

Dealing with Educational Problems: Strategies for Nepal

Sushma Parajuli^{1*}¹B.Sc., Tribhuvan University, TU Rd, Kirtipur 44618, NepalDOI: [10.36347/sjahss.2023.v1i102.002](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjahss.2023.v1i102.002)

| Received: 28.12.2022 | Accepted: 07.02.2023 | Published: 12.02.2023

*Corresponding author: Sushma Parajuli

B.Sc., Tribhuvan University, TU Rd, Kirtipur 44618, Nepal

Abstract

Review Article

This paper draws on various literature to make a portrait of Nepal's educational problems. Then, it offers strategies to address those problems. Finally, it concludes with recommendations for researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in enhancing education in the country.

Keywords: Nepal; education; problems; strategies.

Copyright © 2023 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE CONTEXT

Nepal is a small country sandwiched between the Tibetan plateau and India. It is a young republic that recently overthrew more than 250 years of monarchy and promulgated a new constitution in 2015. The country is accelerating its development to enter the club of developing nations by 2026 (Shrestha, 2021). Thus, Nepal needs to do much homework to meet its target of joining the list of developing countries. One of the things that Nepal can do is to focus on reducing the existing inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, and caste because women, ethnic and linguistic minorities, and Dalits are primarily marginalized in Nepal. Also, because the marginalized people make up Nepal's overwhelming majority, development programs must address the problems of existing inequalities to fulfill the intended objectives. In this context, this article focuses on identifying the educational problems that have contributed to the poor schooling of marginalized students and explains what Nepal needs to do to address those issues.

2. EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS

Nepal has several educational issues that prevent female, ethnic minority, and Dalit children from attending schools. Available literature pinpoints home-school distance, poor school facilities, untrained teachers, poor school management, parental illiteracy, and poverty; no parental involvement, lack of mother-tongue education, lack of support at school due to low or no representation of marginalized teachers; lack of government control; patriarchal discrimination against girls (Giri & Shrestha, 2017; Joshi A, 2022; Joshi *et al.*,

2022; Joshi & James, 2022; Neupane, 2017).

3. STRATEGIES FOR SOLUTIONS

Offering strategic solutions to Nepal's current educational problems is essential to add to the list of alternatives to accelerate educational development in the country. The goal is to contribute to minimizing the disparity in education among female, ethnic minority, and Dalit students. Below are the strategies to solve the current schooling issues enumerated earlier.

3.1 Provide School Accessibility

The public and private sectors have different educational accessibility problems that Nepal must deal with. After the expansion of the private sector in the aftermath of the 1990's political transformation, Nepal's cities and towns are crowded with private schools, which mainly attract affluent parents. The exponential growth of the private sector in urban areas has contributed to the demise of public schools, which are confined to educating children who cannot enroll in expensive private schools. Though some public schools have performed like private schools in terms of academic achievement, they still need to attract parents from middle- and higher-income backgrounds because urban public schools are stigmatized as *schools of the poor*. Public schools are dominant in most of the country's low-income rural areas, but they are sparsely located. Consequently, children must walk a long distance from home to school every day, making it difficult for many children to attend school regularly. Another accessibility issue related to many rural public schools is the lack of support schools offer to marginalized children. For instance, young girls might

need special care and support (Joshi *et al.*, 2022) related to their health and hygiene, but because of the lack of female teachers in many schools, they are often at risk. Also, girls, ethnic minority, and Dalit children may not get emotional support due to the lack of teachers from marginalized backgrounds (see Joshi & James, 2022). Finally, while private schools are accessible to children from affluent parents, they are inaccessible to linguistic minorities because they focus on the medium of instruction in languages (mostly English as a foreign language) other than theirs. Also, while public schools may offer education in the Nepali language, Nepali is still a second language to many linguistic minority students. Because of the lack of an L1-based medium of instruction, both private and public schools do not appeal to minority children. Under such circumstances, Nepal needs to develop and execute an education policy that makes private and public sectors accessible to all without discrimination, especially by addressing the issues of home-school distance, medium of instruction, and the lack of teacher diversity.

3.2 Expedite Literacy

Nepal experienced an armed conflict between Maoists and government forces for more than a decade. The Maoist insurgency took more than 17,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of others (Media Foundation, 2011). In the aftermath of the conflict, many social and political problems emerged. For instance, many people abandoned their villages and settled in urban areas; as Maoists closed schools, many children in rural areas remained illiterate; ethnic violence escalated in many parts of Nepal, especially in the country's southern plains. If Nepal does not expedite literacy programs, there will be no surprise if similar conflicts arise due to the vulnerability of illiterates to become prey of radical ideas. Because Nepal's low literacy coincided with penury and conflicts, the grassroots and government need to work in tandem to initiate policies and programs that will not only literate but also bring people together. To achieve harmony, good citizenship is a prerequisite, which must include respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion. As Reimers (2007) argues, citizens need global values and "knowledge, ability [,] and disposition to engage peacefully and constructively" (p. 276) with people of different backgrounds to attain individual and societal needs.

