016.

<sup>7</sup>STR has been reduced from 32:1 in 2003 to 28:1 in 2008, 21:1 in 2013 and 17:1 in 2018. Please see for details in the relevant sections the MoE's Annual Education Statistics.



professions, including teachers,<sup>8</sup> may be willing to contribute their know-how as part-time teachers. Also, with the rising education level amongst the Bhutanese, parents can be expected to play a more proactive role in the education of their children. Some already help with homework and fund raising but they could do more. Parental involvement will benefit the children and may have important positive social benefits. There may be other ways to enhance the teaching pool. We will discuss more under the Improving Management section.

### **Improving Student Readiness for School**

Another important consideration for education quality is the readiness of a student to learn. A little over a decade ago, most learners entered school with no preschool experience. That has changed since 2008, when the government started promoting Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD). As of 2018, there were 8,499 children enrolled, comprising 24 percent of the three-to-five-year age group. MoE plans to scale this up to 50 percent of the age group by 2023.<sup>9</sup>

Although the evidence of the benefits of ECCD have been reported,<sup>10</sup> the effectiveness of the programme is largely dependent on the competencies and motivation of its facilitators. MoE will need to build up a core group of experts in this field who will monitor and support the facilitators and the centres. Otherwise there is a risk that a good number of the centres will only serve as child-minding facilities.

We also need to be mindful that parents are the primary care givers and best placed to support their children's cognitive, social and emotional development. This may be true of all societies but is especially relevant for Bhutan where the government is championing GNH. With this in mind, the national ECCD programme's main thrust should be to provide parents with the relevant knowledge and skills, perhaps through the mass media. The ECCD centres could also play their part by supporting parents/family members who are unable to do this because of work, illiteracy, etc. At present, attention is focused on the development of the centres and not in reaching out to the parents with the information on the best practices for

<sup>8</sup>Please refer to RCSC, Annual Civil Service Statistics, 2017, page 60 which provides a growing number of Civil servants due for retirement.

<sup>9</sup>GNH Commission, 12th Five Year Plan: NKRA 3: Poverty Eradicated and Inequality Reduced.

<sup>10</sup>National Statistical Bureau, Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (BMIS) 2010. Also refer to Save the Children and MoE, 2015 National ECCD Centre Program Impact Evaluation.

childcare and development. This needs to change. Research points to the critical importance of the first 1000 days in a child's life. During this period the brain is most plastic, grows the fastest, and is most responsive to the outside world. The brain's neural pathways that support communication, understanding, social development, and emotional well-being grow most rapidly in these first three years.<sup>11</sup> To date, there are no government programmes that address these early stages of development and urgently needs consideration. The best agency to lead this is the Health Ministry as they already have extensive networks that could reach the target groups (usually mothers) through the Post Natal Care system. The mass media can also be used for this.

## Improving Teaching-Learning Resources

Since 1966, a team of officers from the teaching cadre have been engaged in developing curriculum and writing or selecting textbooks for the Bhutanese schools. There is a well-designed curriculum framework which articulates the learning standards for each grade in each subject. The curriculum framework and materials are constantly updated and revised, based on feedback from teachers and in accordance with imperatives determined by the government.

All learning materials, except stationery items in urban schools, are provided free. The availability of learning resources is not an issue. At times, it is a matter of logistics – problems arising when supplies are delayed. The Royal Education Council<sup>12</sup> (REC) has also made it possible for basic curriculum materials to be downloaded from its home page.<sup>13</sup>

The Internet has been an indispensable resource and teaching tool. Towards this end, 7,067 teachers have been trained in basic information technology through the Chiphen Rigpel project (2010-2014). What remains is to connect the schools to this immense worldwide resource. As of April, 2018, only 53 percent of our schools have internet connectivity,<sup>14</sup> mostly with inadequate bandwidth. Therefore, to enable teachers and students to download learning materials, the government should make it a priority

<sup>11</sup>Grantham-McGregor, S., Cheung, Y., Cueto, S., Glewwe, P., Richter, L., Strupp, B., et al., (2007). Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries. *Lancet*, 369: 60-70

<sup>12</sup>Department of Curriculum Research and Development, Ministry of Education has since 2014 been subsumed under the Royal Education Council which was established as an independent body for Education Research in 2007.

<sup>13</sup>[www.rec.gov.bt](http://www.rec.gov.bt)

<sup>14</sup>MoE, Annual Education Statistics, 2018.

to connect all schools to the Internet with the appropriate bandwidth for the student population. Amenities such as safe drinking water supply and toilets have also been recognised as being important for the education and well-being of the students and efforts are underway to improve them in all schools. In addition, the central schools have started to provide their children with soap, toothpaste, school uniforms and bed clothes, etc. How this impacts learning is not clear, but it has certainly made a lot of parents and their wards happier.

### **Improving Management of the Education System**

Once again, the most important resources of the education system are its teachers. Unlike many other public education systems in the region, Bhutan does not have teacher absenteeism and the associated issues.<sup>15</sup> However, MoE still has to ensure that this resource is optimally deployed and directed to bringing about real, qualitative improvements in the classrooms.

Teachers are a mixed group, with varying qualifications, experiences and skills. Amongst them there are teachers who are experts at teaching language or instilling discipline without resorting to corporal punishment. Likewise, there are teachers whose expertise is in making fractions or higher conceptual mathematics understandable, as there are those who inspire children in creative writing. There are also teachers who are good at dealing with slow learners or children with disabilities. How well such expertise is used to benefit the education system is a management challenge and must be taken up if we are to make substantive and sustained qualitative improvements in student achievement levels. For a start, we could create a roster of experts, a system of peer support across schools, and build a nurturing a culture of self-directed professional development.

A core management objective must be to keep the teachers motivated. The job satisfaction level amongst our teachers is reported to be about 68 percent.<sup>16</sup> Factors, ranging from salary scales to working conditions, are at play in determining motivation and morale which are difficult to be reformed overnight. But there are also things which can be addressed with relative ease. One of them is for administrators and the government to treat the teachers with decency, provide recognition when it is due and give them a voice in matters that affect them and the education system.

<sup>15</sup>Please see findings from the World Bank, Discussion Paper Series, Bhutan Learning Quality Survey, 2009.

<sup>16</sup>Royal Education Council, (2013), Teachers' Job Satisfaction in Bhutan.

The following sums up the sentiments of many of our teachers:

“We all know that when we have a voice in what happens around us, and that when our work has more meaning in the community that we live in, our morale is, for obvious reasons, high. Karma Dorji.”<sup>17</sup>

Besides good management of teachers, there are a number of pertinent points that need highlighting: (a) information systems, (b) effective engagement with development partners and (c) effective and efficient use of financial resources.

## Information System

The basis of good policies and sound management practice is a good information system. There are several information systems within the MoE that are generated by different branches of its administration. These include the examination results and assessment studies of BCSEA, the administrative reports of the Education Monitoring Division, the information system of the Human Resource Division, and the EMIS of PPD. Historically, there has been a glaring gap that correlates teachers’ and administrators’ accountability for student performance. There are attempts being made within the RCSC and MoE to address this through the establishment of a new teacher performance evaluation system.<sup>18</sup> These should be continually refined based on the feedbacks and reviews from administrators and teachers, and supported by a more appropriate and robust personnel management information system.

In addition, the Annual Education Statistics report needs reformulation. After all, what gets counted is important. While most of the enrolment targets for the MDGs have been fulfilled, the report continues to be dominated by education coverage statistics. Instead, it would be more useful to focus on information that is deemed essential for education quality, such as examination scores, education assessment results, teacher performance, job satisfaction level, internet bandwidth per student, and different aspects of the costs of education.

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<sup>17</sup>A teacher, Principal and Chief EMMSD, in *Teacher Morale in Bhutan*, presented to the Seminar on Education Quality, NIE, Paro, 2008.

<sup>18</sup>Please see *Performance Appraisal Customised for Education Sector*, Kuensel, 9 April 2019.

## Effective Engagement With Development Partners

Development partners, such as the UN agencies, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and some friendly countries have always played a key role in supporting our education plans and policies. In engaging with its partners, Bhutan has often prided itself in determining its own programmes and getting partners to support it. But this can be overdone, as was evident from the background document of the recent Round Table Meeting which appeared to be overly preoccupied with meeting the financing gap of the plans of the previous government, as opposed to seeking help to fill its knowledge gaps.<sup>19</sup>

It is likely that, in some corner of the globe, situations similar to Bhutan's have been resolved with the engagement of some of these organisations. Access to such knowledge and expertise could help Bhutan leapfrog stages of our development. There appears to be tools and programmes which could be particularly relevant (after adaptation) to Bhutan, such as the World Bank Group's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Education leadership needs to explore and exploit such opportunities.

## Efficient and Effective Use of Financial Resources

In 2018, the Education Sector was allocated 21 percent of government expenditure.<sup>21</sup> Bhutan's spending on education, as a proportion of the country's GDP, is the highest compared with countries in the South Asia region, as well as those participating in the PISA-D. If this was the case, how efficient is our education system? And, more pertinently, why has the enhanced input into the system not resulted in a commensurate improvement of the students' achievement?

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<sup>19</sup>Please see Joint Task Force (JTF) for the 14<sup>th</sup> RTM, RGoB and United Nations System in Bhutan, Enhancing Happiness and Sustainable Development Through Partnerships, March 2019.

<sup>20</sup>Please see <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26463> for more details.

<sup>21</sup>National Statistical Bureau, Statistical Yearbook 2018.

No study has been conducted to determine what inputs contribute to student achievements and to what degree. The National Education Assessment report for 2013-14 had, however, established a positive correlation of student performance to the shorter distance from home to school. It also found that boarders do not necessarily have higher achievement levels.<sup>22</sup> Yet the government continues to be preoccupied with boarding facilities in its central schools which, from the 2018 baseline of 20 percent of students, will be expanded to 70 percent.<sup>23</sup> This not only takes away precious resources from other national imperatives,<sup>24</sup> it further increases the annual recurrent costs.<sup>25</sup>

The tenet in education planning is that no matter what reforms are instituted to enhance education quality, if it does not filter down to the classroom, it is a futile exercise. And by the same reasoning, classrooms are where we need to devote the nation's energy and resources. That is where the pertinent targets need to be set. That is where our situation analysis and planning should begin and new policies initiated to achieve the quantum jump in student achievements. The rest are pretty distractions or costly sociological ventures that have little to do with education.

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<sup>22</sup>BCSEA, NEA 2013, page 10 which reports "The day scholars outdid the boarders in English performance by 4.48 percentage points" and in Mathematics, "...the boarders performed slightly better."

<sup>23</sup>Please see GNH Commission, 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan, NKRA 7: Quality of Education and Skills Improved

<sup>24</sup>For example the Kuensel (1 April 2019) reported that Bhutan will not be participating in PISA-D for 2021 cycle because of budgetary constraints. Please refer to the story, Student Learn without Understanding by Yangchen C Rinzin.

<sup>25</sup>Please see MoE, Annual Education Statistics 2018, p64. Average costs per student in a regular school is Nu 30,000 while that of a boarder in Central School is Nu 59,350. This does not take account of the recently announced proposal of MoE to increase the stipend for school feeding programme.

# The Value of Research Culture

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## Introduction

The two primary historic reasons for establishing institutions of higher education worldwide have been both a place of learning as well as a centre for generating new knowledge. This has been the case globally, and has its roots in a wide variety of philosophical traditions, from Buddhism to Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Generating research within higher education is also one of the most important engagements for institutions to promote social change amongst practitioners and policymakers. Historically, many societies have placed a lot of emphasis on developing and nourishing a research culture to promote evidence-based practices and policies.<sup>2</sup>

Recently the Royal University of Bhutan has actively promoted research amongst its faculty but there have been many challenges.<sup>3</sup> This article aims to present the importance of research within institutions of higher education, look at the current state of the research culture in Bhutan, explore the opportunities and challenges, and suggest a way forward for relevant stakeholders to develop and nourish a robust research culture.

## Importance of Research

Research supports the development of enquiring minds and inspires innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. In many countries, the development of policies and practices is largely backed by R&D,<sup>4</sup> instead of being based on ideology. Existing literature also indicates that there is a strong, positive relationship between research and practice.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, there is a strong and positive relationship between higher

<sup>1</sup>(Pommaret, 2012)

<sup>2</sup>(Altbach, 2009; Horowitz, Potter, Robin, & Tillyer, 2013; Martin & Tang, 2007; Pratt, Margaritis, & Coy, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>(Deki Gyamtso, Kezang Sherab, & Maxwell, submitted for publication; Kezang Sherab & Greenwood, 2014; Kezang Sherab & Sonam Dorji, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Maxwell & Phintsho Choeden, 2012)

<sup>4</sup>(Research and Development) (Altach, 2011; Pratt, Margaritis, & Coy, 1999; Wasi, 2000)

<sup>5</sup>(Brew & Boud, 1995; Elen, Lindblom-Ylanne & Clementto, 2009; Kezang Sherab & Sonam Dorji, 2015).

education research and national economic growth.<sup>6</sup> As we argue below, the absence of a rigorous research culture in the Bhutanese context has, historically, meant that most policies and practices are ideology-based and policymakers and academics have not been able to take advantage of research when designing policies.

