

People's Democratic Party

Education for the 21st 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 21st 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 - 21st Century School

Our schools should be centres of excellence where future citizens learn not only the 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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 21st century world and its learners deserve a curriculum that is engaging and enjoyable. The 21st 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 21st 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 21st 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.