



**THE INTERIM REPORT ON REVIEW OF EDUCATION-RELATED
LEGISLATION IN BHUTAN**

PREPARED BY THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR EDUCATION

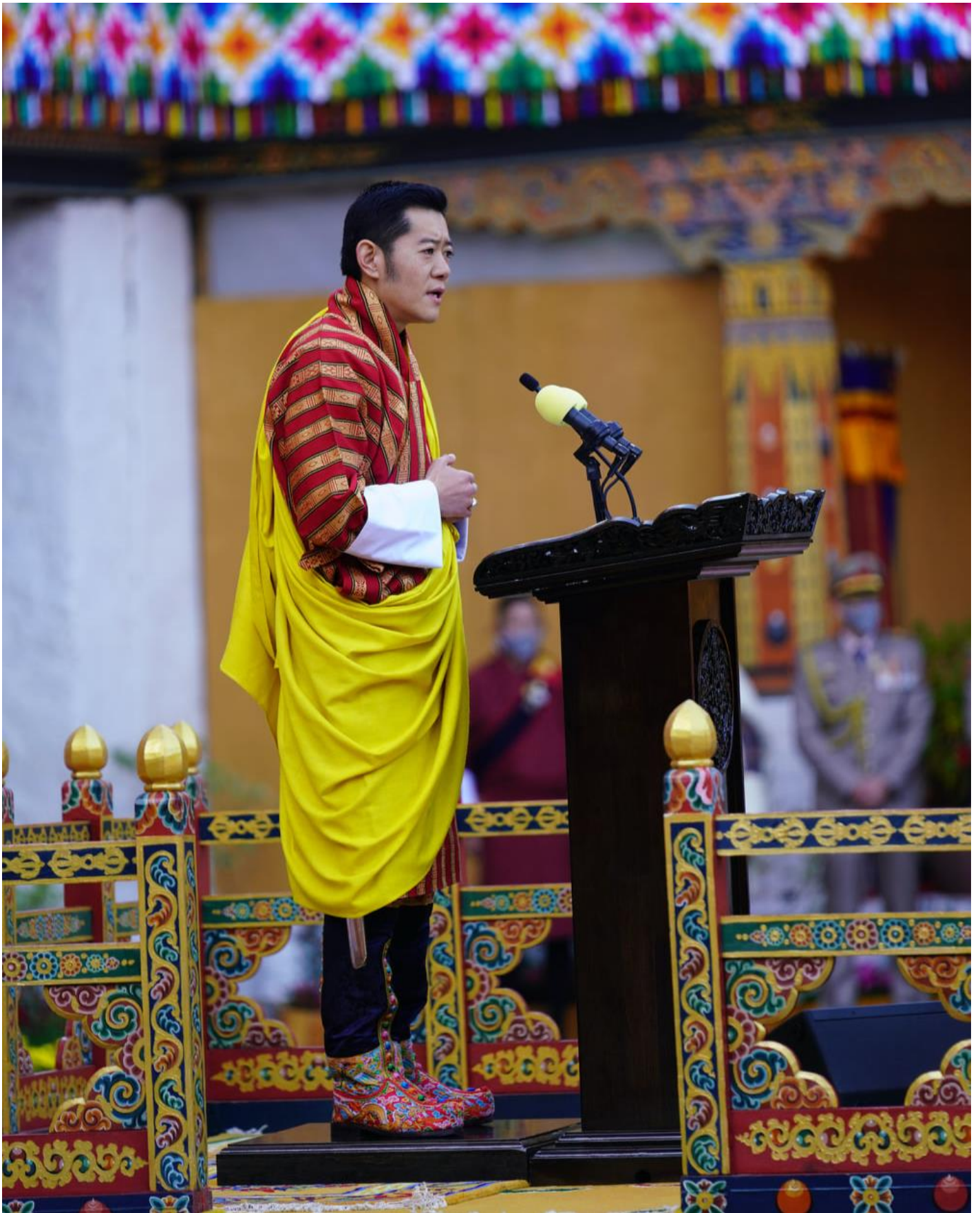
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Excerpts from His Majesty the King's Royal Kasha on 113th National Day Celebration in Punakha, 2020

“Standing on the cusp of the twentieth century, Gongsu Ugyen Wangchuck saw the importance of modern education in preparing Bhutan for what lay ahead. Despite the daunting challenges of his time, he established schools in Bhutan and sent Bhutanese children to study in India

“...Since the introduction of parliamentary democracy, our time and energy have largely been committed to the establishment of democratic institutions and ensuring their success. This remains a national priority. However, we need to bring into focus other equally compelling national priorities. Education is an indispensable one.

“... The process of reforming our education system must aim for standards and goals which are of the highest possible order.

“...The new vision for our education system must encompass the drive to create enlightened citizenship that is as much local as it is trans-local. This can only strengthen the quality of our democracy and secure our sovereignty.