## **Background and Challenges in Bhutan**

When referring to “research culture” in Bhutan we acknowledge that research does occur outside of the higher education sector - in the work of government agencies, civil service organisations, private businesses and consultancies, monastic institutions, and Royal Government-backed research entities such as the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research. However, we believe that the contribution from a robust higher education sector is absolutely crucial to a healthy research culture writ large in that they “provide a key link between the nation’s scientific and knowledge system to global science and scholarship ... but also contributing, just as significantly, to better understand the human condition through the social sciences and humanities.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the focus of this article will be on the higher education sector and research culture in general.

The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) was established in 2003 with an original devolved organisational structure of 10 colleges. As of 2019, there are nine colleges, two constituent private colleges, and a second university focused exclusively on the medical and health professions. Prior to 2003, each college was affiliated to a specific government ministry and its role was to produce the workforce required for that ministry.<sup>8</sup> Research and publication was almost non-existent, except for those conducted by a few faculty members who had pursued their higher studies abroad.

However, with the launch of RUB as an autonomous entity in 2003, research became a core part of the Royal Charter and was mandated for all faculty members.<sup>9</sup> Thus, following the practice of universities worldwide, RUB

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<sup>6</sup>(Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2007).

<sup>7</sup>(Altbach, 2011, p. 65).

<sup>8</sup>(Kezang Sherab & Greenwood, 2014; Schofield, 2016).

<sup>9</sup>(Maxwell, 2013).



embraced both teaching and research roles.<sup>10</sup> Since 2003, the institution has been promoting research not only amongst the member colleges, but also at the national level. RUB has also developed and promulgated policies to foster research culture and increase productivity. It established a Research and Innovation Committee within the Academic Board structure under “The Wheel of Academic Law.”<sup>11</sup> RUB’s research policies are set out in the ‘*Zhib Tshol*.’<sup>12</sup> In brief, this document outlines the framework for the administration of research, roles and responsibilities; planning, approval, and monitoring; research codes of conduct, and many other areas of research.

Recent research has shown that RUB faces many challenges in its effort to foster a nationwide research culture.<sup>13</sup> The literature states that these challenges include: college leadership that does not incentivise or support its faculty to conduct research nor create a culture of research autonomy for its academic faculty; a significant lack of time set aside in the academic work-load allocation for research activities; lack of understanding and administrative support for research, particularly in the logistical, financial, and legal capacities; a shortage of libraries, labs, and other infrastructure and research-material resources; a lack of research training and advanced degrees; and a lack of research funds. Below, we will address each of these challenges through the practices recommended by Hanover Research (2014).

## Attributes of a Positive Research Culture

Given the already-identified challenges listed above, we will now define what we believe to be the attributes of a positive research culture that Bhutan should strive towards. We will focus on what the literature (Hanover Research, 2014) identifies as areas of importance to promote a positive research culture effective leadership, productive institutional characteristics, training and support, research recognition (internal and external), research centres and programmes of research, and networks and collaboration.

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<sup>10</sup>(RUB, 2004)

<sup>11</sup>(RUB, 2017)

<sup>12</sup>(RUB, 2014)

<sup>13</sup>(Deki Gyamtso, Kezang Sherab, Maxwell, & Sonam Wangmo, submitted for publication; Kezang Sherab & Greenwood, 2014; Kezang Sherab & Sonam Dorji, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Maxwell & Phintsho Choeden, 2012; Schofield, 2016)

## **Effective Leadership**

Leadership plays a crucial role in promoting research culture. According to Pratt, Margaritis, and Coy (1999), leadership refers to both research skills and management practice. While there has generally been some improvement in Bhutan in terms of research skills, with the increase in the number of PhD graduates, leadership commitment to research has not been as robust as it should be, according to the '*Zhib Tshol* (RUB, 2014)'.

In our experience of research practice in Bhutan(anecdotal), the greatest barrier to research is the lack of support from the top levels of college leadership. There is a dichotomy or lack of synergy in many colleges between the College Academic Committee, led by the President of the College and the College Research Committee, led by the Dean of Research and Industrial Linkages at the College. According to policy, the College Research Committee and the Dean of Research are independently empowered (RUB, 2014, §2.10.1.1).

## **Productive Institutional Characteristics**

In an often-cited study in organisational analysis the following institutional characteristics were identified as being important to facilitate research productivity (see Figure 1):

Characteristics	Description
<b>Recruitment and Selection</b>	Great effort is expended to recruit and hire who have the training goals, commitment, and socialisation that match the institution
<b>Clear Coordination Goals</b>	Visible shared goals coordinate members' work
<b>Research Emphasis</b>	Research has greater or equal priority than other goals
<b>Culture</b>	Members are bonded by shared research related values and practices, have a safe home for testing new ideas
<b>Positive Group Climate</b>	The climate is characterised by high morale, a spirit of innovation, dedication to work, receptivity to new ideas, frequent interaction, a high degree of cooperation, low member turnover, good leader/member relationships, and open discussion of disagreements
<b>Mentoring</b>	Beginning and mid-level members are assisted by and collaborate with established scholars
<b>Communication With Professional Network</b>	Members have a vibrant network of colleagues with whom they have frequent and substantive (not merely social) research communication both impromptu and formal, in and outside of the institution
<b>Resources</b>	Members have access to sufficient resources such as funding, facilities and especially humans (example, local peers for support, research assistants, and technical consultants)
<b>Sufficient Work Time</b>	Members have significant periods of uninterrupted time to devote to scholarly activities
<b>Size/Experience/Expertise</b>	Members offer different perspectives by virtue of differences in their degree levels, approaches to problems and varying discipline backgrounds, the group is stable and its size is at or above a "critical mass"
<b>Communication</b>	Clear and multiple forms of communication such as that all members feel informed
<b>Rewards</b>	Research is rewarded equitably and in accordance with defined benchmarks of achievement; potential rewards include money, promotion, recognition, and new responsibilities
<b>Brokered Opportunities</b>	Professional development opportunities are routinely and pro-actively offered to members to assure their continued growth and vitality
<b>Decentralised Organisation</b>	Governance structures are flat and decentralised where participation of member is expected
<b>Assertive Participative Governance</b>	A clear and common goal, assertive and participative leadership where active participation of members is expected, effective feedback system is utilised.

Figure 1. Institutional characteristics that facilitated research productivity (Bland, et al. 2005, p. 228).

Many of the characteristics in the table above are interlinked to other areas within this discussion. These characteristics also feature throughout RUB's policies (RUB, 2014), but we do not believe that there is enough of a follow-through and an effective oversight for these policies to be effectively carried out.

## **Training and Support**

Long-term investment in research capacity is an important aspect of building a robust research culture (Hanover Research, 2014; Pratt, Margaritis, & Coy, 1999). Without significant investment in building research capacity, not much research is likely to take place. There has to be a clear policy that will guide research activities, training, and support. This includes the presence of mentoring programmes, continuing education courses, grant-writing support, research funding, and support for PhD attainment (Hanover Research, 2014, p. 12). The Tertiary Education Policy of Bhutan (2010) has clearly identified this. Such policies are a good start but, then again, whether it has been translated into reality is another matter.

Another issue is that of research autonomy. The structures of RUB are very hierarchical and certainly not “flat” as suggested by Figure 1. Most, if not all, colleges require their researchers to gain approval from the College Research Committee or even the President him/herself in order to carry out a research project. The literature, and ourselves included, find this structure to be extremely problematic and is a significant detriment to the autonomy and integrity of the research process.

## **Research Recognition: Internal and External**

Policy makers and leaders need to understand the potential role of research in bringing about sustainability in policies and programmes that are initiated and implemented. While there has been some public awareness created, there is still a lot Bhutan needs to do in terms of understanding the real meaning of the term “research” and how it generates knowledge and addresses social issues. Of late, the term “research” has been widely used in Bhutan in everyday speech across all sections of society. Although this is an indication of the acceptance of the usefulness of research, this also indicates that the term has been grossly misused. To many, research simply means finding out a piece of information. However, research is a much more systematic and rigorous academic activity that employs appropriate methodology to generate new knowledge and solve the problems that human beings face (Leedy, Newby & Ertmer, 2012).

Internally, higher education institutions need to use research as an integral part of their academic progress and recognition procedures. At the policy level, this is made clear by RUB (see RUB HRRR, 2017 & RUB '*Zhib Tshol*', 2014) but when it comes to implementation at the ground level, there are difficulties which need to be addressed (see the section on "Way forward for Bhutan"). In brief, the elements that enable research capacity building, robust institutional support, availability of grants, availability of higher degree research courses, and research culture itself needs to be supported.

### **Research Centres and Research Programmes**

Literature suggests that creating research centres and research programmes strengthens the overall research culture of the institution and can better attract more competent researchers. Outside the university system, the Centre for Bhutan and GNH studies is viewed, both nationally and internationally, as the generator of knowledge on Bhutanese society. The '*Zhib Tshol* (RUB, 2014)' clearly indicates the importance of research centres. However, the '*Zhib Tshol*' also makes it clear that research centres are not autonomous and must seek approval from college management and the College Research Committee. Again, we view this arrangement as problematic. Clearly, there is a need for financial oversight and quality assurance procedures but not to the extent of allowing college management to dictate research activities and areas of focus.

### **Networks and Collaborations**

Research culture should be supported by institutions which should sponsor participation in conferences for faculty, hosting its own conferences and public forums, and collaborating with other universities, associations, and government organisations (Hanover Research, 2014). This is also emphasised in the '*Zhib Tshol* (RUB, 2014)' but in reality, there are issues that need to be addressed.

## **Way Forward for Bhutan**

Based on some of the discussions presented above, the following recommendations are proposed to further enhance research activities in Bhutan. These include the establishment of a Bhutan Research and Innovation Council, a Research Endowment Fund, Leadership and Institutional Support, Higher Degree Research Programmes, Publication and Dissemination, and a robust focus on R&D. Some of these appear to be similar in nature and may be complementary, but we propose that they be separate, as we highlight below.

### **Bhutan Research and Innovation Council**

One of the plausible reasons for the lack of a robust research culture in Bhutan is the absence of a national-level organisation that would oversee all research and development activities, including research ethics oversight and approval. Currently, different agencies appear to have their own agency-specific policies and acts such as the Tertiary Education Policy of the Kingdom of Bhutan (2010), Renewable Natural Resources Research Policies of Bhutan (2011), University of Medical Sciences Act of Bhutan (2012), and Royal University of Bhutan Research Policies (2014). We propose that it is crucial that a national level organisation such as a Bhutan Research and Innovation Council (BRIC) or National Research Council (NRC) be established to oversee and steer research activities at the national level.

### **Research Endowment Fund**

Research and innovation is only possible with appropriate funding support. University academics are mandated to carry out research and generate income for the university through research grants but there are minimal funds available. The only option is to apply for international research grants which are highly competitive. Currently, there is no funding support for research and innovation activities at the national level. Given the potential of research in national development, it is crucial that the government allocate a portion of its budget for a research endowment fund (REF).

## Leadership and Institutional Support

While leaders need to understand that research is key to a nation's progress and development, they should also foster a climate of academic freedom and autonomy. In Bhutan, there are few safeguards to academic freedom such as a tenure-system or an academic employment "bill of rights". A robust and positive research culture begins with leadership which recognises that research benefits the community and society, not just the college itself. Institutional support should take the form of a research support office that assists academics to compete for international research grants - often an arduous and time-consuming process that may have little chance of success. In particular, a college research support office could assist in preparing financial costings and procuring the necessary approvals and arranging the logistics, before the research proposal is submitted instead of after the research grant has been awarded.

## Higher Degree Research Programmes

In other countries, higher degree research (HDR) programmes are considered to be a form of research capacity building. We believe that Bhutan must give high priority to HDR programmes both through increasing scholarships and through the development of its own domestic programmes. The literature is clear that graduate students generate a significant and positive research culture (Hanover Research, 2014), a culture that is severely lacking in the universities in Bhutan.

## Publication and Dissemination

Currently, individual institutions have been making some effort to create public awareness in terms of the potential of research. For instance, RUB has initiated a television talk series to educate the general public on the importance of research and what research can do. We believe these kinds of efforts can be scaled up. We would also suggest that more can be done to prepare the average Bhutanese citizen to be a good "research consumer" – that is, Basic Education should be fine-tuned to teach Bhutanese children the basics of research, what it means to do systematic inquiry, and how to critically understand research findings and statistics. These kinds of skills are also vitally important to produce an informed democratic citizenry.

Publication and dissemination are crucial aspects of a more robust research culture. Bhutan needs to adopt an active approach to publishing and disseminating research outputs. This includes consistency in research journal production, as well as the creation of a centralised University Press. Dissemination of all research activities also needs a high-quality web-based platform that is globally accessible and easy to navigate. It is often the case that research and institutional websites in Bhutan are not maintained and are often down. We suggest that more resources be allocated to both, online and print dissemination, which should include a permanent team of administrators dedicated to the task.