3.3 Focus on Citizenship Education

As Nepal is a nation full of linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity, there is a need for its citizens to develop an understanding of and respect for each other to remain united and to achieve lasting peace and national development. The purpose of global citizenship is to prepare children to "become active promoters of more peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable societies" (par. 2). However, citizenship without respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion cannot help achieve such goal (United

Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.). Any deficient citizenship cannot contribute to supporting good governance and developing and implementing inclusive public policies.

3.4 Offer Meaningful Education

Nepal has been campaigning to literate its citizens from both governmental and non-governmental levels since the 1950s, but the problem of illiteracy has yet to be resolved (Joshi A, 2022). As a matter of fact, literacy among the Nepali people is barely close to 70% (UNESCO, UIN, 2022). While literacy programs are limited to success rhetoric, they need assistance to make a meaningful connection between learning and participants' day-to-day reality. Despite decades of enormous spending, the literacy situation among the marginalized population has remained abysmally low (Joshi^a, 2022; Joshi *et al.*, 2022; Joshi & James, 2022). The current low level of literacy shows Nepal's strategic failure in achieving its literacy goals. Sadly, despite prolonged international involvement in developing literacy modalities, international agencies have yet to take responsibility for the failure of literacy campaigns (Khaniya, 2007).

Based on Nepal's experience, policy levels should apprise previously implemented literacy programs to measure their strengths and weaknesses. Also, the new literacy initiatives should address poverty and harmful social practices, like discrimination against girls, minorities, and Dalits. Regarding poverty, if people cannot sustain life, they are less likely to show interest in literacy programs. As a potential solution, package programs, including economic incentives and literacy education, should go in tandem. There is also a need to raise awareness among the public about the importance of literacy in easing various aspects of life, not only confined to health (see Hanemann, 2017). However, to win public trust, literacy programs must show the connection between literacy programs and people's real-life issues.

3.5 Update Teaching Practices

In terms of regular schooling, students in most Nepali schools are overwhelmed by traditional teacher-centered methods of teaching (Gyawali *et al.*, 2007; Neupane, 2017), centrally prepared textbooks, and teaching materials that have no or little connection to learners' needs. The reasons students learn should be linked with the skills they need in real-life. So, teaching and teaching materials must be aligned with students' interests, abilities, and real-life needs. If the teaching is based on students' problems and honing their inherent talents or addressing their daily needs, students can become confident about their life. Unfortunately, primary education is seen as a preparation for secondary education, secondary education is seen as a preparation for higher secondary level learning, and so on in the context of Nepal (Khaniya, 2007), suggesting that there

is no end goal for each school level.

3.6 Focus on Globalization

Today's world is technologically advanced. Internet, media, and other means of communication, with the emergence of the World Trade Organization (WTO), have contributed to bringing the citizens of the world in a situation where they need to compete with ideas, goods, skills, and knowledge for survival and gain. As a member of WTO, Nepal, too, needs to prepare its citizens to compete with the rest of the world. Thus, Nepal needs updated syllabuses, global teaching approaches, infrastructure for teaching, and testing equivalent to international standards. Ironically, while most of the courses used in Nepali school and university programs replicate the global content, the content delivery, teaching approaches, and examination systems are Nepal's by-products. More importantly, there needs to be more investment in updated educational infrastructure to allow Nepali students to catch up with latest information and technology. What this situation means is that Nepal should prioritize investment in educational infrastructure. As educational borrowing and sharing are important aspects of globalization (Jackson, 2016), Nepal should take advantage of the opportunity to learn from others and develop and implement innovative educational initiatives.

3.7 Emphasize Inclusion and Equity

Access to education is a significant problem for some groups of children in Nepal. In socio-economically marginalized families, boys are sent to work while girls are given household responsibilities. Even when educational opportunities became easy, educating girls is not common. Parents tend to perceive daughters as a family burden and seek to wed them off as soon as possible, leading to the early marriage of the girl child (Joshi et al., 2022; Neupane, 2017). Also, most schools in Nepal do not have an apt number of female, minority, and Dalit teachers (Joshi et al., 2022; Joshi & James, 2022). The absence of marginalized teachers has further alienated historically disadvantaged children due to a lack of support at school. Given Nepal's current situation, it is vital to increase the participation of female, minority, and Dalit teachers in schools. Otherwise, a large segment of the country's population will remain out of education and development.

Reimers (2007) states that "high levels of educational inequality continue to reproduce high levels of social and economic inequality" (p. 3). In fact, ethnic, cultural, and language diversity is Nepal's strength, and preserving it would be in the country's best interest. In this regard, education in the mother tongue would help Nepal promote such diversity as education in the mother tongue allows children to be imaginative and fully expressive. The ability to invent new things and influence others may depend on how

long one has devoted to their native language, and the quality of exposure one has received in the mother tongue (see Joshi B, 2022). Giving communities chances to decide on the medium of instruction in schools would promote mother tongue-based education. However, this task is yet to be completed due to the lack of community input in school management, teacher development, and curricula development.

