

Gross national happiness and challenges for education in Bhutan: Perspectives of policy experts

Jamba Tobden

Auckland University of Technology: jambatobden@gmail.com

Miriam Ham

Central Queensland University: m.ham@cqu.edu.au

Nations, institutions and researchers worldwide are increasingly demanding their governments set out a systemic change to humanise the present order of the world. In Bhutan, introducing a Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy in the 1970s and applying GNH indicators in the early 2000s was a deliberate attempt to embed Bhutanese values into national governance structures. For Bhutan, GNH provides a focus to ensure developed policies stemming from international agendas are humane. The nationwide happiness index, constructed every five years, measures people's happiness level through nine domains consisting of 33 indicators by a GNH survey of all Bhutanese citizens. The latest survey indicates that citizens perceive education as making the lowest contribution to the GNH index. This study examines the perception of key policy actors gathered through interview and outlines three key challenges for policy architects implementing happiness-focused governance policies with implications for education. The paper concludes with observations on educational implications for Bhutan and other countries seeking to replicate a national focus on happiness.

Keywords: education; governance; politics; happiness; well-being; sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Standing on the cusp of the twentieth century (around 1907), the first King of Bhutan recognised the importance of modern education to prepare Bhutan for the future. At that time, there were no modern schools in Bhutan. His Majesty, therefore, sent Bhutanese children to study in the neighbouring states of India, built early foundations of modern education by building infrastructure, and enhanced policies to strengthen the existing monastic education system in Bhutan. By 2021, Bhutan had established 1,928 schools and institutes, with 12,487 teachers and 247,572 students (National Statistical Bureau [NSB], 2021). This translates to a gross enrolment rate in primary school of 96.50%, a youth literacy rate of over 93%, and a general literacy rate of 71.4% (NSB, 2021; Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020; Tobden, 2022).

More than 100 years since the first king laid the foundations for modern education, we find ourselves at the beginning of another new century and in need of a new vision to prepare for what lies ahead (The Royal Kasho on Education Reform [The Royal Decree], 2021). Globally, nations, institutions and researchers are increasingly demanding their governments pursue a progressive strategy of systemic change to humanise the present order of the world (Sachs & Unger, 2021; Unger, 2020). The introduction of a Gross National Happiness (GNH) framework was a deliberate attempt to embed Bhutanese values into national governance structures. For us in Bhutan, GNH clarifies what it means to be a politician, a public servant and a human being. It is every Bhutanese's responsibility to uphold the values of GNH, which is primarily the need to pursue everything in moderation. The Bhutanese expectation is that all policies focus on this

value. The result of GNH education, then, is to prepare a future generation to live in harmony with themselves, each other and the environment.

Education is one of the nine domains of GNH (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). The goal for education in Bhutan is to pursue an educated and enlightened society of GNH, built and sustained on the unique Bhutanese values of *Tha Dam-Tsi Ley Gyu-Drey* (cause and effect) (MoE, 2020). To this end, higher education institutions, particularly the institute for GNH Studies (iGNHaS) at the Royal University of Bhutan, are increasingly engaging in research, teaching and training services that pertain to indicators under the education domain (Tobden, 2020). However, there is evidence to suggest emergent issues facing education in Bhutan.

The recent GNH survey (2016) shows that education is the least contributing domain to the value of GNH in Bhutan (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). In a nation that values education highly, this is an alarming finding. This paper reports the perspectives of those working in education and other policy positions concerning the current indicators. The study gathered qualitative data using interviews as a deliberate contrast to the quantitative data of the GNH survey. The research sought to discover participants' perspectives on why they believe the GNH survey shows education as the least contributing domain to the value of GNH in Bhutan.

The findings indicate that a delay in implementing a National Education Policy has and continues to negatively impact the direction of education and teachers' ability to implement new GNH initiatives. The research took place in the context of a growing argument that the government must emphasise education reforms and implement a series of holistic development programs to realise the full potential of GNH in education. This study suggests that, although Bhutan has innovative educational guidelines and frameworks in the draft National Education Policy that align with GNH, they are ineffective until the policy is approved. Several examples of the impact of the delay on current practice include resource distribution and teacher implementation of international initiatives. The findings highlight the important role national education policies play in a nation's education system and align with similar findings from other studies in Asia. The impact of delays is particularly significant in terms of teachers' planning and practice concerning quality outcomes for the students.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

The education system in Bhutan, in the form of national development plans and policies, was introduced in the 1960s when economic development plans were first introduced (NSB, 2021; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). In the previous 400 years, Bhutan had a well-established monastic system of education that continues in some form today. There are three main streams of education in Bhutan: general education, Monastic education, and non-formal education. All streams are state-run (MoE, 2019, 2020; Ramchand, 2020). The *Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan* mandates free education for all citizens of Bhutan until Year 10, extended to Year 12 in 2020.