### **Government Think-Tank**

Many successful nations and organisations in the world make a huge investment in R&D. Existing literature suggests that there is a positive correlation between investment in R&D and economic growth (Example, Martin & Tang, 2007). Likewise, Bhutan needs to focus on a more aggressive policy to establish both government and privately-funded think-tanks to research on policy and other social issues. Investment in developing research institutions and facilities beyond the university system would pay an attractive dividend in the long-run. For instance, the Centre for Bhutan and GNH Studies Research could widen its scope to function as a Government think-tank instead of engaging in their own GNH specific research activities.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we believe that there are a great number of challenges for Bhutan to overcome to develop a research culture. That being said, we do acknowledge that universities in Bhutan are actually quite young compared with most other national university systems and has a lot of growing to do. However, we do worry that the research culture in Bhutan is in a precarious position at the moment and is in danger of regressing if innovation, academic freedom, decentralisation, and investment in institutional and individual capacities are not supported. We believe that Bhutan has so much to offer the rest of the world but only if the research culture is vibrant and sustaining.



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# Vocational Education in Bhutan

*Phuntsho Wangdi*

## Introduction

The Royal Government of Bhutan accords the highest priority to the education sector as it believes that the country's quality of health, prosperity, happiness and progression hinges on the quality of its education. In the early 1960s, modern education with English as the medium of instruction was introduced, supplementing the country's age-old monastic form of education. Since then the modern education system has been instrumental in producing a generation of nation builders who have contributed to the country's current state of socio-economic development.

However, the system is now grappling with the challenges of change as it seeks to further enhance the quality, equity, system efficiencies and access to the education system at all levels. To address those challenges and deliver high quality, wholesome education to young Bhutanese, the Ministry of Education had, since 2014, initiated reforms to streamline and strengthen the structure of the school systems, curriculum, assessment, and teacher competencies (MoE, 2014).

The central idea behind the reform initiatives is to create an education system that efficiently delivers the required knowledge, skills and talents for the youths of Bhutan and instill in them the positive qualities of responsibility, resourcefulness and productivity so that they could live up to the ideals of the nation's visions and policies. Article 9.15 of The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan articulates that the state shall endeavour to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality. In the opening page of the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024; His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck stated that "education is empowering - it's a social equaliser and it facilitates self-discovery, which leads to realising one's full potential".

The National Education Framework takes this further and advocates the creation of “highly skilled citizens capable of responding to the emerging global challenges”. The Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 (2014) emphasises the importance that Bhutanese students be equipped with both the country’s traditional and contemporary knowledge to enable them to lead a productive and meaningful life.

Therefore, to give students access to high quality, alternative pathways in education that would correspond with their learning aptitude and to meet the demands of the industrial sector, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is essential. Making TVET available will enhance the students’ employment prospects and address the national demand for skilled manpower (MoE, 2017). Therefore, the Ministry of Education has embarked on the creation of an alternative pathway to education by initiating TVET education programmes in mainstream schools, from Primary through to Class XII.

This paper will critically examine the policy decisions behind the establishment of TVET, analyse some of the current challenges, and conclude with some recommendations.

### **Challenges: the Place of TVET in the Current Education System**

Bhutan’s education system, as it is now, consists of seven years of primary education from PP-VI, which includes one year of pre-primary, and six years of secondary education from grades VII – XII (MoE, 2014). Pre-primary to grade X education is provided free, as per the Constitutional mandate. Based on their academic merit, students who have completed grade X may continue on to grades XI and XII in either government or private higher secondary schools which are under the Ministry of Education (MoE), or join a certificate-level technical and vocational training institutes under the Ministry of Labour and Human Settlement (MoLHR).

The school and curriculum structure in Bhutan’s education system is arranged in five key stages as follows (MoE, 2014):

- Key Stage I: PP-III – Dzongkha, English, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, Health and Physical Education, Arts;

- Key Stage II: IV-VI – Dzongkha, English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health and Physical Education;
- Key Stage III: VII – VIII – Dzongkha, English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, Health and Physical Education;
- Key Stage IV: IX-X – Dzongkha, English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History and Geography;
- Electives: Economics, Computer Application, Agriculture and Food Security, Vocational Skills Development Curriculum;
- Key Stage V: XI – XII - Dzongkha, English, Physics, Chemistry, Commerce and Accountancy; and
- Electives: Geography, History, Mathematics, Biology, Computer Studies, Business and English Literature.

The above curricular structure indicates that although TVET programmes are offered as electives in mainstream senior secondary schools, they are implemented as co-curricular programmes in the form of “Clubs”. At present, there is no national certification system for these school electives. As a result, there are no avenues for equivalency or credit transfer systems between the academic scores acquired in the board exams and MoLHR’s national certification system. Hence, students who complete these vocational electives do not progress seamlessly onto TVET programmes offered at tertiary institutions.

The absence of a national certification system for TVET programmes in schools has also had a negative effect on the employability of the secondary school graduates looking for jobs in the industrial sector. As a result, teachers and students alike regard vocational electives as having little practical value in enabling a student to earn a living or move on to tertiary education, thereby contributing to the shortage of skilled manpower in the country.

Furthermore, there is a lack of clarity of the role and/or a replication of functions amongst the various agencies, such as the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ministry for Works and Human Settlement (MoLHR) and the

Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) in the oversight of TVET education. The Ministry of Education, as the custodian of all educational programmes in the country must be the sole agency that is responsible for standards and the delivery of all educational services and its outcomes in the country. This should apply to TVET education as well. Currently, MoLHR oversees TVET education at the Diploma level, while RUB supervises TVET education at the tertiary level. Such marked divisions of roles amongst the agencies have contributed to the lack of cohesion in terms accreditation and certification systems, curricular and pedagogical delivery and the allocation of resources, thus negatively impacting policy and practice that affect TVET education nationwide.

### **The Reform: Opportunities for TVET**

The role of education is not only to impart literacy and numeracy skills to learners, but also to ensure that they are creative, innovative and enterprising as well as employable. Diversified educational programmes that can be made available and adapted to suit the needs of individual learners will serve as a social leveler and help alleviate poverty. In sum, education should empower individuals to become responsible and productive citizens and spur the national economy towards progress and prosperity.

Thus, in order to fulfill the sacred mission of educational equity and meet the demands for skilled manpower in the market economy, it is timely that the Ministry of Education is launching TVET programmes in mainstream schools and bringing about the following structural reforms:

Key Stage I: Primary (IV to VI) - All schools to run vocational clubs to introduce students to the vocational education programmes delivered through a framework provided by the Royal Education Council (REC). This will allow students to study the subjects of their interest, and have an aptitude in, and build a foundation for higher technical and vocational training courses.

Key Stage II: VII – VIII - All schools will have pre-vocational orientation programmes that will prepare students for the world of vocational education. There will be theoretical and basic practical lessons on TVET delivered through a curriculum developed by REC. This will help the

students understand the diverse career opportunities available in technical and vocational fields and encourage them to pursue vocational subjects of their interest and aptitude to and equip them with the required skills.

Key Stage III: IX – XII - Schools will have vocational programmes offered as elective subjects like Agriculture, Media Literacy, and ICT subjects delivered through a curriculum provided by the Royal Education Council (REC). This would help students develop essential skills and prepare them to embrace creativity, for future planning, and design and innovation when they are gainfully employed in the technical and vocational fields.

It is worth noting that the new reforms in the structure of TVET delivery would herald the following opportunities:

- Provide alternative pathways to children through the diversification of subjects made available in a demand-driven curriculum;
- Facilitate mobility between technical/vocational and general education with multiple entry and exit options;
- Foster innovation, entrepreneurship and nurture creativity in children to generate diverse opportunities for socio economic development; and
- Provide opportunities for students to understand Bhutanese culture better by learning traditional arts and crafts through interdisciplinary approaches.

## Recommendations

Keeping in view the challenges that might potentially disrupt the implementation of TVET programmes, the following recommendations are made to enable a seamless transition of TVET into the mainstream education system:

- The Royal Government of Bhutan could commission a detailed assessment to determine the effectiveness of the current institutional arrangements pertaining to TVET education and transfer all educational roles, including TVET education, up to secondary education or its

equivalent to the Ministry of Education. The MoLHR could then become a facilitating agency for job creations and recruitment for the TVET graduates.

- The Royal University of Bhutan should focus solely on offering TVET education at the tertiary levels.
- Establish a separate, neutral and transparent Bhutan Accreditation Council to be the premier authority for all accreditation and certification of training programmes in the country.
- Diversify and upscale the TVET curricular and pedagogical standards to ensure that it is enticing and relevant, meet expectations and prepare students for their dream jobs and gain social acceptance and respect.
- Ensure a seamless vertical and horizontal curricular and pedagogical progression from and within the school TVET programmes through to the tertiary level. Institutionalise a national certification system and accreditation for the school TVET programmes so that students could transition to jobs after they graduate.
- RGoB to provide comprehensive ideological, financial and logistical support and state-of-the-art resources to enable Bhutanese TVET graduates to find a productive niche anywhere in the world.

## **Conclusion**

The creation of alternative TVET pathways from senior primary through to senior secondary levels in schools will widen the avenues for children to tap their innate potentials. It will also enable the schools to groom them with the required skills and knowledge and help the country harness its human resources. This will ultimately contribute towards the nation's economic growth and social development.

Thus, an alternative TVET pathway to education can be instrumental in expanding opportunities for the youth - the most vibrant and dynamic human resource in Bhutan.



# Non-Formal Education - Learning Never Ceases

*Pelden*

## Background

The Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme in Bhutan was introduced in 1990. It was initiated by the National Women's Association of Bhutan (NWAB) by Royal Command during the 53<sup>rd</sup> National Assembly, mainly to empower Bhutanese women. Recognising its importance, the responsibility of overseeing the programme was entrusted to the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) in 1992 and 1993. However, in 1994, with the additional mandate to provide functional literacy and numeracy to the youths and adults who had missed out on formal schooling, the Inspectorate of Schools of the Department of Education took charge of the programme.

As the Non-Formal Education (NFE) programme grew in popularity and scope the Non-Formal and Continuing Education Division (NFCED) was created in 2004, under the Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education. NFCED has three objectives:

- To raise the functional literacy levels of the adult population above the current 66.6 percent (BLSS, 2017);
- To provide opportunity for aspiring learners to continue their education and be integrated into mainstream education; and
- To improve the people's ability to increase their income, personal knowledge and enhance their understanding of the national identity and culture.

The NFE programme aims to help illiterate learners who are 15 years and above who could not pursue formal education. The NFE programme has three levels: Basic Literacy Course (BLC); Post Literacy Course (PLC); and Community Learning Centre (CLC). BLC is a 12-month long course that provides functional literacy which is equivalent to Grade VI Dzongkha in the formal education system. BLC graduates should be able to converse

in Dzongkha at a basic level, read Kuensel (the national newspaper) and signboards on the street, and read and write simple messages. Upon successful completion of the BLC, graduates progress on to PLC, a 12-month which covers both Dzongkha and functional English. “Para-literates” such as school drop outs, nuns, *gomchens* (lay monks), etc., are also encouraged to enroll in the PLC to achieve basic literacy. Then in 2003, the Community Learning Centre (CLC) was introduced to develop vocational skills to equip the BLC and PLC graduates learners with livelihood skills for self-learning and lifelong learning. According to the Annual Education Statistics, 2018, Bhutan had 560 NFE centres with over 6,017 learners, out of which 1,788 were male and 4,229 were female.

Besides providing functional literacy and livelihood skills, NFECD initiated the Continuing Education (CE) programme in 2006 to encourage lifelong learning and career enhancement for those who could not continue their school education but aspire to make up for it by pursuing further education through evening classes.

**Diversity of Learners and Learning Environment - Learning Never Ceases**  
From the very beginning the NFE programme was popular as it reached out to the section of the population which had missed out on getting a formal education for numerous reasons. About 70 percent of the learners were women - housewives, farmers, day labourers and some school support staff – who aspired to read and write, read sign boards and religious scriptures, participate in local elections, establish small businesses, be able to utilise information and make informed decisions.

Although the learners, as old as 60 to as young as 18, have a wide range of learning abilities, they are passionate about learning new things. At the beginning, some even struggle to hold a pencil; thus the instructor has to start with hand coordination. NFE classes are conducted in any available space: temporary bamboo huts constructed by the learners, village *lhakhangs* (monastery), rented village houses, *gewog* (block) town halls, instructors’ houses, school classrooms, prisons, and the armed force’s campuses. In some cases, learners are fortunate enough to have the use of classrooms which are ideal for teaching and learning. As many of the learners usually work in the fields or at home tending to their families during the day, the classes are conducted in the evenings. After a hard day’s work, they come to class, eager to learn.

## NFE Instructors – the Light That Ignites Hope

The success of the NFE programme largely lies in the hands of the instructors who help the adult citizens learn and eventually become socially and economically independent. When the NFE programme first started, the instructors were ex-teachers, village lamas/*lopons* (pastors) or anyone who had passed Grade VIII. Over time, the curriculum was adapted to incorporate the changing the social and economic circumstances. As a result, the minimum entry requirement to qualify as an instructor was changed to Grade X in 2002 and from 2012, this was raised to Grade XII.

Currently, there are approximately 544 instructors of whom 45 percent are Grade X graduates, 54 percent are Grade XII graduates, and a few monks and Grade VIII graduates. The 392 female instructors and 152 male instructors teach in urban centres and in remote corners throughout all the 20 *dzongkhags* (districts) in the country.