“...In achieving such a vision, it is not enough to merely transform our education system and impart twenty-first-century competencies. We must simultaneously endeavour to create relevant jobs and economic opportunities. Otherwise, we risk reproducing in future the very scenario of today, where our education system has resulted in thousands of unemployed youth...

“...I trust that a time-bound Council for Education Reform will prepare a visionary and workable roadmap for the twenty-first century to support the Royal Government of Bhutan in this august endeavour.”

Acknowledgement

The Special Committee for Education extends its gratitude to the Ministry of Education and Skills Development for their presentation on the draft Education Policy and outlining the responsibilities of various departments. The officials presented updates on the restructuring initiatives and reform measures implemented in response to the Royal *Kasho* on Education Reform of 2020 and also an overview of the mandate of all the Departments. The draft National Education Policy was also discussed, which now awaits its endorsement by the Cabinet for the implementation. The Committee appreciates the insights and detailed presentation shared during the consultation, which has significantly contributed to our understanding of the current education system in Bhutan.

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1 Background

The foundation of modern education in Bhutan dates back to 1914, with the establishment of the first school in Haa under the Royal Command of Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck. This school began with just 11 students and offered a core curriculum that included Hindi, English, Arithmetic, and Dzongkha. Over time, under the guidance of successive monarchs, the development of modern education accelerated, leading to the establishment of more schools and teaching centers. Since the beginning of the Five year plans, education has been given the highest priority, resulting in the significant expansion of the education system in Bhutan.

According to the Annual Education Statistics of 2024, Bhutan has 1896 schools, institutes and centers in public and private sectors with 196441 students and trainees. Similarly, there are 12221 teachers, lecturers and instructors in the country. This reflects significant growth in both the number and quality of Bhutanese education under the visionary leadership of our successive monarchs. Consequently, various planned documents have been prepared to enhance quality of education. To improve accessibility in education, the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014–2024 was endorsed, outlining strategic goals for the education sector, emphasizing inclusivity, quality improvement, and alignment with national development goals.

The National Council, as the Review House of Review in the Parliament of the Kingdom of Bhutan, submitted Review Report on the Quality of Education during its 18th session in November 2016. In addition, the historic Royal *Kasho* of 2020 on Education Reform decreed the urgent need for educational reform in the country. The *Kasho* emphasizes that education is indispensable and must be revitalized by reorienting school structures, revisiting the curriculum, pedagogy, learning processes, and assessments, either through transformation or radical rewriting to address the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. As a result, robust changes were introduced to align with the visionary Royal *Kasho* to impart twenty first century education and the draft National Education Policy was updated in 2022.

However, redundancies persist in the education system, necessitating clear direction and a legal framework to ensure the sector's effective operation. The National Education Policy after the introduction of Democratic Constitutional Monarchy has been in draft since 2009 and the Ministry has predominantly relied on the Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (EPGI) to govern

education in Bhutan. Yet, the fluid nature of EPGI makes it difficult to ensure inclusive and sustainable transformation in our education system. Additionally, the implementation of existing policies and guidelines is often inconsistent due to variations in interpretation among the implementers. Therefore, Bhutan might require a robust legal framework, such as an education act, to ensure the seamless operation of its educational endeavors at all times.

2 Objectives:

2.1 Review legislation and policy instruments to identify existing gaps.

This review aims to enhance the education system's effectiveness, inclusivity, alignment with global trends, governance and accountability. In addition, the effectiveness, relevance and the implementation process of the existing guidelines and policies will also be assessed.

2.2 Review the current challenges and opportunities in the education system.

The review intends to study the differences in the quality of education, infrastructure, teachers, funding and access to technology between the rural and urban students.

3 Study Approach

Several national and international legislative acts and policy documents were reviewed. The national documents included: Education Policies and Guidelines Instrument (EPGI), Bhutan Education Blue Print (2014 – 2024), the draft National Education Policy (2022), the draft 13th Five Year Plan and A Review Report on the Quality of Education, National Council of Bhutan.

Review was also conducted on the educational state of the countries from South East Asia, Europe, East Asia and South Asia with a focus on the impacts of Acts and Policies.

Furthermore, public & stakeholder consultations and the survey are also included to gather comprehensive insights and data on whether the Education Related Legislation in Bhutan is required.

4 Preliminary Observation and Findings

The main enhancement to education came during the reign of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck. Under the Royal Command, a National Education Policy Committee was formed. The first National Education Policy was completed and approved in 1976, followed by the second National Education Policy in 1984.