Further, the state makes technical and professional education available, and higher education is equally accessible to all based on merit (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2008). Since the beginning of the ongoing Five-Year Plans in the 1960s, the Royal Government of Bhutan has emphasised education as a priority sector in terms of human resource allocation and budget allocations (NSB, 2021; MoE, 2020). Since 2018, teachers have been the highest paid civil servants in Bhutan (Kuensel, 2021).

The Bhutanese education system started with the Indo-Western model in the 1960s, sourced from India as the nation's closest neighbour and development partner. However, Bhutan made significant efforts to infuse unique Bhutanese culture and traditional values into the borrowed educational materials and teachers (Ramchand, 2020; Zangmo, 2018). The national contextualisation of education continued in the 20th century, guided by the Bhutan *Vision 2020* policy, which emphasised a holistic approach to education to develop the capacity of young people to inculcate an awareness of the nation's unique cultural heritage and ethical values (Royal Government of Bhutan [RGoB], 1999). The two teacher education colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan have made tremendous progress in producing Bhutanese teachers to replace expatriates and enhance access to education for all (MoE, 2019).

However, changing job market dynamics and the impact of international policies are causing the education system in Bhutan to be unable to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to meet new national and global challenges (MoE, 2014, 2019, 2020; The Royal Kasho on Education Reform, 2021). The Bhutanese parliament, parents, and other officials discuss and share concerns about the quality of education in formal meetings and on social media (Kuensel, March 2018, December 2018). The results of the GNH survey evidences this national discontent with education's poor contribution to Bhutanese society's happiness, though no formal study demonstrates that the quality of education has declined.

To address the concerns and enhance the quality of education, the Royal Government of Bhutan initiated a series of policy interventions that included structural change, policy changes and changes to enhance human resources development. On the structural front, the Royal Education Council was instructed to oversee curriculum development with a vision of 'Innovation in Education' (MoE, 2019, p. 120). On the policy front, 'an education blueprint for 2014-2024, the education sector strategy' was prepared following a nationwide consultation with teachers, parents, students and policymakers (MoE, 2014). The government approved professional development programs for teachers on the human resource front. The Ministry of Education mandated that every teacher receive 80 hours of professional development each year (MoE, 2014).

Despite improvements in the education sector in terms of access and quality, several areas continue to lag, including quality of teaching and learning, inclusiveness, adaptive and digital learning, learning instead of classroom teaching, gearing towards emerging jobs, improving infrastructure, re-designing curriculum, and teacher quality (NSB, 2021; MoE, 2020; The Royal Kasho on Education Reform, 2021). His Majesty, the King of Bhutan, stated that the 21st-century educational requirement is defined by the accelerated rate of change in all aspects of our lives, driven by rapid technological advances and globalisation, wired and digital systems in rural areas, towns, homes and workplaces. The new vision for education must blend 21st-century competencies with holistic development so that Bhutanese children are educated and equipped to become caring, dependable and honest human beings (The Royal Kasho on Education Reform, 2021).

As noted, education is one of the nine domains of Bhutan's GNH. The indicators under this domain are literacy, schooling, knowledge and value (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). The GNH framework was introduced into the Bhutanese education system in 2010 through the 'Green Schools for Green Bhutan' initiative (Zangmo, 2018) incorporating Bhutanese values. These values include *driglam namzha* (the national etiquette), *tha-dam-tshig ley gyu-drey* (sublime values of solemn devotion and trust based on interconnectedness, relationship and bonding, and cause and effect), *zacha-srosum* (etiquette of how one eats, one behaves and how one walks/moves based on national values), *sampa-semke* (notion, thought,

idea or anything arising or dawning in the mind (MoE, 2014; 2019). The Royal University of Bhutan has the vision to be a GNH-inspired university and, therefore, institutionalised the institute for GNH Studies in 2014 (Tobden, 2020). This is to say that the education sector in Bhutan, from schools to universities, is infused with the GNH framework.