## Impact of Non-Formal Education

Non-Formal Education has been a huge success story in the country. The programme has transformed the lives of 203,471 learners who now have basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as better values and life skills, and a greater ability to earn a living. Two Major Impacts of the NFE programme:

### 1. Empowerment of Illiterate Bhutanese Citizens

The NFE Review Report 2015 highlights how the programme has benefitted its learners:

- Able to read and write;
- Take better care of their families;
- Perform simple calculations;
- Help and guide their children and siblings in studies;
- Gain ideas and confidence in establishing small businesses; and
- Participate in Local Government elections.

For many learners, being able to read Dzongkha has improved their knowledge and understanding of many issues which include living a healthier lifestyle, eating more nutritious food, and engaging meaningfully in social and economic activities. Being able to recite prayers, taking part in religious activities with confidence, reading signboards to navigate, reading newspapers and interacting more competently in society, are all positive outcomes.

The programme has also encouraged and empowered many to contribute to nation building by participating in LG elections. In 2016, 343 NFE graduates took part in Local Government elections, out of whom 121 were elected. Among the elected, four were *gups*, (block headman) eight were *mangmis* (assistant block headman) and 191 were *tshogpas* (village coordinator). Out of the eight *mangmis*, one was female and of the total elected *tshogpas*, 95 were male and 14 were female. Many NFE graduates go on to vocational skills training in the CLC and have established their own tailoring shops, work in companies, or run businesses from home.

## **2. Contributing to a Gross National Happiness**

NFE is a vital component of the development of Gross National Happiness (GNH) in Bhutan. Incorporated within the series of Five-Year Plans (FYP) to achieve GNH the NFE programme addresses the nine domains. The NFE has improved the living standards of the people through literacy, strengthened community vitality by bringing people together, given access to education through lifelong learning opportunities, strengthened ecological diversity and resilience, enhanced cultural diversity and resilience, improved health standards, time use, psychological well-being, and good governance.

In recognition of Bhutan's efforts in creating life-long learning opportunities and enhancing literacy, the programme has been awarded the Honorary Mention of the UNESCO Confucius Award in 2009 and the International Confucius Award in 2012. Words of Appreciation from the Learners:

“Finally daylight has arrived in our lives. Learning is so much fun. I feel happy learning how to write letters. I am a complete human now.”

## Challenges

Although the NFE programme has been a huge success in reaching the unreached sections of the population, it is grappling with a number of challenges.

- **Reaching the Unreached Population**

Given the mountainous terrain of the country, any development work that aims to reach scattered communities in hard-to-reach places poses a challenge and that includes the setting up of new NFE centres. Small, isolated villages might not have enough potential learners to form a cohort. As a result, there is still a significant number of rural villagers who are unable to get access to the NFE programme, thus missing out on enhancing their literacy skills and the capacity to increase their income.

- **Job Status of the NFE Instructors**

NFE instructors are employed on a temporary basis. Their job security is not guaranteed and depends very much on there being another cohort of learners wanting to enroll. This instability is a challenge for the instructors who would then, understandably, leave for better opportunities elsewhere. Consequently, this has a bearing on the availability of instructors to run the programmes and the quality of the teaching and this ultimately affects the learners.

- **Training of NFE Instructors**

Training takes place on two levels: (1) Training of Trainers (ToT) by the NFCED (2) Trainers training Instructors. The training is conducted at the national level by the NFCED and at the cluster-based level by the *dzongkhags* and *thromdes* (municipality). Unlike formal teacher training, which takes between one to four years, NFE instructors undergo a 10-day pre-service orientation before they are employed and while they are in service, they may also participate in annual refresher workshops.

The Review Report 2015 cites that one of the disadvantages of this limited training, which focuses mainly on teaching skills, is that has little effect on increasing the competency and capability of the instructors.

To encourage potential learners who show an interest and enroll in the programme, NFE academic sessions start whenever there are enough learners to form a cohort. In these cases, a newly recruited instructor might have to forego the crucial pre-service orientation and start the class which might, in turn, affect the quality of the teaching. Yet another challenge is that although the *dzongkhags* and *thromdes* are required to offer the pre-service orientation to the new instructors, funding might not be available.

- **High Dropout Rate**

The NFE policy requires that there be at least eight learners before a new centre is considered in operation. At times, as many as 20 learners may register for a new programme but they gradually drop out for various reasons: labour shortage in the farms; family problems; domestic disagreements; health issues; relocation of a spouse and the loss of interest. In addition, ‘The Review Report 2015’, documented that the lack of competency of the instructors and the quality of the teaching also contributed to the dropout rate. Other challenges faced include encouraging potential learners to take up the programmes and when they do sign on, to keep them motivated to complete the course.

- **Monitoring Support and Evaluation Mechanism**

There is a well-defined mechanism in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning. The monitoring is carried out at the ministry, *dzongkhag*, school and *gewog* levels and has two aspects: the quantitative side which captures enrollment, attendance and syllabus coverage, etc; and then the qualitative aspect that aims to address and enhance learning. While the NCFED monitors the centres in the *dzongkhags*, the *dzongkhag* officials monitor the centres in their jurisdiction twice a year, as is required by the NFE Operational Guidelines 2018. Currently, however, only the quantitative aspect of the monitoring is being carried out. Although the *gups* and *tshogpas*, together with *dzongkhag* education officials and principals, are required to carry out the qualitative aspects, this is not adequately done because of various problems: financial

and time constraints; the stakeholders are not visiting the NFE centres at all; and those who visit are not focusing on the quality of the teaching. Another issue is that the collection of data is done manually at all the different levels - central, *dzongkhag*, and NFE centres. The process is time consuming and results in a lot of paperwork and delays in getting reliable, timely information. Furthermore, there is no proper database developed for the NFE programme so in-depth analysis and reporting is very difficult.

## Looking Into the Future

The Non-Formal Education programme aims to achieve 100 percent literacy rate by 2030. Along the way, the programme aims to ignite in its learners a passion for lifelong learning, develop skills for personal growth, and be able to adapt to the ever- changing needs of the economy and the nation. The NFE draft National Education Policy (NEP) requires the NFE programme to enhance access to literacy, numeracy, and vocational skills considering learners' economic circumstances, gender, disabilities, and educational needs. The NFE Equivalency Framework is thus developed to create flexible pathways and equality among formal, non-formal, and vocational education in learning and in the development of skills. It also aims to improve the quality of the NFE programme to make it attractive and credible.

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# Politics and Education Policy

*Dr Sonam Chuki*

Broadly speaking, education, in itself, is a path towards a progressive human life. The Buddha viewed education as a path to human enlightenment, or liberation from repeated suffering.

Thomas Jefferson, one of America's eminent presidents, stated that education is central to creating an "enlightened citizenry... for the proper functioning of a republic." This implies that well-educated citizens are a prerequisite to smooth governance of the country. This is why Jefferson argued that it is important for the country to provide "a suitable education for all citizens."<sup>1</sup> This is also true for Bhutan. In contrast, the concept of politics refers to the governance of citizens, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the way scarce resources are utilised.<sup>2</sup> Under the broad umbrella of politics, education becomes inseparable from government. Political scientists and educationists argue that "there is no apolitical educational system"<sup>3</sup> and the two influence each other.

## Education and Politics: a Symbiotic Relationship

A government's political will strongly affects education because the government of the day makes decisions on budget allocation, human resource distribution and capacity building, and the improvement of the educational infrastructure. The government can also influence the appointment of the heads of the educational institutions and schools, with some, perhaps, selected based on political or party interests and not based on professional credentials. Moreover, politics can be expressed in "authoritative values".<sup>4</sup> Therefore, politics can either advance or retard education.

In Bhutan's context, school education has been given high priority since the modern education system was established in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> For a small country with limited military and economic resources, the human resource is the nation's most valuable asset and is essential for the nation's progress. However, education is viewed today as a gateway to the labour force where

<sup>1</sup>Smith (1997: 1), retrieved from <https://www.printfriendly.com/p/g/BjTHxe>, "Thomas Jefferson on Politics & Government", retrieved from <https://famguradian.org/subjects/politics/thomasjefferson/jeff1350.htm>

<sup>2</sup>Ijov and Sar (2015:15).

<sup>3</sup>(Cited in Ijov and Sar 2015: 18).

<sup>4</sup>Ijov and Sar (2015:15).

<sup>5</sup>Ministry of Education (2014:16).



employability appears to take precedence over the value of education and a preparation of the citizens for life. Since the advent of democracy in the country, education has been given prominence on the political agenda of successive elected governments. The change in governments has affected education policy, school curriculum, teacher preparedness and infrastructure support and as a result, has had an impact on the attitude and aptitude building of our future citizens.

### **Politics Fashions Education**

During the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa's (DPT) tenure (2008 - 2013), education policy led to the Education City Act (2012). The Act promulgated the establishment of high quality institutions to raise the standard of education and to create knowledge centres through public-private partnerships (PPP), joint ventures, or full private participation in the Education City.<sup>6</sup> An area was identified and some basic infrastructure like a road, a bridge, and electricity supply lines were built. However, the project did not take off and the concept of the Education City, apparently not adequately researched, was mired in allegations of corruption and incomplete planning.

The DPT also convened an international “Educating for Gross National Happiness” conference in 2009, attended by renowned educationists, thinkers, and academics. Following this, the government introduced the Educating for Gross National Happiness initiative in 2010. There was a flurry of activity in schools across the country around the theme of “Green School for Green Bhutan”. It planned to build physical, social, cultural and intellectual greenery in young minds following GNH values.<sup>7</sup> There was an attempt to incorporate GNH as a core criteria in the assessment of school performance but it is not clear what impact this initiative had on the education system. We have not seen a specific curriculum for an “enlightened GNH society”.

When the People's Democratic Party (PDP) formed the government (2013 - 2018), it made revisions to the education policy and introduced some reforms. The brainchild of the previous government, the Education City, was abandoned and in its place the central school system was introduced. Although the objective was to build a network of central schools to

<sup>6</sup>Bhutan Education City Act (2012:17).

<sup>7</sup>Powdye (2014: 119-123).

provide equitable education to economically disadvantaged communities, its implementation faced difficulties almost from the start. The number of central schools was increased to 63 across the country<sup>8</sup> but many did not have the infrastructure, the requisite number of teachers and the boarding capacity to cope with the increase in the number of students. As a case in point, Kuensel, reported that Kilikhar Central School in Mongar only had 74 beds for 132 boarding students. The students had to share beds in the hostels which would have posed a risk of the spread of communicable diseases, such as seasonal viral fever, the common flu, and cholera. Moreover, overcrowded hostels are not conducive for studying. Students were accommodated in temporary sheds, staff room, and meeting hall.

With resources overstretched, the school could not take in students from the neighbouring Chhali and Tsakaling lower secondary schools. As a result, the students were sent to Gyalpoishing Higher Secondary School. However, in 2017, that school was upgraded to a College of Information Technology under the Royal University of Bhutan by a government executive order.<sup>9 10</sup>

This same lack of resources was found in other central schools, which indicates that schools were being upgraded to the status of central schools without having the resources to meet basic requirements. In 2014, the government introduced the autonomous school policy to address the quality of education and gave state schools the option to apply for autonomous school status, giving the school principals a certain degree of financial leverage.

However, because of a change in policy, that status was rescinded prior to the end of the government's tenure. To improve teaching techniques and English language proficiency, the government initiated two national level professional development courses for school teachers named Transformative Pedagogy and English for Effective Communication.<sup>11</sup> The study on the impact of this initiative is yet to be conducted. Curriculum reforms were also introduced. As an example, in the primary schools,

<sup>8</sup>Annual Education Statistics (2018: 1-2).

<sup>9</sup>Phuntsho (2017).

<sup>10</sup>Royal University of Bhutan 2019. Retrieved from <http://www.rub.edu.bt/index.php/en/teaching-learning/colleges/constituent-colleges>

<sup>11</sup>The Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS, 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=36243> Wangdi (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/teachers-introduced-to-transformative-pedagogy/>, Rinzin (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/ministry-launches-english-for-effective-communication/>

Environmental Science was removed from the curriculum and the concepts and themes were incorporated into the English and Dzongkha language curriculum. Some educators felt that this move weakened the learning of Environmental Science concepts at the foundation level as focus would be shifted to languages instead.<sup>12</sup> In a bid to bring learning into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the/government introduced the concept of research-based teaching and learning using Information Communications Technology (ICT).

World History for Classes XI and XII was changed from a reliance on textbooks to one that was supported by technology and the Internet. However, it became a challenge to provide adequate digital infrastructure support to both urban and rural schools equally. Although some schools welcomed the idea of this new approach others voiced the need for reliable and adequate Internet and library resources to be put in place before implementing the new curriculum.

For the current Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) government (2018 - 2023), education continues to be a priority. The party promises to elevate the teaching profession, make education inclusive and enhance classroom facilities.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the DNT government pledges to:

- Remove the cut off points for Class X students to enable them to continue studying until Class XII;
- Cancel Saturday classes;
- Do away with examinations until Class VI;
- Make teaching a profession to vie for by offering the best and most prestigious scholarships;
- Raise the pay and allowances for teachers and more administrative and support staff to ease teacher workload;
- Review the central school system to make it better and reopen strategic community and primary schools that are useful and beneficial in certain communities.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>18<sup>th</sup> National Education Conference, MoE Resolution. Personal communication with English Curriculum Developer, the Royal Education Council, Paro.

<sup>13</sup>DNT Manifesto (2018: 7).

