



A critical appraisal of education policy practices ensuring free and compulsory school education: Insights from Nepal

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ABSTRACT

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Education policy plays a pivotal role in ensuring access to free and compulsory education for all children, fostering national development and reducing social disparities. This critical appraisal examined the school education policy practices in Nepal that aimed at achieving the goal of free and compulsory school education at basic level. For this, descriptive and analytical research designs were applied for analyzing the education policy provisions. The education policies practices were observed through a field survey in which the information was gathered from schools through the distribution of questionnaires to students, teachers, and guardians, as well as interviews with head teachers and focus group discussions among policy experts and local leaders. The investigation led to the provision of free and compulsory education in basic education. While there was good achievement in teacher training and development, there was insufficient support for teachers-guardians interaction programs. The research also offers suggestions for preparing detailed policy implementation guidelines, including an education plan for policy execution. Nepal has made significant progress in school education in terms of providing free and compulsory school education. This paper has provided a critical appraisal of these policies and practices drawing on evidence from Nepal. By analyzing the evidence and outcomes, this study evaluates the effectiveness, challenges and potential areas for improvement in the Nepalese education system.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to ensuring free and compulsory school level education. The study has focused upon the practices of government level education policies and acts of grass root level for granting education right to the citizens. It also explores how these policies are put into practice, including the challenges and successes in ensuring free and compulsory school education in Nepal.

1. INTRODUCTION

The provision of free and compulsory education is essential for the development and advancement of any nation. Nepal, a country striving to achieve educational equity and improve overall literacy rates, has implemented school education policies to ensure free and compulsory school. Education plays a crucial role in fostering citizen empowerment and facilitating the growth of human capital. It enables students to make meaningful contributions to

society. The progress of a nation's modernization is contingent upon the establishment of rigorous educational standards. Appropriate educational policies and guidelines are essential for maintaining the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. The education policy in Nepal places significant emphasis on providing free and compulsory primary education to all students. Education regulations acknowledge important legislation and offer policymakers avenues to address challenges. The government of Nepal has implemented various programs to promote the advancement of education. The present research focuses on school education in Nepal, giving pupils with the tools to gain basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, and routines for becoming informed citizens.

Elementary learning is crucial to fighting illiteracy and helping young people reach consensus, according to the [Ministry of Education \(1956\)](#). The Nepalese government's School Sector Development Program (SSDP) helps students aged 4–12 attain their full physical, social, emotional, cognitive, mental, and moral potential. SSDP aims to assist these kids become effective adults. This aim may be reached while simultaneously guaranteeing that all students have access to high-quality basic education, are prepared for secondary education, and have the essential learning capabilities ([Ministry of Education, 2016](#)). Basic education's purpose is to provide free, mandated, high-quality education to all school-aged children, according to Nepal's Constitution ([National Planning Commission, 2016](#)). Nepal has applied several methods to provide elementary education for all children.

The advancement of education in Nepal has resulted in the implementation of novel policies and programs. A strong foundation in education is crucial for empowering individuals, and it is imperative to have well-designed policies and effective implementation strategies in place to ensure the attainment of excellence. Ongoing research and analysis are essential for the evaluation of these policies. This critical appraisal paper aims to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the mentioned policies by utilizing available evidence and assessing their impact on educational access, equity, and inclusivity. Similarly, this study investigates the processes and factors influencing the development of mandatory and cost-free basic education policies in Nepal.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The study transcends mere description by undertaking a comprehensive critical appraisal, evaluating policy impact, identifying deficiencies, and proposing potential enhancements. This approach enriches decision-making processes and facilitates the refinement of policies. Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, researchers, and advocacy groups, offering a nuanced understanding of real-world challenges associated with ensuring free and compulsory education.