Subsequently, the first publication of the Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (EPGI) was released in 1987, providing a single point of reference for circulars, policy orders, and guidelines issued by the Ministry to its many stakeholders. The latest, the 37th EPGI was published in 2023. The EPGI, which relies heavily on circulars, notices, and ad hoc decisions and plans from the Ministry has resulted in weaknesses and uncertainties within the education system. Additionally, the lack of uniformity and the discretionary power exercised by decision makers make it an unreliable policy for the Ministry. The absence of legal standing further undermines the EPGI's effectiveness. Consequently, teachers and students face numerous challenges due to frequent changes in the curriculum, assessment methods, teaching pedagogy, and the overall system.

The draft National Education Policy was first prepared in 2009 and has remained unchanged to date, still awaiting its endorsement and implementation. It has remained in its draft form for almost 15 years.

The Special Committee for Education in the 18th Session, 2016 submitted 23 recommendations to the government (Annexure I). The outcomes of the recommendations will be updated in the Final Report during the 34th session following stakeholder consultations.

The Bhutan Education Blue Print (2014 – 2024) was endorsed with the primary objective of serving as a comprehensive policy document to guide the Ministry of Education. The several key initiatives remain unfulfilled, posing significant challenges to the education system. The formulation of an Education Act through multi-sectorial participation and consultation, reflected in Chapter 5: Delivering the Shifts, Subtopic 5.2 (Page 91-92), is incomplete, leaving a crucial legal framework undeveloped. The establishment of the National Teacher Council, intended to standardize teacher registration, licensing, and professional conduct, has not been realized. The construction of a Ministry's Secretariat Office Complex, aimed at enhancing coordination and resource sharing among departments, remains unfinished. These unfulfilled programs, outlined

under Subtopic 5.2, highlight ongoing challenges and the need for a legal framework to support the fulfillment of such policy documents that have involved significant financial investments.

Table 1. Comparative analysis of Educational Policies, Acts and Outcomes in selected Countries.

Country	Policies	Acts	Outcomes
Bhutan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Education Policy (1976) • National Education Policy (1984) • Draft National Education Policy (2022) • Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (EPGI) 	No Education related Acts	
Singapore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Paper on Education Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Act 1957- revised on 2020 operated on 31 December 2021 • Compulsory Education Act 2000 (CE Act 2000) • Special Education (SPED) Act (2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-Quality Education skilled Workforce and Economic Competitiveness • Strong Teacher Quality and Professional Development
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Policy in the UK, 2006 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Act 1870,1944 (Butler Act) 2002 ,2011, • Education Reform Act 1988 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More inclusive, comprehensive and equitable education system. • Accountability. • Shape and guide the development of education policy and practice in the UK.
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Education Policy 1948, 2020 • New Education Policy 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English Education Act 1835 • The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act 1995 • Right to Education Act (RTE) 2009 - “the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements in infrastructures • Enhanced Quality of Education • More inclusive and educated Indian society.
China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine-year compulsory education (1986) • Vocational Education policy (revised in 2013) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compulsory Education Law (1986, revised 2006) • Education Law of the People's Republic of China (1995, revised 2005) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernization of education. • Diversification of Education providers.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational Education Law (1996, revised 2013) • Teachers Law of the People's Republic of China (1993, revised 2018) • Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China (1998, revised 2018) • Education Law for Persons with Disabilities (1994, revised 2017) • Private Education Promotion Law (2002, revised 2017) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Vocational Education
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Education Policy 2019 • Education for all 2000 • School sector Development Plan • Higher Education Policy 2019 • TVET Policy 2012 • Inclusive Education Policy 2018 • Multilingual Education Policy 2015 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education Act 2018(1971, 1992) • Higher Education Act 2012 • Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) Act 2017 • National Examination Board Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nepal have been profound, leading to greater equity, inclusivity and quality in the education system. • Promote accountability, transparency, and efficiency in the management and administration of educational institutions and systems.

Bhutan, guided by the National Education Policy (1976, 1984,) and the Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (EPGI), lacks specific education-related acts, leading to inconsistencies and insufficient support for sustainable educational transformation. Conversely, Singapore’s robust legislative framework, including the Education Act (1957, revised 2020), Compulsory Education Act (2000), and Special Education (SPED) Act (2003), has resulted in high-quality education, a skilled workforce, and strong teacher development, illustrating the advantages of comprehensive legal support. Similarly, the United Kingdom's Education Acts (1870, 1944, 2002, 2011) and the Education Reform Act (1988) have fostered an inclusive and equitable education system with effective accountability mechanisms.

India’s educational reforms, driven by policies such as the National Education Policy (1948, 2020) and the New Education Policy (2023), alongside legislative acts like the Right to Education Act (RTE) (2009), have led to improved infrastructure and enhanced educational quality, though challenges remain in ensuring uniform implementation across the country. China’s emphasis on modernization and diversification, supported by the Compulsory Education Law (1986, revised

2006) and the Vocational Education Law (1996, revised 2013), has advanced vocational education and broadened educational opportunities, despite facing issues of regional disparities. Nepal, with policies like the National Education Policy (2019) and acts such as the Education Act (2018), has made significant strides in promoting equity and inclusivity, though maintaining consistent quality across diverse regions remains a challenge.