<sup>14</sup>DNT Manifesto (2018: 63).

These radical changes - doing away with lower primary (PP-Class III) examinations, no minimum academic cut off point in Class X to qualify for Class XI and awarding of government scholarships for students to study in private schools - seemed noble and attractive when they were introduced. However, the resultant increase in the number of students going onto the higher grades have created some serious challenges that have hindered the delivery of quality and equitable education: inadequate school infrastructure; teacher preparedness; and the availability of teachers. The lack of boarding facilities is one major concern. This has meant that some teenage students have to rent and live in private apartments away from their parents. As a result, the adolescents may be introduced to sexual life, have easy access to alcohol and drugs and other types of social ills of urban life. This may, in particular, affect teenage girls in the form of unwanted pregnancies, abortion related complications and even untimely deaths.

Doing away with Saturday classes called for a revision of the curriculum and the number of instructional hours in schools. And following the MoE's 19<sup>th</sup> National Education Conference's Resolution in 2019,<sup>15</sup> the Royal Education Council reviewed the existing textbooks, removed irrelevant content and amended the mistakes found.<sup>16</sup> However, there was no opportunity to conduct comprehensive research on the curriculum and provide an evidence-based policy advisory support. A concern is whether all these policy changes have, in actual fact, contributed towards attaining quality education. During a televised discussion on the government's education reforms, the education minister commented that the results will be known in two years.<sup>17</sup>

Although teachers are an indispensable part of school education, teaching is still viewed as a demanding profession with low remuneration. In recent years, there has been a growing trend of teachers leaving the profession. The MoE's 2018 education statistics stated that "about 3.6 percent of 8,824 teachers in public schools leave the profession every year."<sup>18</sup> In 2017 and 2018, about 355 state school teachers left for various reasons - termination of service, retirement or they had finished their contracts - but most chose to leave as, what MoE referred to as "voluntary resignation".

<sup>15</sup>The BBS live public discussion on education, 26 April 2019.

<sup>16</sup>The 19<sup>th</sup> National Education Conference, 2019.

<sup>17</sup>The BBS live public discussion on education, 26 April 2019.

<sup>18</sup>The 19<sup>th</sup> National Education Conference, 2009.

Among the “voluntary resigned” group are some young, energetic, industrious, and forward-looking teachers. Most of them left to go overseas to upgrade their educational qualifications, earn higher wages, seek international exposure, or even migrate to better their lives.<sup>19</sup>

In Finland and Singapore teachers are highly respected, have better remuneration and rigorous professional development. In Singapore, for example, teachers receive about “100 hours of training” annually to stay abreast of the latest teaching techniques.<sup>20</sup> Finland advanced from an agrarian to an industrial country through “an equal school system, a science-based teacher training programme, a high regard for teachers, and high quality teaching in schools.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, an excellent set of teachers is indispensable to high quality education and a nation’s advancement. Our government’s pledge to elevate the status of the teaching profession is most timely. If the best and brightest minds are attracted to teaching through “the best and most prestigious scholarships” as outlined, it is a realistic and a sustainable solution to attain quality education.

As His Majesty the King aptly states, “Education is empowering - it’s a social equaliser and it facilitates self-discovery, which leads to realising one’s full potential... Good education gives you confidence, good judgment, virtuous disposition, and the tools to achieve happiness successfully.”<sup>22</sup>

This implies that good education is viewed as the critical means to liberation from cyclic sufferings like the Buddha taught. It also means that quality education facilitates a fulfilled human life according to Aristotelian thought and a prerequisite to building an enlightened citizen for better governance as Jefferson proposed. Thus, education is a serious, life-changing force and every government’s vision should transcend the five years of its tenure.

<sup>19</sup>Annual Education Statistics (2018: 33 and 37).

<sup>20</sup>Ura (2019), retrieved from Ura Sonam’s Facebook Profile on 23.4.2019.

<sup>21</sup>Helsingin Yliopisto (2018, retrieved from <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/news/education-news/kirsti-lonka-education-lifted-finland-out-of-poverty-but-we-need-to-keep-developing-to-remain-at-the-cutting-edge?gclid> on 25.4.2019

<sup>22</sup>Ministry of Education (2014).

## Should Education Modify Politics?

To reiterate, education is vital for a country's development. Excellent education will produce educated minds and knowledgeable, skillful citizens needed for governance. Proactive and engaged citizens can improve politics. These citizens will have the intelligence to differentiate between clean and corrupt politics, virtue and vice, good and bad governance. Virtuous and caring citizens will have the ability to recognise the facts, gain the necessary skills, and aspire to play a part in democratic governance.<sup>23</sup>

In Bhutan's context, politics and education are closely related. Education is shaped by successive elected governments' changing education policies. If politics can have an impact on education, it is possible for education to have an effect on politics. At present, Bhutan's general literacy rate is about 71.4 percent.<sup>24</sup> A fully literate society will be well informed and can shape public views. Thus, education can energise politics through caring and active citizenry in the form of well-planned sustainable educational policies beyond five years to attain the nine citizens' attributes articulated in 'Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024: Rethinking Education'.<sup>25</sup> The attributes stressed "character building, life-long learning habits, importance of family, community and national values, physical and psychological well-being and sense of identity, knowledge and skills".<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion

Education is the catalyst that empowers citizens and builds nations. Empowered citizens who are intelligent, caring, dynamic, responsive and professional could help create a flourishing GNH-society. Empowered citizens will be able to build trust between the government and the governed. However, short term, quick-fix policies will do more damage than add value to existing good practices in the education system. Therefore, viable, long-term educational policies must be continued from one elected government to the next. If Bhutan has to live its GNH philosophy, education is the answer to groom a happy, able, and fulfilled citizenry.

<sup>23</sup>Ijov and Sar (2015:16).

<sup>24</sup>Ministry of Education (2014:65).

<sup>25</sup>Ministry of Education, Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024: Rethinking Education

<sup>26</sup>Ministry of Education (2014:65). Annual Education Statistics (2018:4).

# Implication of Bhutanese Studying Outside

*Dr Tandin Dorji*

## A Government Vision for Tertiary Education

“Twenty years from now, we will be equipped with the full range of institutions required for the formation of the knowledge and skills required to sustain the nation’s further development. At the apex of our institutions of learning will be a well-equipped university that will not only meet the intellectual and learning needs of Bhutanese but will also attract students from other countries, both within the region and beyond.”<sup>1</sup>

This was a vision conceived for tertiary education that was charted in 1999, in the Vision 2020 document which proposed to establish, “at the earliest feasible opportunity, a National University that is not only able to meet national needs but also those of individuals from neighbouring countries and even further afield. The university should link Bhutan to the international world of learning and its establishment should be guided by the need to establish recognised “centres of excellence”.<sup>2</sup>

Before the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) was founded, Bhutan did not have a university. In 1983, Sherubtse Junior College was upgraded and became an undergraduate degree college affiliated to Delhi University. There were other tertiary educational institutes<sup>3</sup> but they were governed by specific ministries and the degrees were awarded by the institutions themselves.<sup>4</sup> Hence, there was a need to set up a university to lead and regulate a sound tertiary education system.

Thus, in 2003, the Royal University of Bhutan was established based on a federated college model. As a result, all the tertiary educational institutions which, were previously governed by specific ministries and agencies, were

<sup>1</sup>Planning Commission, RGOB (1999). Bhutan 2020: A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness (Part II), pp.71

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp.20

<sup>3</sup>Some of the other Tertiary Education Institutes that existed before the establishment of the first university in Bhutan are National Institute of Education in Samtse and Paro, Royal Institute of Health Sciences, Natural Resources Training Institute at Lobesa, Royal Bhutan Polytechnic in Dewathang and Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology in Rinchening and Royal Institute of Management.

<sup>4</sup>DAHE, MoE. The State of Tertiary Education in Bhutan: 2017, pp.1-2

placed under the auspices of the university. Today, tertiary education comprises RUB, with its 10 constituent colleges and two affiliated colleges, the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan (KGUMSB) which was established in 2015 with three distinct faculties constituting three individual colleges and one affiliated college, the Ministry of Labour’s Royal Institute of Management, and the Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law.<sup>5</sup>

### **Need and Sustainability of Expanding Tertiary Institutions**

There is a need to address the concern that large numbers of Bhutanese are pursuing higher education in the neighbouring countries. A report, entitled ‘Analysis of students pursuing undergraduate programmes 2015’, by the Department of Adult and Higher Education (DAHE), stated that there are were 2,953 Bhutanese students studying in colleges in India. This number was for registered students and there were are many more who were not registered. Of the 2,953 students, nearly 2,000 of them were privately funded. Two years later, the number of students pursuing higher studies outside of Bhutan, rose to 4,628, reported the ‘State of Tertiary Education in Bhutan 2017’. Of that number, 3,544 were studying in India.<sup>6</sup> The report also stated that “it is believed that the number of tertiary students studying abroad on their own would be more than what was been captured by DAHE.”<sup>7</sup>

The Royal University of Bhutan also shared similar observations in its Strategic Plan (2013-2020) ... “currently, due to lack of comparable opportunities within the country that high-school students can opt for, qualify for, and can afford, it is seen that as many students study in foreign institutions as those enrolled in tertiary education institutions within the country.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid, pp.1-2

<sup>6</sup>DAHE, MoE. The State of Tertiary Education in Bhutan: 2017, pp.17

<sup>7</sup>Ibid

<sup>8</sup>RUB (2015). The Royal University of Bhutan Strategic Plan (2013-2020), pp.5



These documents indicate that there is a demand for more places at tertiary institutions and the need to expand these institutions. According to a course and place preference survey conducted among students by Norbuling Rigter College, the majority of the respondents (78.3 percent) preferred to study in Bhutan while 21.7 percent opted to study in India. Although studying in Bhutan was preferred, students did say that “Pursuing further studies abroad was the only option for many Bhutanese who could not be accommodated in the country’s limited colleges and tertiary institutions.”<sup>9</sup>

In its experience, when Norbuling Rigter College opened for enrolment, 500 students registered for a planned intake of just 350, showing that Bhutanese wished to study in the country. In actuality, only 91 students met the eligibility criteria approved by the Royal University of Bhutan.<sup>10</sup>

The main reasons cited for choosing to study in Bhutan were safety, proximity to family, and the ability to stay abreast of developments in Bhutan to help them prepare for RCSC.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the reasons for choosing to study in India were exposure, lower fees, better facilities, and more course and college options.<sup>12</sup>

Besides the need to invest in the expansion of tertiary educational institutions and the willingness of the students to study in Bhutan, the feasibility and sustainability of such an investment should also be considered. At present, each college has the capacity to admit approximately 900 to 1,500 students. As can be seen in the following table illustrating the intake capacity and the number of students wanting to enrol between 2014 to 2018, there was an annual shortfall of places. As a case in point, even with the establishment of an additional private college<sup>13</sup> in July 2017, there was a gap between demand and supply of 3,790 in 2018. Although there is no data on what the students who do not qualify for government scholarships do, it is assumed that many of them would pursue higher studies in the neighbouring countries, thus indicating the need to establish more institutions for tertiary education to accommodate them.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.kuenselonline.com/mishandling-the-smu-issue/>

<sup>10</sup>Information from admission record of Norbuling Rigter College, Paro.

<sup>11</sup>NRC (2017). Course and Place preference survey: An insight into options of Bhutanese students to pursue higher studies, pp.11. The study captured 1032 class XII students of all the three streams from 18 schools spread across Bhutan.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, pp.17

<sup>13</sup>Norbuling Rigter College was established in July 2017.

Year	Students who passed class XII	RUB constituent colleges	KGUMS	Others TEIs	Total of TEIs	Demand supply gap
2014	9163	3471	No data (Rough estimate of 900 annually) 4623 4848		4371	4792
2015	8855	3723			4232	
2016	8830	3948			3982	
2017	9280	4224	187	5124	4156	4189
2018	9114	4424	No data ((Rough estimate of 900 annually)		5324	3790

**Table 1: Intake capacity of Tertiary Education Institutions of Bhutan in year one.<sup>14</sup>**

The National Statistical Bureau's<sup>15</sup> projection of population growth shows that, annually, there will be more than 45,000 Bhutanese in the 19 to 22 year age bracket, many of whom might wish to pursue higher education. Therefore, it may be concluded that investments in the expansion of tertiary education is sustainable.

Year	Rural	Urban	Total
2022	26,357	27,589	53,946
2027	24,234	29,663	53,897
2032	19,580	28,408	47,988
2037	16,593	28,407	45,000
2042	15,622	31,656	47,278
2047	13,436	32,333	45,769

**Table 2: Projection of population who would be in the age group of pursuing studies (19 to 22 years).<sup>16</sup>**

## Benefits of Expanding Tertiary Institutions

As discussed in the preceding section, there were 4,628 students pursuing higher studies outside Bhutan in 2017, of which 3,544 were studying in India.<sup>17</sup> The report also stated that the number enrolled in institutions outside of Bhutan should be higher but that data was not available to the

<sup>14</sup>BCSEA, Pupil Performance Report (2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018); RUB (2015). The Royal University of

<sup>15</sup>NSB (2019). Population Projections Bhutan 2017-2047, pp.69

<sup>16</sup>Bhutan Strategic Plan (2013-2020); DAHE, MoE. The State of Tertiary Education in Bhutan: 2017; and <https://www.pressreader.com/>

<sup>17</sup>Ibid

Department of Adult and Higher Education.<sup>18</sup> Even if we just consider the case of students studying in India which is a total of 3,544 students it would mean that, annually, about 1,200 Bhutanese are enrolled in the Universities in India because Bhutan has not been able to meet the demand. To address the need to provide more places in tertiary institutions within Bhutan, the ‘Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024: Rethinking Education’ recommended that “private sector participation in diverse fields at the tertiary level”<sup>19</sup> be promoted. If Bhutan fails to address the shortfall and access to quality tertiary education urgently, there might be negative consequences for the economy and the social and cultural fabric of the country.