The five-yearly GNH survey is designed to measure the happiness level of the entire Bhutanese people in each of the nine domains by asking questions about their sufficiency of the domains and the 33 indicators. In the most recent application of the nationwide GNH survey (2016), education (9.78%), good governance (10.18%), and psychological well-being (10.48%) were the domains seen to make the smallest contribution to the value of GNH (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). The same survey revealed that community vitality (11.56%), ecology (12.41%), and good health (13.10%) were the highest contributing domains to the value of GNH in Bhutanese society.

While other nations cite money, wealth, financial security and health as the sources of happiness (Gunawardena, 2015; Langdrige & Crossley, 2005; Leontiev & Rasskozova, 2014; Sotgui, 2016), Bhutanese people cite education, employment, the future success of significant others and access to services as sources of happiness (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016); this is the Bhutanese exceptionalism. It is significant, then, to find that education is rated as among the lowest contributing factor to the value of GNH. The GNH survey has ‘government services in providing educational facilities’ as a sub-indicator of government performance. The biggest contributors to insufficiencies of government performance revealed in the GNH survey are the ‘absence of sufficient schooling’, ‘lower levels of knowledge’ and ‘higher illiteracy’. This perception is evident in many students repeating their classes and dropping out of school, which has resulted in Bhutan having one of the highest repetition rates in South and East Asia (Wangmo, 2013).

International research reveals why happiness should be the central aim of education (Noddings, 2003): education helps people to acquire knowledge, builds self-confidence and thus, it positively impacts happiness (Cuñado & Gracia, 2012). Globally, the Sustainable Development Report 2021 shows that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires success in realising six major transformations, and the first on the list is quality education (SDG 4) (Sachs et al., 2021). It appears, however, that this is not currently the case in Bhutan despite the overt implementation of the GNH. Our study shows that one of the factors contributing to this result is the delay in the necessary educational policy to guide the education sector. This delay is a result of changing political governance. As mentioned earlier, the draft National Education Policy was initiated in 2015. The government then proposed an education blueprint for radical and systematic education reform in Bhutan. While the draft policy was in the process of being finalised, a new government was formed in 2018, and their priority became focused on teacher empowerment, resulting in the policy remaining in a draft form to this day.

METHODOLOGY

This paper comes out of a larger project where I, the lead author, explored the elements of Government performance in Bhutan, particularly in education. I have an ongoing interest in this topic as I have spent the last 15 years working in policy expertise, first in the Ministry of Education as a policy implementor and later in the Royal University of Bhutan, engaged in infusing GNH values in the education sector. The larger project was guided by the central question, ‘what elements of government policy and implementations, in the context of Bhutan's cultural and political economy, are critical to the continued enhancement of sustainable gross national happiness?’

The latest GNH survey quantitatively shows an intricate and textured picture of the lives of the Bhutanese people (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). My project explores the complexities of the shortcomings in education in Bhutan by employing qualitative methods, which are more appropriate for exploring salient features of lived experiences (Creswell, 2014) that may not be revealed through quantitative methods. According to Tracy (2020), qualitative methods provide knowledge that targets societal issues, challenges or opportunities.

The findings of this study were derived through a qualitative inductive approach based on interviewing policy experts. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were held with 28 policy experts from various institutions, including members of parliament, government policy officers, corporate institutions' officers, leadership of the government, corporate and private institutions, civil society organisations, and representatives of farmers' groups and local government functionaries. The interviews with experts were held online and consisted of ten to fifteen interview questions, each lasting between one and one-and-a-half per participant. The participants were recruited adopting a purposeful sampling technique (Creswell, 2014, p. 194) to recruit participants that fit the parameters of the research questions, goals and purpose (Coyne, 1997; Creswell, 2014; Tracy, 2021).

The study used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of thematic analysis of open coding of the data, followed by categorising the codes into themes. All qualitative data analysis uses coding and theme-generating techniques; however, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Saldana (2013), each analysis's intent differs substantially. Since this paper is based on data collected in interviews with policy experts, this study adopted participants' terminologies and phrases as 'crystallisation points' (Bogner et al., 2009). Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.

FINDINGS

This paper focuses on three key findings of the larger Doctoral thesis project: (i) the need to approve the National Education Policy, (ii) reframing education and setting priorities, and (iii) the role of education in contributing to happiness and well-being—the GNH infused education. The following section is structured according to the three themes, with data presented for each and discussion following in the next section.