By elucidating issues such as socioeconomic disparities, implementation obstacles, and the imperative for collaboration, the study furnishes practical recommendations aimed at improving policy execution. On a global scale, this research serves as a compelling case study for nations confronting similar challenges, providing nuanced insights into the intricacies of policy implementation across diverse sociocultural and economic contexts. This has the potential to stimulate cross-country learning and the adoption of effective strategies.

The exploration of stakeholder perspectives in the study adds depth, guiding more inclusive and effective policy-making processes that align with the diverse needs of the served populations. Essentially, the study's significance lies in its capacity to contribute empirical evidence, actionable insights, and a profound understanding of the multifaceted challenges surrounding education policy implementation in Nepal. This contribution has the power to influence policy discourse, academic dialogue, and practical interventions, ultimately fostering nationwide enhancements in education access, equity, and quality.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This body of work plays a crucial role in highlighting the practical challenges associated with implementing mandatory and cost-free basic education policies, while also addressing underlying challenges faced by the fundamental education system in Nepal. This concise review establishes a strong foundation for the current study,

offering valuable insights into the evolving landscape of the Nepalese education policies and their practical implications.

2.1. Review Literature in Nepalese Context

The government of Nepal has formulated fifteen different plans for the country's future development, and throughout each of these plans, the government of Nepal, has placed a particular emphasis on the expansion of basic and secondary educational opportunities. There was a decent exercise for the improvement of Nepal's school system, but efforts were not adequate (National Planning Commission, 1956). The second plan prioritized the growth of elementary education above the expansion of educational facilities by focusing on the construction of more than three thousand primary schools (National Planning Commission, 1962). More than forty percent of children between the ages of six and eleven who were of school age were given access to elementary education as part of the third plan (National Planning Commission, 1965). Similarly the National Planning Commission (1975) laid the emphasis to raise the number of children enrollment in primary and basic education.

The government of Nepal has placed significant emphasis on the development plans concerning the implementation of free and compulsory school education for all individuals. Significant attention was directed towards this matter following the 1980s. The National Planning Commission (1985) has prioritized the recruitment of highly skilled teachers, the enhancement of school infrastructure, and the development of a curriculum that aligns with national requirements. Additionally, they have emphasized the importance of effectively implementing school monitoring measures. National Planning Commission (1992) placed significant importance on the provision of elementary and basic education. Similarly, the National Planning Commission (2002) aimed to establish and enhance an education system of exceptional quality. Additionally, the National Planning Commission (2007) directed its efforts towards improving access to basic education for a wider population. The National Planning Commission (2010) has prioritized the provision of quality basic education (grades 1-8), ensuring that it is accessible to all students and compulsory. The National Planning Commission (2016) prioritized the establishment of a conducive learning environment, while National Planning Commission (2019) has shifted the focus towards the enhancement of school education to achieve positive outcomes.

National Education System emphasized that both boys and girls should get instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as some knowledge of the basic education. As per the Education Act-2018, it has been emphasized the children within the age of 4-13 years to be required to get a free and compulsory education up to the level of the basic education via every local level (Nepal Law Commission, 2018). The law makes it mandatory for the government to provide free basic education up to the eighth grade and free secondary education for students in grades 9 through 12 (MOEST, 2020). As part of the Education for All (EFA) plan of action (2001-2015), Nepal has brought attention to the challenges of reaching underprivileged and impoverished children, removing gender inequities, and meeting the requirements of children with a variety of special needs. The aim was to ensure that basic education is both free and mandatory for all children.

Nepal has highlighted the provision of free education necessitates provision of cost-free services right from admission to, textbooks, tuition, and examinations. It has also remarked the necessity to have a phased strategy to implement a compulsory basic education policy through statutory provisions, suitable at national and local levels, as well as incentive programs to persuade local governments to adopt and announce basic education as free and mandatory in their respective areas.

2.2. Empirical Review Literature

Douglas College (2017) remarked that educational policy provides guidelines and procedures for handling academic concerns whereas learning can be enhanced by effective educational leadership. School reforms aim to enhance teaching and learning and in all the schools in a district, state, or nation (Devita, 2004).