## Economic Benefits

In 2016, in the State of the Nation Report, Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay<sup>20</sup> reported that about Nu 700 Million was spent by Bhutanese on education. He reiterated the need to establish more tertiary educational institutions.

Expanding the tertiary education sector will have positive, multiplier effects on the nation’s economy. Firstly, it would generate employment for hundreds of Bhutanese who work as faculty members, as well as administrative and support staff.

Secondly, the establishment of institutions would stimulate the economy of the community and its environs: staff would rent houses near the college campus, farmers would have a ready market for their vegetables and livestock products, and shops and restaurants would emerge to cater to the staff and students.

## Socio-cultural Benefits

Although it is important for Bhutanese students to get exposure by studying outside Bhutan, it is necessary to assess if all of that exposure is positive. There are stories of students wasting their time, visiting socially unhealthy environs and having substance abuse issues. This has affected many who study in sub-standard colleges with private funding. Thus, to guard against

<sup>18</sup>DAHE, MoE. The State of Tertiary Education in Bhutan: 2017, pp.17

<sup>19</sup>Ministry of Education, Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024: Rethinking Education

<sup>20</sup><http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=60317>

these negative influences, it is crucial to create the space and opportunities for our youths to study in Bhutan and keep them connected to Bhutanese values and practices and grows into responsible citizens. In his keynote address at the Inauguration of Norbuling Rigter College, the then Prime Minister of Bhutan (2013 to 2018), Dasho Tshering Tobgay, underscored the importance of values, stating that the “College should infuse Bhutanese values, culture, and history so that children stay rooted. This cannot be found even in top notch universities. However, it is important to blend this with international ideas.”<sup>21</sup>

## **Good Quality RUB Curriculum for Students**

In its strategic plan document, the Royal University of Bhutan stated:

“Some of those who enrol in universities abroad end up in institutions of questionable repute, thus wasting resources and their precious time. This situation calls for the need to invest more in the expansion of tertiary education within the country to address the rapidly rising demand more effectively.”<sup>22</sup>

This statement was echoed by the Education Sector Review Commission in 2008:

“... with an increasing number of Bhutanese students pursuing higher education outside the country, a matter of particular concern arises from the importance of protecting students from low-quality or disreputable providers of higher education outside the country.”<sup>23</sup>

As an example of sub-par degrees, that from Sikkim Manipal University comes to mind when in 2017, it was discovered that the degree offered by this institute was gained through distance learning.<sup>24</sup> The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) stopped recognising the degree. As a result, it dashed the hopes of many graduates who had aimed to work in the civil service. Similarly, when the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) made

<sup>21</sup>RUB (2015). The Royal University of Bhutan Strategic Plan (2013-2020), pp.5

<sup>22</sup>Education Sector Review Commission (2008). Education without compromise, pp.43

<sup>23</sup><http://www.kuenselonline.com/mishandling-the-smu-issue/>

<sup>24</sup>This argument is based on the fact that most of the Bhutanese studying in the neighboring countries are admitted in colleges of questionable repute.

the same decision, many youths who had aspired to become politicians, could not do so. To overcome the problem of Bhutanese students having to study in colleges of questionable repute outside of the country, and as a result having graduates who are not employable, the number of tertiary institutions needs to be increased.

While the curriculum offered by our tertiary institutions may not, as yet, be of the standard of internationally acclaimed institutions, graduates of tertiary institutions in Bhutan, who go on to pursue masters and doctoral studies in universities in advanced countries, have performed very well. This may be a positive indicator that tertiary education in Bhutan is relevant and is of comparable standard.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Trail Ahead: Where Should Tertiary Institutions in Bhutan Head?**

There is, without a doubt, a need for change. Tertiary institutions in Bhutan should be able to accommodate the number of students who aspire to study in the country and prepare them for the global job market. But how responsive will the institutions be to the demands of the Bhutanese students? How should the learning ecosystem change to support and cater to the needs of the job market? What should be the way forward for the tertiary institutions? Some of these pertinent issues are discussed below.

Trail One: At the heart of any temple of learning is its curriculum. Although more tertiary institutions are needed, their approval should come with the conditions that require the institutes to offer innovative, job-relevant programmes instead of adopting existing programmes from other institutions. Such initiatives will create opportunities for students to benefit from current and relevant courses in Bhutan.

Trail Two: Currently, similar programmes are offered in several colleges, as in the case of the Business studies programme. Gedu College of Business Studies, Royal Thimphu College, and Norbuling Rigter College together, churn out more than 500 business graduates annually. Does Bhutan have a large enough market to absorb all these graduates?

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<sup>25</sup>This argument is based on the fact that most of the Bhutanese studying in the neighbouring countries are admitted in colleges of questionable repute.

Are they capable enough to enter the international job market or become entrepreneurs? Thus, to avoid flooding the job market with large numbers of graduates from one programme, limiting the number of students for each programme may encourage the tertiary institutions to innovate and invest in more current and targeted programmes.

Trail Three: Before a tertiary institution is approved, a study of the holding capacity for each campus should be conducted to ensure quality and the relevance of the programmes offered. Some urgent questions that may be considered are: Does the existing infrastructure and facilities promote learning? Is there space and scope for expansion of the existing tertiary institutions? Based on the findings, a projection of student intake capacity for each institute could be made and adhered to. This will ensure that each tertiary institution will focus on offering quality education to an optimum number of students.

Trail Four: The National Education Policy of Bhutan states that the TEIs in Bhutan should offer courses that are relevant to the current, as well as future national, social, economic, and spiritual needs.<sup>26</sup> To fulfil this policy, the tertiary institutions must diversify their programmes. In addition, the programmes must be aligned with technical and vocational education so that they cater to the job market. Therefore, the target of the tertiary institutions should be to train more skilled professionals rather than general graduates who might face challenges in finding employment.

Trail Five: As a preferred destination for higher education, Bhutan ranks high with its advantages of having a pristine environment, a rich culture, the principles of Gross National Happiness, and quite importantly, it is safe. These factors might well attract students from other countries. Therefore, tertiary institutions should establish their reputations by committing to stringent, high quality academic and research standards. The institutions should also invest in high calibre human capital, up-to-date facilities, and innovative and relevant programmes. Such investments and commitment will propel the tertiary institutions in Bhutan to leapfrog even the globally acclaimed educational institutions, thereby making Bhutan a preferred education destination.

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<sup>26</sup>MoE. National Educational Policy (Draft), pp.12

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<http://www.kuenselonline.com/mishandling-the-smu-issue/>

## When Bhutanese Study Outside

*Dr Janet W. Schofield*

For centuries, Bhutan remained remote from the rest of the world due both to its mountainous topography and its desire to protect itself from outside influence and interference. But in the last half of the 20th century the country began to permit, as well as to seek, more international contact and that trend continues today. The primary driver of this change was the government's recognition of the importance of educating Bhutanese citizens at a time when there was little educational infrastructure in the country outside of the monasteries and the key reason for government scholarships for international study today continues to be "to address the shortage of human resources in the critical need areas".<sup>1</sup>

But education in another country provides not only specific knowledge and skills. It also provides exposure to a different culture that may well have its own profound impact in areas ranging from individual's sense of self to their patterns of behaviour. Consistent with this volume's goal of looking at education beyond the formal education system, this paper explores how Bhutanese college students are impacted personally by exposure to very different cultures during their undergraduate years beyond what they learn through a specific course of study abroad.

International exposure during the undergraduate years is increasing for Bhutanese, with several thousand studying abroad through self-funding in addition to the roughly 200 selected by the government each year for international scholarships. Young Bhutanese are increasingly going abroad for jobs as well. Furthermore, Bhutan's tertiary educational institutions are increasingly providing their students with international exposure. For example, RUB brings students from Naropa University in the USA to some of its member colleges for a semester and students from the EU and the University of New England in Australia for shorter-term visits. In addition, Royal Thimphu College (RTC) has brought international students to its campus, for a semester or more, from countries in Asia, as well as from Europe, the Middle East, North America and Africa. During its first decade, it has also sent more than 225 Bhutanese students abroad to Europe and the U.S. as well as to many Asian countries, primarily on short-term cultural exchanges or for competitions of various sorts.

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Education, Royal Government of Bhutan, Undergraduate Scholarship Operational Guidelines. p.4 [http://www.dahe.gov.bt/images/pdf/UG\\_Scholarship\\_Operational\\_Guidelines\\_-\\_2017.pdf](http://www.dahe.gov.bt/images/pdf/UG_Scholarship_Operational_Guidelines_-_2017.pdf)



International experience influences students well beyond the academic knowledge or technical skills they gain. Specifically, numerous studies conclude that long-term (a semester or more) study in other countries impacts areas ranging from foreign language proficiency to self-and intercultural-understanding to civic engagement and career outcomes.<sup>2</sup> This is not surprising, as long-term programmes give individuals the opportunity for extensive exposure to other cultures with the potential that brings for reflection and personal growth. As short-term international programmes have become increasingly common, a modest number of studies have begun to suggest that they too may have a significant positive impact on students in domains ranging from intercultural sensitivity to better understanding of global interdependence.<sup>3</sup> However, such conclusions are based almost exclusively on research involving students from the US, Europe, and Australia, typically studying in other Western cultural contexts.

Thus, it seems unwise to generalise from them to the likely impact of similar programmes on Bhutanese students. First, there are larger cultural differences between Bhutan and such countries than between the US, Europe, and Australia. This may well influence the experiences' impacts. Second, differences in levels of development between students' home country and the host nation might well also influence the effect that such an experience has. Concern about whether Bhutanese students may be dazzled by the evident prosperity of more developed countries or seduced by it into assuming that such countries' cultures are preferable to Bhutanese culture is not unrealistic as suggested by the popularity of jeans and Korean music and hair styles among urban Bhutanese youth.

Unfortunately, research on the impact of international exposure on students has almost completely ignored the question of how it may impact their sense of national identity and closely related issues, their appreciation of their own culture, their interest in working and living outside of their home country, and the like. But such issues are extremely important in the Bhutanese context.

<sup>2</sup>R. Michael Paige, et al. 2009. Study abroad for global engagement. *Intercultural Education*, v. 20sup1, S29-S44, DOI10.1080/14675980903370847 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675980903370847>

<sup>3</sup>Kyoung-Ah Nam, 2011. Intercultural development in the short-term study abroad context. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272622813\\_Intercultural\\_Development\\_in\\_the\\_Short-Term\\_Study-Abroad\\_Context\\_A\\_Comparative\\_Case\\_Study\\_Analysis\\_of\\_Global\\_Seminars\\_in\\_Asia\\_Thailand\\_and\\_Laos\\_and\\_Europe\\_Netherlands](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/272622813_Intercultural_Development_in_the_Short-Term_Study-Abroad_Context_A_Comparative_Case_Study_Analysis_of_Global_Seminars_in_Asia_Thailand_and_Laos_and_Europe_Netherlands)

Thus, it was decided to conduct a survey of about two dozen RTC students who had participated in college-organised international programmes to developed countries to see if and how their experiences influenced them. To help develop specific questions for the survey, a subset of these students were interviewed regarding their thoughts on the areas in which the international experience had an impact on them and their peers.

Then, all students still on campus who had visited the USA or Japan on short-term RTC-related programmes were asked to anonymously complete a survey the impact of that experience on them. The qualitative questions inquired, first, about the most important impact of the experience on the students and, second, about how, if at all, the experience influenced their views of Bhutan, its culture, and/or their identity as a Bhutanese. Overall, exposure to both Japan and the USA appeared to increase students appreciation of Bhutanese culture, their sense that being Bhutanese is very central to who they are, their pride in being Bhutanese, and their valuing of things that are characteristic of Bhutan such as its environment, monasteries, GNH, and the like.

The qualitative responses suggested that the admiration shown for Bhutan in Japan and the USA made students proud of things they had thought little about or not valued highly before. “In our country most of the students disrespect our culture and try to be more Korean...” one student wrote. “Only after visiting Japan I came to know that the Japanese people value our culture more than us...I love teaching my classmates... that being Bhutanese is the greatest, so we should not ignore our culture.” Similarly, in one of the pre-survey interviews, a female student said that she used to routinely wear jeans and a tee-shirt to go into Thimphu town, but now she usually wears a kira because the reaction in the USA to her kira was so positive that she now feels proud to wear it. A number of students also mentioned having observed that, elsewhere, people seemed too busy to spend time on close relationships as students valued and enjoyed doing in Bhutan.

At the same time that students reported an enhanced appreciation for Bhutanese culture, environment, and life style, they also indicated that their international experience substantially increased their desire to study and work outside Bhutan for at least a few years. They also reported a very modest increase in their desire to live outside Bhutan permanently.