National Education Policy

Study participants echoed the emerging discourse in the Bhutanese media and policy forums about the length of time it is taking to approve the National Education Policy. One of the participants, Karma, said, 'We have been discussing about education long time back, is there anymore to think?' Karma narrated the milestone changes in education in Bhutan as follows:

[T]hat prior to 2008 (pre-democracy in Bhutan), we have institutionalised the Royal Education Council, which carried out extensive research into quality of education. The first government (2008-2013) introduced Educating for GNH. A lot of national and international experts met several rounds to discuss the quality and relevance of education; the second government (2013-2018) laid out the educational journey for ten years and came up with the education blueprint; the third government (2018-present) overhauled the teacher pay packages and made teachers the highest paid civil servants in the country. I think the most important job is to get the education policy approved and functioning.

Concerns were raised about the impact of the delay. Participants cited as an example the issue of inequity in resourcing according to the variances in regions across Bhutan. Chimi commented:

Our classrooms are not climate resilient. The schools in the south where the temperature rises up to 38 degrees in summer are not equipped with air conditioners and, likewise, the schools in the north where temperature falls to 0 are not equipped with internal heating systems. Our children write exams in freezing cold and it is not conducive to learning.

The irony is, that the draft policy allows for the requirements of regional challenges in resourcing schools according to their needs. The draft education policy has a statement that facilitates ‘special provisions and considerations shall be made for schools with exceptional circumstances, such as extreme remoteness, high altitude, and low socio-economic communities’ (MoE, 2019, p. 6). However, these infrastructure requirements can only be implemented when the National Education Policy is adopted because, in its draft form, the policy has no power.

Study participants unanimously indicated that much work had been done in the form of policy interventions and program initiatives that comes with every new government. The participants felt, however, that approval and publication of the National Education Policy would be a long-term solution to facilitate a focus on quality that would strengthen the entire education system. The participants also voiced frustration and questioned why the past successive governments were taking such a long time to endorse the National Education Policy. They strongly suggested that the ‘time to finalise the policy is now’.

Reframing education and setting priorities

Despite their demands for expedited approval of the draft policy, study participants raised concerns about the structure and focus of the draft National Education Policy. Their comments ranged across aspects of the overall vision, the policy's mission and objectives and, as discussed above, some of the structural priorities. The next paragraphs touch on the specific concerns raised about opposing ideologies between global education systems and Bhutanese values. Participant Kinga said:

The urgency now is to focus on one clear goal and get the education policy approved. While in the policy, we must decide whether to focus on value versus skills, or a combination of the two; access versus quantity; expansion of schools versus consolidation of schools; Compassion versus competition; and GDP versus GNH. The problem is, because of the modern education, it has given this wrong sense of self-importance and individualism, we must learn the values and discipline from our monastic education, and leverage that into the modern education system.

The participants explained that teachers cannot decide how to adapt their curriculum, resources and pedagogical approaches to incorporate GNH or new globalised initiatives emerging in the 21st century into their classrooms. Participant Dorji said:

Our teachers are confined to the rigid curriculum. Our teachers should be given the flexibility to operationalise their own teaching materials, and fix accountability of their own achievements.

He went on to say, ‘we must make systematic shift to gainfully reform our education system’. Dorji quoted His Majesty the King: ‘We will never go wrong, if we invest in human resources in building intelligent institutions’. Participants agree that substantial time and resources have been spent on reforming and rethinking education; however, the competing choices and confusion about how to effectively go about this is the main reason for delaying the policy objectives in the draft National Education Policy.

The vision and goals of education, as stated in the draft National Education Policy, are to develop citizens that value Bhutan's unique national identity, ancient wisdom and culture, and prepare them for right livelihood and knowledgeable, skilled, creative and innovative individuals. The draft policy states that Bhutan has made commendable progress in access to education; however, more needs to be done to focus on the quality of education in line with international policy and suggests instituting a Quality Assurance Board and a performance-based management system to maintain and the enhance quality of education. As raised by the participants, the issues of competing choices are already captured in the draft National Education Policy. Therefore, it is deemed that the approval and adoption of the National Education Policy would begin to provide a pathway forward to enhance the quality of education in Bhutan as it would clarify for teachers their right to make informed decisions about what and how to teach their students.