Fullan (2015) remarked that the education policy implementation in a new dimension focused on the method of implementing an idea, program as a view of set of guidelines developed to facilitate governance within an organization. Espinoza (2009) advocated for a broader definition of education policy, acknowledging that it can be created by commercial players or other institutions, such as international and non-governmental organizations.

Ranjan and Prakash (2012) examined the education policies and practices in Bihar, India. The researchers proposed that teacher incentive compensation may be a significant factor in raising educational standards. Gwang (2002) emphasized throughout that strategy on constructing and upgrading additional schools and classrooms. Education policies address a wide range of topics, including equity, the overall standard of educational outcomes, learning environments in schools, and the system's ability to prepare students for the future, in addition to issues like funding, efficient governance, or mechanisms for evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2015).

Jung and Shiwakoti (2017) remarked that school education policy formulation practices were guided by power theory and constructed through the involvement of limited policy experts in central level. Nurkolis and Sulisworo (2018) examined the characteristics of effective schools and how effective school policies worked in the context of delegated education. Muhdi (2019) examined the execution and implementation of public policies which linked education as a result of decentralization, concentrating on regional autonomy policy implementation in Indonesia and their findings showed that accountability, the quantity of implements, human resource management skills, and translation proficiency were crucial factors in the execution of instruction.

Alawattagam (2020) explored the salient features and its evolution of the free education system and emerging challenges for policy makers in Sri Lanka. The free education was introduced in 1944 and initiated the concept of universal free education policy in 1945 aiming to provide equal opportunities for all to gain access to the education system and establishing a strong foundation for long run sustainable development in the human capital of the nation. Sri Lanka was able to be in the forefront in South Asia in terms of literacy rate, school enrollment rate and gender parity in education.

The constitution (Article 25-A) of Pakistan guaranteed the right to free and compulsory education to all children of age 5-16 years in Pakistan. That free and compulsory education has been provided by the State which includes both federal and provincial governments. Article (25-A) also necessitates the legislation (by the Provincial Assemblies) to facilitate the enforcement of free and compulsory education. Similarly, the government of Pakistan declared education for all (EFA) in particular (Pakistan Institute of Legislative Department and Transparency (PILDAT), 2011).

The improvement of education in Bangladesh heavily relies on the policies and strategies that the government puts in place. The government of Bangladesh plays a significant role in ensuring that better policies are formulated to guarantee the improvement of education, and better strategies are applied to enhance the level of education by increasing funding for education. The government of Bangladesh also introduces policies and strategies which enhance the lives of teachers and students thereby improving school education (Mustary, 2021).

As per the right of children to free and compulsory education in Bangladesh under Act 2009, the major emphasis was given on ensuring free and compulsory elementary education to all children in the age bracket of 6-14 years. This act prioritized and made obligatory for state governments and local bodies to ensure that every child received education in the neighborhood schools. The education policy focused on numeracy as well as the education that provided a fundamental foundation. Right to education described the modalities of the importance of free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6-14 years as per the constitution Article 21A of the Indian Constitution (Singh & Nagpal, 2010).

By reviewing different national and international studies dealing with education policies ensuring free and compulsory school education, the researcher identified a few research gaps in Nepalese education policy. It was found that there has not been any comprehensive appraisal of education policy practices ensuring free and compulsory school education: insights in the context of Nepal. The descriptive approach has also not yet been used in

a study, and sample size in previous studies have also been small. This study would be fruitful to scholars, policy makers, educationists, civil societies, businessmen, governments and international communities both academically and with policy perspectives.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Research Design

