

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 Phunsum 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 10th 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 12th 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

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008.

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Report on Harmonisation and Consolidation of Laws 2018