Role of education in contributing to happiness and well-being: GNH-infused education

Building on the base key findings above on the need to have the National Education Policy in place, with a clear vision and appropriate structural mandates, the next issue participants raised was the need to redefine the role of education in contributing to happiness and well-being in alignment with GNH values. The definition and role issues mostly have to do with aspects of curriculum and instructional pedagogy. One of the participants, Sonam, said:

We do focus on policy research, including social enterprises, and of course a very important component is education and professional development training, primarily for the benefit of who we would like to term as 'happy humanity', as you can say this is the direct inspiration from the philosophy of GNH.

Several participants suggested reorienting school structures, such as revisiting curriculum, teaching and learning pedagogy, learning processes and assessments, including making Science, Technological, Engineering and Maths (STEM) skills part of everyday learning but in a way that prioritises the values of developing holistic, caring, dependable and honest human beings. Participants Pema, Karma, Jigme and Sonam gave specific examples of how the GNH may be contextualised into various disciplines. For example, Jigme outlined how the college of Business Studies 'should be able to develop business plans for farmers cooperatives, community projects and young entrepreneurs for free'. Likewise, 'the College of Engineering, Science and Technology graduates should design landscaping, drawings and structural plans for the community projects for free of cost'. Participants outlined how the draft National Education Policy enables flexible incorporation of new global initiatives in a way that embodies GNH. They specifically cited how the school curriculum will strengthen STEM education to promote creativity and innovation (MoE, 2019, p.10) and how all educational institutes should put in place plans and programs to imbue a sense of volunteerism and foster character building embedded in the country's unique values and culture (MoE, 2019 p. 15). GNH education is the background (end objective), and education values are the foreground (a means to an end) of the Bhutanese education system (MoE, 2014; RGoB, 2008). However, until the policy is published, teachers and colleges are powerless to enact the changes.

DISCUSSION

One of the dominant factors participants cited as the reason behind the Bhutanese people's perspective of the limited contribution of education to GNH is the delay in approval of the National Education Policy. The Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat (GNHC) is mandated to review and screen all policies in Bhutan to ensure the GNH congruence of any

new policy (GNHC, 2015). The policy is currently in draft form, and under review at the GNHC; however, its review has been delayed for over seven years, with the first draft of the policy initiated under the 11th Five-Year Plan (2014-2018) (Ball & Wangchuk, 2015) and only published in 2018 on the Ministry of Education's website in draft form (MoE, 2022).

The reasons for the delay are the corresponding government changes and priority focus changes. Bhutan is not the only country to experience the impact of political change on educational policy. In Nepal, one of the most significant impacts on the educational system was volatility in the governmental sector (Shrestha, 2011). Similar to Bhutan, the delay in Nepal's constitutional arrangements and competing political agendas resulted in teachers citing political interference as the number one reason for the lack of clarity in their curriculum, pedagogical approaches and assessment processes (Ham, 2020). In Bhutan and Nepal, an absence of national governing structures resulted in a lack of direction and confusion around the direction of education, which impacts its effectiveness at every level. Teachers from around the world cited similar issues of limited contextualisation of curriculum and teaching approaches that reflect cultural values and having a negative impact on students because of absent clear policy (Westbrooke, 2013).

Another direct impact of the delay in the policy is how new global initiatives are being incorporated into Bhutan's education system without the necessary guidance. For example, STEM has become more and more popular in international curricula and policy documents, which has given momentum to science education (National Science and Technology Council, 2013 and The Royal Society Science Policy Centre, 2014, both as cited in Naseer & Heba, 2021). Dalton (2020) defines STEM as a teaching philosophy that integrates all four disciplines, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, into a single cross-disciplinary program with real-world teaching methods rather than focusing purely on the academics of these individual subjects. In Bhutan, the incorporation of STEM is primarily focused on equipping individuals to compete in the economic marketplace and underpinned by individualism and competition rather than the foundational values of the GNH. Although Bhutan must respond to the inclusion of STEM in its curriculum, the challenge is to do it in a way that reflects the wholesome education values according to the GNH (MoE, 2019). In the absence of an adequate policy, the participants in this study argue that contextualisation is currently not being considered at the level necessary to authentically incorporate new initiatives in a way that aligns with GNH. It will be important to inquire further as to how the next decade of GNH-inspired education unfolds as it emerges to embrace these 21st-century challenges.