A mixed-methods research design was adopted in this study which combined qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. This method relies on the review of existing literature, policy documents and reports from government and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, primary data was collected through questionnaire with students, teachers and parents who were involved in basic education and interview and focus group discussion with policymakers, head teachers, educationists and local leaders to provide deeper insights into the implementation and outcomes of education policies in Nepal.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of this study comprised public school students studying basically in primary and basic levels, their guardians, teachers and head teachers teaching at basic and secondary levels, policy experts and educationists as well as the local leaders who directly belonged to the practices of education policy. A sample size of 240 students, 121 guardians, 132 teachers, 10 head teachers, 10 educationists, 10 education policy experts, and 20 local leaders was selected. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used for the selection of schools and respondents. The researcher selected 11 model schools and 4 emerging model schools based on geographical structure, aiming to represent the overall scenario of policy practices at basic education. This study focused on model public schools in the sample areas as the sample representation where there was direct investment and monitoring by the government. Sample districts were selected based on geographical representation, considering factors such as climate, socio-culture, language, religion, economic status, and living styles. Model schools and emerging model schools were selected as sample schools.

3.3. Data Collection Tools and Techniques

3.3.1. Primary and Secondary Data

Primary data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and field surveys from selected schools. Respondents included educationists, policy experts, and local leaders. Secondary data was collected from various sources, including published books, journals, policies, plan documents, study reports, school documents, and government publications. The study aimed to understand the perceptions of policy implementation in different school settings.

3.4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study collected primary data using statistical software, tabulated it, and analyzed it to generate descriptive and inference statistics. Descriptive measures included frequency distributions, central tendency, dispersion, and percentages. The data was cleaned, tabulated, and analyzed using SPSS ver-24.

3.5. Reliability and Validity of the Data

3.5.1. Reliability

Consistency in Sampling: The study employed a clear sampling strategy, selecting a diverse range of respondents and schools using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. This systematic approach increases the likelihood that the sample is representative of the target population, enhancing the reliability of the findings.

Mixed-Methods Approach: By employing both qualitative and quantitative methods, the study ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. This triangulation of data sources and methods contributes to the reliability of the study's results by corroborating findings across different approaches.

Data Collection Tools: The use of various data collection tools, including questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions, increased the reliability of the instrument. Different tools allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the research topic, reducing the risk of bias associated with relying solely on one method.

3.5.2. Validity

Content Validity: The study draws on existing literature, policy documents, and reports from reputable sources, establishing content validity by aligning its research questions with established knowledge and expert insights.

Sampling Validity: The careful selection of sample districts based on factors such as geographical representation, climate, socio-culture, and socioeconomic status enhances the sampling validity. This approach ensures that the sample is reflective of diverse contexts and increases the generalizability of the findings.

Methodological Triangulation: The combination of data collection methods (questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data) constitutes methodological triangulation, reinforcing the validity of the research instrument by providing multiple perspectives on the research topic.

In conclusion, the research instruments used in this study demonstrated reliability through consistent sampling, a mixed-methods approach, and the use of diverse data collection tools. Additionally, it exhibited validity through content validity, sampling validity, and methodological triangulation. These characteristics collectively enhanced the credibility of the study's findings and contributed to the robustness of its conclusions regarding the implementation and outcomes of education policies in Nepal.

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1. Perception towards Education Management

Free books, uniforms, lab fees, and admissions are part of the free and compulsory education program. A total of 25.76 percent of teachers reported that books were provided free to the students, but most schools charged fee for exams, books, uniforms, and other materials. However, a few students received scholarships and free textbooks from most institutions. Most schools were found providing these privileges under free and compulsory basic education. A majority of 93.94 percent of schools provided pupils textbooks, with 6.06 percent criticizing about amenities. According to Nepalese education policy, students should get free textbooks; hence, 95.45 percent of schools provided English and Nepali textbooks free, which were prepared by Curriculum Development Centre. Teachers still encountered issues of textbooks availability, budgetary concerns, regulatory issues, technology integration issues, and managerial obstacles while providing instruction.