5 Conclusion

The interim report on the review of Bhutan's education-related legislation emphasizes the urgent need to bolster the legal framework governing the sector. Initiated by Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck and nurtured through subsequent monarchs and governmental efforts, Bhutan has made commendable strides in improving educational access and quality. However, challenges persist, including disparities between rural and urban education, limited human resources, and the absence of a formal legal document.

Comparative analyses with Nepal, India, the United Kingdom, China, and Singapore underscore the importance of establishing a robust legal foundation in Bhutan. These comparisons highlight the necessity for consistency, accountability, and inclusivity within the education system. Bhutan's integration of Gross National Happiness (GNH) principles sets it apart, aiming to cultivate well-rounded individuals who contribute meaningfully to national development while upholding cultural values.

Looking ahead, the recommendations from this review target reforms to address gaps and align Bhutan's education goals with global standards. Foremost among these reforms is the enactment of a legal document, crucial for providing a sustainable framework that enhances the system's resilience, responsiveness, and capacity to meet the evolving demands of the 21st century.

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ANNEXURE I

Strategic Focus Area	Recommendations
1. Teacher performance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen the current recruitment procedure and criteria in colleges of education, with due consideration to trainee's attitude, aptitude for teaching. 2. Invest in enhancing teachers working environment, with due consideration for their accommodation, working space, modern teaching learning facilities with adequate internet connectivity. 3. Revisit current workload of teachers to ensure adequate timing for lesson planning and assessment by deploying separate instructors for sports, arts, music, dance and culture, etc. based on the level of schools. 4. Package attractive financial incentives and high grade in the entry level to attract and enhance teacher morale and motivation. 5. Revisit current teacher deployment system, which is based on STR with due consideration to subject teacher specialization and as per the needs of schools in the country. 6. Review current teacher's PD programs and strategies to meet its minimum requirement with proper monitoring and impact assessment with due focus on whole school approach through a central based program. 7. Strengthen educational research in the education system to generate innovation in the practices of teaching and pedagogy.
2. General Education Curriculum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Carry out comprehensive curriculum review in a phase manner by considering a standard curriculum development cycle taking into account adequate time to provide current, relevant and right size curriculum through national level subject conferences and workshops. 9. Consider proportionate foreign and local contents in the curriculum and provide adequate space for school based curriculum and community based learning. 10. Review/update contents, standards and sequence of textbooks to ensure right size of syllabi, current and relevant information, and systematic flow of learning in the same grade and gradual progression to next higher grade. 11. Strengthen Bhutanese value education by developing curriculum to promote national aspiration and consciousness for progressive and harmonious society. 12. Further, strengthen Dzongkha curriculum to promote Dzongkha by reintroducing earlier textbooks on <i>namthar</i> and <i>legshey</i>, and Bhutanese history in Dzongkha and piloting Social Studies and Civics to be taught in Dzongkha.

<p>3. Student Learning Outcomes– Access and Assessment</p>	<p>13. Accord due consideration to the concerns of fee structure and its revision and other operational aspects of private schools while reviewing the Guidelines for Private Schools of Bhutan, 2012.</p> <p>14. Expand enrolment capacity of public schools up to middle secondary to fulfill constitutional requirement of access to free education to all Bhutanese school going aged children. In absence of in-take capacity in public middle secondary schools, option of financing students sent to private schools by the Government may be considered or even other arrangements.</p> <p>15. Enhance establishment of ECCD centers across the country with standard operational guidelines to strengthen both accessibility and quality services.</p> <p>16. Reinforce implementation of SEN policy to address educational needs of children with special needs focusing on PD courses, teaching learning materials and separate mode of assessment.</p> <p>17. Revisit the current Continuous Assessment system in school with the objective of assessing holistic development of school children (scholastic and non scholastic).</p> <p>18. Introduce a system of CA in class XII with due weightage in BHSEC while at the same time initiate mechanisms to minimize biases in CA.</p> <p>19. Institute a system of tracking overall student’s performance (electronic or otherwise) that should be transferred from one school to another by the school authorities or accessible to the new school, as the child changes school to track and improve a child’s longitudinal performance.</p>
<p>4. Resource Allocation</p>	<p>20. There is a need to consider the student strength and geographical location as one of the basis for resource distribution amongst schools to promote fair and equitable allocation of budget.</p> <p>21. There is a need to institute a system to formulate separate budgets for primary schools instead of consolidating with the Dzongkhag’s budget.</p> <p>22. The Government needs to be concerned of the long-term financial sustainability of the central schools due to seemingly extravagant provisions in the central schools.</p> <p>23. The Government may wish to revisit the policy of providing basic amenities to all students, irrespective of their economic background.</p>