To this end, the model of Green Schools, briefly mentioned in the background and literature section of this paper, evidences how a program has been adopted in such a way to embody GNH education and values education. At the school level, programmes, such as Green School for Green Bhutan, mindfulness meditation and training, and GNH clubs, have been rolled out since 2010. The GNH values and principles have been taught through five pathways: 'meditation and mind training; infusing GNH values into the curriculum; holistic assessment of students; broader learning environment; and media and literacy and critical thinking skills' (MoE, 2014, p. 84). Participants applauded the success of the unique green school policy, which is currently implemented in the schools in Bhutan.

The secret to the success of this program is that the Green School framework has been written in such a way that it can embody different meanings and purposes around the world, which facilitates a contextualised approach and enables appropriate implementation. For Bhutan, the Green School framework consists of eight indicators drawn from the GNH pillars and domains. They are: naturally and environmentally green (greening the school campus), intellectual

greenery (mindfulness learning), academic greenery (discovering), social greenery (relationships and society), cultural greenery (cultivating cultural values), spiritual greenery (enrich spiritual experiences), aesthetic greenery (being optimistic) and moral greenery (fundamental principles of truth and reality) (Powdyel, 2014). This framework is considered holistic and connecting. Each 'greenery' is well considered and important for enriching people's lives because they were drawn from the GNH framework. We suggest this could work in many national contexts, increasing relationality and inclusion. Further research into these eight indicators of the Green School framework would be significant as a model for how to contextualise new global initiatives, such as STEM, so that they better incorporate the values of GNH for not only Bhutan but also other nations wishing to implement a focus that aligns with GNH in their nation.

The participants in this research indicated that, with all these functionalities in place, the policymakers would be able to reinforce, re-evaluate and reframe new global initiatives and core competencies into Bhutan's education system to ensure education contributes to GNH. Several studies claim that Bhutanese GNH education is a human-centred approach that has captured global attention. 'Bhutan is demonstrating that education and schooling can be a catalyst for social development in dimensions other than human capital' (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016, p. 12). It is suggested that once the delay in the National Policy is rectified, further research as to how Bhutan enacts their human-centred response to the international policy agenda aligned with quality education may act as an example for other nations seeking to ensure happiness as a priority of their citizens.

LIMITATIONS

The study reports the perceptions of policy experts, such as members of parliament, Chief Policy Officers and Directors of government and non-government institutions, the leadership of political parties and researchers only, and does not include the perspectives of teachers or voices of other actors within the educational system of Bhutan. Therefore, the inference that the approval of the National Education Policy will result in the alignment of teacher implementation and contribution to the GNH requires further research once approved.

CONCLUSION

Though Bhutanese GNH education is specific to Bhutan, education systems worldwide have much to learn from adopting a cultural lens that promotes happiness and well-being. Few nations take their unique cultural focus as seriously as a guide to every level of life, as the Bhutanese do. Such a framing has allowed Bhutan to retain its culture, protecting it from the impact of rapid change occurring in other nations. However, even with the protective mechanism of GNH, policy delay in reacting to global change is impacting the educational system in a similar way to that observed in other nations.

Delay in the approval process of the National Education Policy has resulted in a lack of clear direction for teachers, particularly around how to incorporate new global-based foci into Bhutanese classrooms with the appropriate incorporation of GNH. Reframing, restructuring, and rethinking education is an emerging phenomenon around the world, as educationalists and experts identify what competencies underpin the SDGs and how to enact them to improve the quality of education of children everywhere. While nations strive to skill their youth through innovative reform for global competitiveness, academics and researchers argue for progressive

alternatives to reorient educational curriculum towards environmental and human capabilities sustainability.

The qualitative data in this paper based on interviews with policy experts in Bhutan suggest that Bhutan has several innovative educational guidelines and frameworks, but these will remain ineffective until the National Education Policy is approved. Once enacted, it is hoped that Educating for GNH will remain at the heart of and continue to be the unique exceptionalism of the Bhutanese education system. It is suggested that with further research, Bhutan's approach may provide other nations with models and strategies to achieve an education system aligned with philosophies of happiness, interconnectedness and peace. Producing world-class competent future citizens embedded in happy humanity is promising. Bhutan urgently needs to address its lack of progressive education policy implementation because the cost of inaction will continue to be high.

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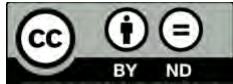
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