Perhaps contributing to these findings, and consistent with existing research on international exposure for students,<sup>4</sup> they also reported clearly increased comfort when interacting with non-Bhutanese and an increased ability to do so effectively. Consistent with these results, comments regarding newfound ease with and/or interest in cross-cultural experiences were one of the two most frequent responses to the qualitative question about the most important impact of the international experience on the students.

Culture is a very broad concept, including not only traditions and material artifacts but also ways of experiencing the world and interacting with others. Interestingly, although students reported increased appreciation for Bhutanese culture, there were some indications that international experience influenced them in a manner that was not totally consistent with traditional behavioral norms for young people. For example, the most frequent response to the qualitative question about the international experiences most important effect was a reported increase in self-confidence. Consistent with this, quantitative responses suggested a substantial increase in self-confidence, independence and willingness to say what they think, although there was essentially no reported change in shyness.

Traditional Bhutanese values include an emphasis on interdependence and politeness<sup>5</sup>, which are not always consistent with independence and saying what one thinks, especially when interacting with those in authority. However, the government's emphasis on the importance of entrepreneurship, as a route to decreasing unemployment as well as recent efforts to move toward greater national self-sufficiency, suggest that these characteristics may be increasingly useful given Bhutan's rapidly changing social and economic circumstances as well as the advent of democracy.

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<sup>4</sup>Irvine Clarke et al (2009). Student intercultural proficiency from study abroad programmes. *Journal of Marketing Education*, v. 31(2), pp. 173-181. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0273475309335583>

<sup>5</sup>Tashi Wangyal (2001). Ensuring social sustainability: Can Bhutan's educational system ensure intergenerational transmission of values? *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, v. 3(1), pp. 106- 131.

In sum, these students reported that even their very short-term experiences in developed countries had a substantial impact on them. Contrary to possible concerns that exposure to developed countries may undermine Bhutanese youth's attachment to their own country and its culture, students generally reported an increased sense of national identity and increased valuation appreciation of Bhutanese culture while, at the same time, they became more interested in studying or working abroad. Of course, how long such changes will last, and whether and how they will ultimately impact behaviour is an open question, one that deserves further attention given the increasing numbers of Bhutanese who go the other countries for study and work.

## From the Political Parties

The Druk Journal aims to continue giving national discourse new vigour and depth. After three general elections, with a new government at the helm of the executive driving seat, the political atmosphere promises a new level of maturity. Today's leaders seem to be looking for ideas and vision beyond the party manifesto. An increasingly savvy electorate is demanding more credible governance.

For this issue The Druk Journal asked the four registered political parties of Bhutan to put forward their understanding of and vision for education in Bhutan. We hoped that existing and new ideas could be cross-fertilised across the board to enrich discourse and the larger national vision.



Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party



Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa

Druk Phuensum Tshogpa



People's Democratic Party



## Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party

### Education – Transcending Your Own Domains

The primary benefit of education, amongst a myriad of things, must be freedom. Freedom from poverty, freedom from ignorance, freedom from not having less, freedom from drudgery, emotional and psychological freedom, Freedom from the imagined order (social, economic and political constructs), and political and ideological freedom. Further, education, if equipped with the right pedagogy, should unarguably result to socio-economic, intellectual, and political prosperity inviting true happiness for all Bhutanese and not just a few.<sup>1</sup> Taking the context of socio-economic development, one could say Bhutan is a transformed nation, but only in comparison to a timeline of 100 years traceable to our foraging forefathers. Within this context, education has indeed lifted us out of impoverishment, from the ages of walking for days to Tibet, to the era of YouTube, smart phones, Netflix, K-pop and Google. Education has also helped produce our own doctors, engineers, pilots, managers, entrepreneurs and political leaders.

That said, education has also left us trailing with poor civic sense, indifference towards public goods, caring little for the future, while dwelling in pride for having circumvented the system on numerous accounts. To cite simple examples, we may have immaculate homes but think nothing of littering or spitting *doma* juice in public space and smearing walls, polluting the river, dumping garbage in the open and urinating and defecating where convenient. Again, our educated society (public and private) increasingly reflects the qualities required to acquire power rather than the skills to exert it for the common good. Education has also made us materially rich but poor on values of community vitality, family time, brotherhood and sisterhood, and lesser regard for the environment as long as bounties are harvested, excavating mountains of its minerals and valuable natural resources as if there are “no tomorrow.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Although happiness can be argued from many perspectives of both objective and subjective well-being while using the former to measure the latter, this is what studies around the world (Bhutan included) claim to measure with questionnaire ratings by respondents. While some view happiness as accumulation of wealth, fortune and social status, others think happiness can be stimulated by injecting chemicals to the body allowing the neurons to do its job.

<sup>2</sup>The legendary John Lennon wrote, “Imagine All the People, Sharing All the World, I Hope Some Day, You’ll Join us as One.”

It strikes me to ask, how can one reign supreme while risking becoming ecological serial assassins and yet claim the conservation of the environment as one of the pillars of Gross National Happiness? This continued, man made natural calamities will become inevitable at the rate urban centres are growing with little preparedness or planning on the “what ifs”. The copy paste urban growth centers have left residents lamenting for scarcities even in lifeline services like drinking water, cooking gas, sewerage, garbage disposal, and parking space.

To continue, has education led us to view the world as faltered in our actions, behaviour, and consumption patterns, wanting more each day with little in our backyard? For instance, national debt<sup>3</sup> rises each year, unemployment has become a plague and many are resigned to the fact that nothing can be done while governance continue as usual, and red tape gets longer by the mile. This should not continue to happen if adults assimilate deeper values of a concerned citizen and set examples by leading our youth and school children to become more responsible in making Bhutan self-reliant through actions of sorts and cease the long standing intellectual acrobatics churning mundanely-convincing national reports, heavily window-dressed satisfying the world order of conformity.

Just like elsewhere, today’s education in Bhutan has given us individual rights, robotic schedules and alienation in the name of concepts like privacy and personal space. This space commands maximum self-rule where even parents are prevented to enter without requesting permission while appointments have to be made to meet relatives and friends. Is this the type of education that can bring happiness? Coincidentally, while we attempt to measure GNH with everyone an expert in the field, happiness has been pursued for millennia by our forefathers. As said by Harari in his Sapiens, “...community spirit with chieftains looking after the entire village shared greater contentment as compared with present 21<sup>st</sup> century affluent societies suffering immensely from alienation and meaninglessness despite their prosperity.” Shouldn’t a GNH country largely dominated by the Buddhist faith encourage meaningful consumption of austerity and not contradict by embracing consumerism in excess, telling the untruth (especially during political campaigns), breeding a culture of pretense in national sync and walking away from responsibilities when it concerns larger public interest. Sadly, this is what education has made us all.

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<sup>3</sup>External debt to GDP ratio has increased from 30 percent in 1990 to 113 percent in 2017, World Bank report, Bhutan



The challenge of education in the Bhutanese context like in any other developing country is that our children are simply not learning enough even when they are in school. Or is it, as noted by His Eminence Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche in his article titled, Education - Bhutan's Most Important Choice, Bhutan Observer, February 21, 2018, due to "... a curriculum that is long outdated British one, regurgitated and shoved down the throats by ex-colonial India." Or is it "...archaic even by modern British standards where students no longer just passively copy, paste and memorise as they do in Bhutan with no encouragement to question or think critically." To note, the ability to churn value-based ideas that compel us to think, re-think, re-evaluate, re-learn and criticise for positive contributions has seen lower scores across the board in our schools, in the bureaucracy, and in other communities. Although some positive signs are noticed in the private sector with people embracing innovation, creativity, taking risk and contributing to wealth creation, the elements of 'me-first' rubbed from the '*hum phailey*' attitude adopted from our neighbours continue to triumph.

To worsen things, there is limited understanding (both with the youth and adults) or refusal to understand the benefits education can bring, such as empowerment of the self, leading to empowering the family, society, culture and eventually the nation. For example, to acquire personal freedom and happiness as the indispensable condition for the quest of human completion, the notion of quality education to be pursued constantly and responsibly is yet to be part of our culture. For instance, the argument on education enlarging opportunities both for the individual and the state continues to be hurdled with limitations in innovation and creativity, instead entrenched in indifference, ignorance, complacency and worst, all obsolete methods and curriculum pursuing only a catch up game. Efforts are continuing since time immemorial but shouldn't we ask what smart methods can be accomplished to avoid the catchup game. Is it policy, resources, or simply an attitude malice? Unpopular thoughts but important to unbundle in sincere acceptance while putting an end to blaming the system. We are the system and it must be ourselves to stop the blame and act.

In the past, His Majesty the Great Fourth has cautioned us on the unmistakable importance in the pursuit of educational reforms with irreparable damage it can cause to a generation if gone wrong. I am uncertain if we have lost one generation but sure on missing the boat for at least two generations with little content mastery, inadequacies on

education quality and teaching methods, infrastructure and technology, teacher motivation and student enthusiasm or even overall shortfalls in the pedagogy itself. Further, as should be understood, one of the primary purposes of education, particularly early in life, is the development of character, ethical behaviour, citizenship and dreams of becoming useful to mankind. It has become urgent in our context to integrate such ideas into educational models at all levels of the school system (primary, secondary and even tertiary). Miracles can be achieved in developing curriculum that combines science, technology, and business programmes with the likes of arts, ethics, music, religion, governance, and literature preparing students who are committed to becoming ethical, mindful, smart working, and skillful leaders. Should such a model be adopted, as an example, we need not dwell with the exploitation of resources to the tune of Nu 55 Million (in the year 2015 -16) by our Cabinet Ministers, Prime Minister, and Chief Justice on hospitality and entertainment expenses.

The role, importance, and accountability of teachers and parents alike cannot be limited to developing good citizens, but beyond, because they are the impetus for sustainable change that bonds the society together, especially in the values of *Le Jumdre Tha Damtshi* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are the backbone of the education system and, therefore, no amount of anything will matter if the two most important constituents are not improved. No amount of policy, curriculum, and resources can achieve anything without capable, motivated and enthusiastic teachers, and responsible parents. For example, most parents in Bhutan are not even aware of the standard at which their children should be performing but remain satisfied with the outcome the school is providing even as their child's learning objectives fall short.

Having said that, there is no silver bullet and this should not dampen our spirits. Let us attempt to educate the heart and the hand, perhaps concerns like youth unemployment, vandalism, substance abuse, suicide, crime and depression will not be an issue as children will explore the world using other faculties at their disposal. Let us investigate alternatives to achieve empowerment and freedom, skills and cognitive development as being far more important than academic excellence. Taking education beyond classrooms, bringing about meaningful impression on children at home and the society at large. And, most important, education that imparts knowledge on collective responsibility nurturing a fair and just society

for a better tomorrow as all equals just like Kuen-Nyam endeavors. Our education system should reflect in our behaviour, habits, and lifestyle consistent to the values of Gross National Happiness. If this is happening, it's a good sign but if otherwise, then we need to rethink deeper at all levels and question whether we are true Bhutanese citizens worthy of living in the land blessed by Guru Rinpoche.

To end, as Nietzsche said, if you have a “why” to live, you can bear almost any “how”. Most important by looking beyond your own domains.

## Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa

*Re-visiting and re-envisioning Bhutan's education system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:  
Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa on its education pledges*

Education is free in Bhutan which invests a large amount of money in education. According to a report by the World Bank (2019), Bhutan's spending on education constituted 5.1 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 2013 and increased to 6.7 percent in 2016. This spending is higher than the neighbouring countries<sup>1</sup> and indicates the singular priority that the Royal Government places on education. This stems from His Majesty the King's prioritising education:

“I have a number of priorities. Number one on my list is education. Education is empowering. It is a social equaliser and it facilitates self-discovery which leads to realising one's full potential. I believe in education” (4 October 2014).

In light of this, it is important that any reform in the education sector should prioritise quality and not undermine it for vested, political interests. At the outset, we should be extremely proud of the education system that our country has. However, in keeping with time, especially in terms of quality, relevance and usefulness to meet the current and future needs of the country and the world at large, it is crucial that positive and impactful reforms be introduced in the education sector. Thus, DNT's stand on education, drawing from its 2013 manifesto, is that there needs to be a paradigm shift from “education for all” to “education with quality that is responsive to the Bhutanese and global employment opportunities” (2018 DNT Manifesto).

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.kuenselonline.com/lack-of-quality-jobs-despite-heavy-investment-in-education-says-world-bank/>

Towards this, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) made the following education commitments in the run-up to the third parliamentary elections in 2018:

- Remove cut-off points for Class X students to enable them to continue studying until Class XII;
- Consider doing away with Saturday classes;
- Do away with examinations until Class VI;
- Make teaching a profession to vie for, by offering the best and most prestigious scholarships; and
- Better pay and allowances, more administrative and support staff to ease teacher workload.

Review central schools to make it better and reopen strategic community and primary schools that are useful and beneficial in certain communities. The first three pledges and especially the removal of cut-off point attracted criticisms from the other political parties as being populist, unsustainable, unconstitutional and more importantly questioned their impact on the quality of education. The subsequent discussions, hereafter, will dwell mostly on the cut-off removal given that this pledge has come under massive criticism.