On the issue of schools charging exam fees, with 31.82 percent of guardians reported exam fees being charged, while 24.24 percent highlighted additional fees for certificate, computer, and ID card, despite the provisions of free and compulsory education. Most textbooks were available in Nepali and English, with 74.24 percent available in both languages. Supplementary materials included related books, library and science labs, extra-curricular activities, and charts and globes. A significant rate of student dropout was linked to factors such as migration, financial issues, poverty, lack of awareness, and family problems. Over 57 percent of students reported class repetition, while 42.4 percent ignored this issue. Structural reforms were found to be needed to attract students, ensure education opportunities, and protect their right to education.

4.1.1. Teaching Pedagogy

The study of teaching strategies and their impact on students is known as pedagogy. Effective pedagogy is crucial for enhancing teaching and learning, as well as developing high-level thinking skills. Evidence-based

teaching strategies are used in selected schools, with analysis, interaction, presentation, criticism, discussion, practical, field visits, and project work being the most commonly used methods. Games, lectures, weekly tests, movies, and documentation are also used, but problem-solving and research is less emphasized.

It was evident from this study that the workload of teaching reflected the quality of education provided in schools, with 58.4 percent of teachers teaching subjects related to their field and 41.66 percent teaching multiple subjects. A survey of teachers revealed that 28.78 percent of students disliked mathematics subjects due to difficulty in solving problems and difficulty understanding teaching techniques. Mathematics and science were the second least preferred subjects. Teachers reported that students disliked mathematics due to difficulties in solving and technical capacity to apply mathematical formulas.

4.1.2. Teachers Professional Development and Benefits

Professional development for teachers has long been recognized as critical to reforming classroom practices, improving school environment and improving students' learning outcomes. While [Timperley \(2011\)](#) remarked that professional learning takes place in a variety of settings, including professional development programs, teaching research groups with formal mentoring programs. Teachers' responses indicated the certain elements of an activity system that supports professional development.

A teacher development policy was in place in this study, with 57.57 percent of teachers satisfied with the avenues provided. Schools conducted professional training, seminars, workshops, and tours for teachers' development (69.70 percent). However, 12.12 percent of teachers believed there were no provisions in place. Teachers were selected through the teacher service commission (74.24 percent) and the school management committee (27.27 percent), as reported in the field study period. Teachers were provided with 12 days of leave (87.88 percent) and a dress code (92.42 percent). Female teachers in primary level were analyzed for policy provisions, with 74.24 percent adhering to 5-10, while 4.55 percent did not. The study suggested satisfactory professional development for teachers.

4.1.3. Perceptions of Teachers towards Teacher-parents' Interaction and Guardians' View on Education Management in the School

The survey indicated that most schools had teachers-guardians' meetings at least once a year. Term paper results dominated these sessions, with a few talks on children's growth. 81.82 percent of instructors said their schools had a teacher-guardians' committee, whereas 18.18 percent did not. Guardians were unaware of obligatory and free schooling (93.94 percent and 6.06 percent). Effective teachers did more than to raise test results. It also changed students' life. Teachers said that 60.61 percent of parents were engaged in their children's education, while 39.39 percent were not. Schools recommended parents come on guardian's day. Most teachers (71.2 percent) believed they persuaded parents to visit schools and engage with teachers. However, 27.3 percent of instructors felt they failed to persuade kids to come school to engage. The reason may be that parents were busy occupied in housework (31.82 percent) and jobs (57.58 percent). Teachers also got guardians suggestions in regards of the need of the teaching more effectively. Likewise, the teachers denied of any caste discrimination to the students in the school along with the punishment systems. The students followed the dress code for keeping intact the discipline in the schools. Regarding the teacher-guardians interaction, most of them (59.09 percent) advocated that there happened the interaction between teachers and guardians at least one year while 33.33 percent reported sometimes was to be needed as reported in the field study period.