3.8 Build Public-Private Partnership

As Nepal's weak education has less impact on sustainable democracy and the country's overall development, the country is in dire need of educational transformation, which can also be achieved through a public-private partnership. However, the fear that the private sector will increase inequalities may impede such partnerships. Of course, the private sector will likely favor middle- and higher-income groups. Nevertheless, it can help generate revenue, create hundreds of thousands of jobs, offer quality education, and stop the outflow of money from the country as it stops the need for parents to send children outside Nepal for better education. The revenue collected from the private sector can be utilized to improve education in public schools. Dhungana (2022) highlights various aspects that private sector can share with the public sector, such as management strategies, technology, human resource development strategies, etc. The private sector's contribution eventually helps improve many lives and gradually drops inequalities. Moreover, the public sector can learn from the success of the private sector to transform teaching and learning in public schools. Similarly, the government can reflect on the success of private sector and develop monitoring strategies that best evaluates the performance of public sector schools.

It is impractical to be oblivious to the role of the private sector in today's world. According to Khania (2007), today's world is knowledge-based where those who can survive and succeed are those who can compete in the global market. If the private sector is given increased responsibility, it will be highly effective in preparing citizens who can compete in the global market. We need a citizenry who can utilize new knowledge and advanced technology. The success of the private sector will directly translate into economic prosperity. However, over-dependence on the private sector will also have unanticipated negative consequences. There is no guarantee that the private sector will not produce a gulf between those who control resources and have no access to resources, between the historically dominant groups, who get easy access to resources, and the dominated groups, who must face barriers in each step of their livelihood. Therefore, it is crucial to utilize the success of the private sector and check its dominance through private-public dialogues.

4. CONCLUSION

In the end, Nepal's education sector has faced a host of challenges to address. Despite decades of attempts to transform the education sector with the help of international institutions, Nepal still needs to enhance educational development in the country. Now, the country should reflect on the past and devise strategies to make its education meaningful, productive, accessible, inclusive, and competitive.

Acknowledgement: I acknowledge that I am the sole author of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Dhungana, S. (2022, August 5). Quality education: Through public-private partnerships. *The Himalayan Times*. <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/quality-educationthrough-public-private-partnerships>
- Giri, A., & Shrestha, V. (2017). The effect of school construction on educational outcomes among females: Evidence from Nepal. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nsc_research/73
- Gyawali, L., Shrestha, I., Singh, N. K., Shah, P. K., Nath, M., & Joshi, P. R. (2007). *English language teaching competency-based lower secondary/secondary level teacher training: Trainer's guide* (3rd ed.). National Centre for Educational Development, Government of Nepal. <http://nkcs.org.np/cehrd/elibrary/pages/view.php?ref=355&k=>
- Hanemann, U. (Ed.). (2017, July 25). *National literacy campaign, Nepal*. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. <https://uil.unesco.org/case-study/effective-practices-database-litbase-0/national-literacy-campaign-nepal>
- Jackson, L. (2016). *Globalization and education*. Oxford Research Encyclopedias, Education. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.52>
- Joshi, P. A. (2022, November 6). Educating the linguistic minority children. *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2022/11/04/educating-linguistic-minority-children>
- Joshi, P. B. (2022). *Participants' perspectives on medium of instruction policy and practice, and implications for multilingual education in Nepal* [Unpublished Ed.M. Integrated Project, Teachers College, Columbia University].
- Joshi, P. R., Digari, S., & James, M. C. (2022). The difference a female teacher makes: Analysis of girls' school achievement in Nepal. *Educational Studies*, 58(4), 511-529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2022.2051032>
- Joshi, P. R., & James, M. C. (2022). An ethnic advantage: Teacher-student ethnicity matching and academic performance in Nepal. *Education Inquiry*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2022.2073055>
- Khaniya, T. R. (2007). *New horizons in education in Nepal* (1st ed.). Kathmandu: Kishor Khaniya.
- Media Foundation. (2011). *Healing the wounds: Stories from Nepal's transitional justice process* (1st ed.). https://www.mfnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Healing_the_Wounds_English.pdf
- Neupane, P. (2017). Barriers to education and school attainment: Evidence from secondary schools in rural Nepal. *International Education Studies*, 10(2), 68-83. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v10n2p68>
- Reimers, F. (2007). Civic education when democracy is in flux: The impact of empirical research on policy and practice in Latin America. *Citizenship and Teacher Education*, 3(2), 5-21.
- Shrestha, P. M. (2021, November 29). Nepal's graduation to developing country hinges on political stability. *The Kathmandu Post*. <https://kathmandupost.com/national/2021/11/29/nepal-s-graduation-to-developing-country-hinges-on-political-stability>
- UNESCO. (n.d.). Global citizenship education. <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced>
- UNESCO, UIS. (2022). *Nepal: Literacy rate*. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/np>