At the outset, it is not the intention of DNT or any other political parties, as they vie to form the government, to lower the quality of education in any way. Rather, it stands critical of what constitutes quality of education in the way we are talking today. Is quality of education 100 percent pass percentage that every school is striving to achieve? In the current scenario, it is singularly the academic achievement that quality of education is all about. Hence, it is critical to reflect on what is quality of education in the first place. Thus, the pledges were firmly couched in the wisdom of His Majesty the King and the holism it will deliver to the students, besides extensive interactions and consultations undertaken with the people of diverse professions including those at the grassroots level. His Majesty the King envisions the quality of education:

“That it is not enough to provide free education, we must provide education of such quality that it will guarantee a distinguished place for our youth anywhere in the world,” (3<sup>rd</sup> Royal University of Bhutan Convocation).

In light of His Majesty's vision of education, it is important that we reflect whether our education system today is delivering quality education to the students especially in the context of "mismatch of skills" that are widely talked about in the job market. Hence, the pledges related to education were guided by the vision of His Majesty and in full cognizance of the diverse requirements of the job market.

### **The Justification of the Pledges/Commitments**

With the topic, "Investing in our Children", for the 6<sup>th</sup> Friday Meet held on 8 February 2019, the government responded to the foggy questions that surrounded the implementation of the education pledges. In re-visiting and re-envisioning our country's education system, the following priorities will guide the course of the shift:

- Shift from summative to formative education;
- Enhance teacher quality with improved facilities and services.

### **Provide Conducive Environment for Education**

The cut off point was set with a singular intent to reduce pressure on the limited infrastructure capacity of the government schools and is not the only measure for the quality of education. Despite the noble intent underlying it, the Class X passed students were forcefully made to look for jobs at a young age without equipping them with the skills required of a job market.

On the constitutionality of the cut-off removal, the government clarified that the initiative does not contradict the Constitution in whatever way it is interpreted. The issue of unconstitutionality, as raised by the Opposition and others, arise basically from their disconnect in the reading of the sections related to Article 9. The picture becomes clear if Article 9, section 16, is read along with section 15 which states:

"The State endeavours to provide education for the purpose of improving and increasing knowledge, values and skills of the entire population with education being directed towards the full development of the human personality".

In addition, during the public consultation of the draft Constitution in Bumthang in 2006, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo commanded:

“When the country becomes prosperous the government may provide free education not only up to 12<sup>th</sup> standard but may be able to provide up to 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> standard”.

Further, with our country to graduate to a middle income country in 2023, it is even more crucial to make this move.

The question of sustainability that the opposition and other political parties raised is in itself an answer to the present system that is unsustainable. If our children are not provided with an opportunity to continue higher education, they will go on to become a burden to the country and this will cost the country even more if this investment is not made now. A deeper dive into the youth unemployment rate of 12.5 percent shows that a large proportion of unemployed youth are Class X and XII passed students. Hence, the Class X cut off removal by the government is an attempt to seal one source of youth unemployment by creating a platform for Class X passed students to continue to Class XI and onward to XII.

The concerns were also raised on transferring unemployment from Class X to XII, which is a valid argument. However, opportunities for gainful employment opportunities begin only after Class XII in the form of diploma and degree courses and other training opportunities. Thus, the initiative confides that it is not the transfer of unemployment to Class XII; rather, given many gainful employment opportunities created as a result of several options, it is highly likely that the number of unproductive children will reduce.

Hence, despite the criticisms that surround the pledges/commitments, DNT firmly believes in the long-term benefits the pledges will deliver with the purpose and quality of education fully in respect of the vision of His Majesty coupled with extensive consultations with the public. DNT plays the role of a facilitator in realising the vision of His Majesty the King and implementing the wishes of the people.

## **Druk Phuensum Tshogpa**

### **The Removal of Cut off Point for Class X**

The cut off point is a certain percentage of marks set by the Bhutan Council for School Examination and Assessment (BCSEA) under the Ministry of Education for students sitting for the Bhutan Civil Service Examination (BCSE) in consonance with the availability of seats, infrastructure/facilities and human resources in the higher secondary schools across the country. Those who scored above the percentage set by BCSEA get the opportunity for free higher secondary education whereas those who could not acquire the set percentage look for private schools to continue their education and some join the Technical and Vocational Education Training Institutes.

With the onset of the third parliamentary election, Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (current government) came up with the manifesto of removing the cut off point for Class X which we, Druk Phuensum Tshogpa, believed was to entice the public and to garner votes. We, the Opposition, feel that the removal of cut off points for Class X is absolutely unconstitutional and reminded the Government time and again that the Constitution should be respected and strictly followed. Article 9 (16) of the Constitution states that the state shall provide free education to all children of school going age up to the 10<sup>th</sup> standard and ensure that technical and professional education is made generally available and that higher education is equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. Besides the demerits of doing away with the cut-off point they took the decision to implement it without any preparation and studies.

There will be huge negative impact on the system, deteriorating the quality of education from their unprecedented and bold decision of removing cut-off points and taking students who acquired 59.6 percent to public schools and those who scored 35 percent with pass marks to full scholarship in the private schools from the academic session of 2019.



In 2018, there were 12,674 students from 118 schools registered for the examination, of which 12,462 appeared. A total of 12,033 students have passed the examination. Among them, 7,808 students will be absorbed in the public schools and the remaining 4,225 will be provided with a full scholarship in the private schools by paying individual student Nu 30,000 per month for day scholars and Nu 50,000 per month for boarders which will be a huge expenditure for the government, amounting to around Nu 140-150 million every year.

### **Quality of the Education**

Although the government undertakes the professional and skill development programme for teachers to ensure the quality of education, with the removal of the cut-off point for Class X students, the quality of education is likely to deteriorate. Since the youths' minds are susceptible to external influences, the liberal environment will lead them to complacency. For instance, it is recommended by the National Law Review Taskforce to reintroduce corporal punishment in school, which was banned in 2008, saying that with the absence of the fear tactic, the discipline of the students has become a daunting task. Moreover, this reform will create in private schools an immense negligence of the students' performance as they are not worried about the shortage of students which will hamper the quality of education in the long run.

### **Sustainability of This reform**

There are many reasons why there is no way to sustain this for a long period of time. The first and foremost is that the nature of the policy changes contradict the supreme law of Bhutan. Secondly, it would bring adverse impacts on the quality of education. Thirdly, Bhutan is still developing and the time has not come for such changes in the system. People are suffering with unhygienic and unsafe drinking water and no proper infrastructure like roads. Fourthly, it is apparent that the government lacks clarity and direction of vision and ambition in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. Finally, it is not in line with the government's slogan of narrowing the gap because some of the parents are financially sound and the government is providing the full scholarship to private students too. Therefore, the government has not carried out a deeper study on the impact of this reform in the Education Ministry and it is uncertain how sustainable it may be.

## **Economic and Labour Force**

Despite the removal of cut-off points for Class X being so expensive, its outcome would be quite challenging. This is because the government has to reflect on the creation of job opportunities for those who are beneficiaries of no cut-off points today. As mentioned above, today there are 12,033 students pursuing higher secondary education. The question is, will all of them be taken into the colleges of Bhutan or will they be given the ex-country scholarship again? So, if there is no answer, the unemployment rate will soar and youth related issues will be rampant in the society.

## **Reference**

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[www.kuenselonline.com](http://www.kuenselonline.com)

Report on Harmonisation and Consolidation of Laws 2018

# People's Democratic Party

*Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond*

## **PDP's Prayers for Education**

Bhutan's story of education is one of success. It has given us a proud nation and talented people. We have achieved 74 percent literacy rate with 99.8 percent primary enrolment. Our education continues to be forward looking - adapting to the needs of the changing times and yet firmly anchored to our rich heritages that have stood the test of time. It is imperative to continue the efforts of our past educationists in nurturing an education system that prepares Bhutan and its people for the new century and be guided by the unique Bhutanese heritage and values.

Guided by our Kings, Bhutan's education system is designed to ensure that every child receives quality education that empowers the child to fulfill his or her full potential. With rapid changes both at the national and global level sparked by advancements in science and technology, we believe that every generation must confront the unique challenges of the generation and take the education system forward without losing sight of its grand vision. Therefore, we seek to reform our education system through the three pillars that are the edifies on which a good education system rests. These three pillars are the School, the Curriculum, and the Teacher.

Our school should be, in all sense and purpose, a "Sacred Temple of Learning". We should, therefore, consistently create schools as safe, comfortable and enjoyable teaching-learning spaces. School curricula should be enjoyable, engaging, and embrace the learning needs of all children. It must prepare the child into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond in skills, knowledge, and value system. Our teachers are the soul of our education system. A committed and a competent teacher is the greatest influence in the education of our children. We should continue our efforts in nurturing teachers into committed and competent professionals who are caring, empathetic and dedicated.

## **Pillar One - 21<sup>st</sup> Century School**

Our schools should be centres of excellence where future citizens learn not only the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills but learn to be good human beings. Every child should have easy access to education and one that is of high quality. Bhutan's mountainous terrain continues to be a dominant challenge in providing easy access and quality education. Therefore, where necessary, residential schools will continue to be an important intervention to enable children in the remote areas to access education.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is proven to enhance good life outcomes. Presently Bhutan covers only about 20 percent of its children in the ages of three to five years with early childhood care and development services. A major reform thrust in the education system should be to enhance ECCD services. We must set an ambitious goal to cover 100 percent of our children with ECCD services in the next five years.

Bhutan has, since time immemorial, built on its spiritual values of compassion and inclusiveness. These important values must inform our education system. Our schools should be the ideal spaces and custodians of these values. We must ensure that every school in Bhutan is an inclusive school that caters to the learning and developmental needs of every child who is differently and specially-abled. While all schools should be inclusive and respect the needs of every child, we must have adequate special needs schools. No child should be deprived of education and development because she is differently-abled.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century world is a world of science and technology. Our education system cannot afford not to enter the race. We must confront the challenges and harness opportunities that 21<sup>st</sup> century science and technology offers the world. Our education system should intently build graduates with strong competencies in science and technology. STEM schools should be an important feature of our school system. STEM schools that are dedicated in offering STEM learning to our children with science and technology aptitude should receive attention of the society.

Our schools should embrace ICT. Schools and teachers must be empowered to use ICT in teaching and learning. Every school should create smart classrooms where students have access to the latest learning tools that technological development has to offer.

### **Pillar Two – Ennobling Teachers**

Our teachers are the torch bearers of our education system. We believe that if there is a silver bullet to achieve the educational dreams of every Bhutanese, that silver bullet is our teachers. We must continue the efforts in nurturing great teachers - teachers who are competent and passionate. Teacher development should begin by attracting the best into the teaching profession. Teaching should become the first career choice above all else. Through concerted professional development and conducive working environment our teachers should be empowered with the necessary facilities, qualifications and the pedagogy to engage learners.

We believe that every teacher in Bhutan can be offered the opportunity to enhance his or her educational qualification to a Masters degree. With the rapid changes that influence schools and teaching and learning, our teachers need to keep abreast of the new development in educational areas. Therefore, every teacher should receive 80 hours of professional development annually.

The contributions of Non-Formal Education and ECCD instructors are invaluable in our education system. The NFE and ECCD instructors should be taken into the fold of the mainstream teaching cadre. They should receive the similar importance accorded to other teachers in service conditions and working environment.

### **Pillar Three – a Robust Curricula**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century world and its learners deserve a curriculum that is engaging and enjoyable. The 21<sup>st</sup> century skill need is not simply “knowing” but in using the knowledge that is acquired. Creativity, communication, and collaboration (3Cs) will determine the success of the graduate. Our curriculum must shift from providing information, facts and knowledge to the higher order thinking skills such as analysing, synthesising and

creativity. Competency based curriculum and learner centered pedagogy should be the mainstay of classroom management and student teacher transaction.

A 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum will not be defined merely in what is contained in the text books. The internet and the global connectivity manifested all around makes up the curriculum in real time. Schools and teachers should have the flexibility to adapt their curriculum and teaching based on the aptitude and passion of the child.

Because every child is unique and has different aptitude and potential, our education system must evolve to provide the space and wherewithal for every child to blossom into the potential and dream she holds. Our education system therefore must embrace and include, in its mainstream school system and curriculum, various choices for our children. The education system should incorporate the performing arts, sports, vocational training programmes, music, painting, etc. in the school programmes. Special schools should be established to house students with these aptitudes.

## **Conclusion**

One of the blessings of education in Bhutan is the clarity of vision emanating from the Golden Throne. His Majesty envisions an education system that equips every child with the skills, knowledge, and aptitude for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; an education system that nurtures every child with the time-tested Bhutanese values of empathy, compassion, humility, and resilience. His Majesty dreams of every Bhutanese graduate to be able to stand on his or her own feet and find for himself or herself a respectable place anywhere in the world; that every graduate grows up as a proud Bhutanese who embodies Bhutanese heritage and values.

One other blessing of education in Bhutan is the commitment and dedication of our teachers and other educationists. Every single day, our teachers in every nook and corners of the country sacrifice personal comforts so that

every child receives the education that they deserve. Despite the numerous challenges, our teachers make the sacrifice in the firm conviction that:

- Every child is His Majesty's Vision;
- Every child is a parent's prayers;
- Every child is the nation's future.

With such blessings, Bhutan is well placed to create an education system that is the finest in the world - one that serves its national aspirations; one that makes the world a happier place to live in.

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