4.1.4. Perceptions of Students and Guardians on Education Management in Schools

As per reported by guardians (21.49 percent), the school management committee helped providing the teachers' training. It was followed by deciding multi-language teaching practice (18.18 percent) support from the side of the

school management committee, by providing educational materials was 17.36 percent and by providing teachers in their own sources (15.70 percent). There was also local support for school education. Support such as provision of curriculum and teaching materials (34.58 percent) and subsequent teacher training (25 percent). The researcher has found that local source and support of local level was minimum.

Similarly, awareness training regarding education (22.39 percent), teacher's quota (2.24 percent) and others (15.67 percent) showed that least importance was given to teacher's quota whereas highest priority was given on financial support. Other things ignored included parents support, free and compulsory education policies, ensuring equal access to education for all children (52.07 percent), creating an environment of equality (15.7 percent), and addressing the needs of the poor and underprivileged. The study emphasized to provide quality education, behavioral education (34.71 percent), better education policies (26.45 percent), compulsory English medium, and ICT (10.74 percent). However, guardians acknowledged subject-wise, language, and political challenges. The students' performance was not found satisfactory due to the lack of availability of curriculum, textbooks and other materials. The major problems of books were not available in time (16.25 percent), delay in the distribution of books (20.0 percent), lack of sufficient books (15.41 percent), lack of materials (14.17 percent) as well books were not locally available (4.17 percent); in addition, there was the problem of time management (7.50 percent). As reported by 72.92 percent students, the library facility remarked good and sufficient whereas 27.08 percent students reported that the library system remained weak in their schools. While managing the tiffin by schools, 45.83 percent students replied yes whereas 54.17 percent students had disagreed to this facility.

4.1.5. Perception of Students towards Teaching Pedagogy

Many studies have focused on pedagogical value of different tools and techniques applied by educators. Majority of the students experienced the interaction and discussion (87.08 percent), and lectures (84.58 percent). The students were being engaged in song/music, drama, extra-curricular activities. Most of students were found comfortable with the language used by the teacher while teaching (85.8 percent). The load of the teaching also reflects the quality of education provided in the schools. The teachers are responsible for teaching subjects related to them (8.3 percent), and 78.4 percent of teachers were responsible for teaching different subjects. Some students did not response to the inquiry. This shows that the teachers were engaged in different areas of teaching.

Regarding the ways of supporting by guardians to their children, more than 20 percent students answered that their parents supported them buying essential materials, 16.25 percent students said that their parents motivated them for study, 12.92 percent students responded that their guardians help them by doing difficult homework; while 2.08 percent students did not respond. Most of students were not facing the problems of class repetition (51.2 percent) while 28.7 percent students did not respond to this statement whereas 19.2 percent students highlighted that they were facing the problems of repetition due to financial problem, poverty, awareness etc. A few students (18.33 percent) mentioned that the schools were punishing them for incomplete homework and 15.83 percent of students for indiscipline. The punishments were given to the students to correct their mistakes, if the student did not follow the school rules and regulations and punish the students if student failed to do homework.

4.2. Descriptive Analysis

This section presents the descriptive analysis of the present education management at school level in perception of the school teachers, guardians and the students. The data were prepared before the analysis, ensuring errors in data including missing data. The education dimensions were explored with the different opinion statements. The items focused on teaching and learning practices and the impact of these activities in the development of student's policy. The responses were made in terms of five-point Likert scale ranging from disagrees to strongly agree.

4.2.1. Perception of Teachers

The descriptive findings show that the highest mean of 4.39 (SD= 0.828) is of the statement toward providing technology and training to make effective of new policy in community school which can be interpreted that the respondents agreed that the community school needed integration of the technology and training thereon to implement effectively the new policy (See Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the perception of the school teachers on the present education management at school level.

Opinion statement	Mean	Std. deviation	Strongly agree (Percent)	Agree to some extent (Percent)	Agree (Percent)	Disagree to some extent (Percent)	Strongly disagree (Percent)
The condition of teaching and learning in school is good.	3.95	0.867	30.3	39.4	25.8	4.5	0
The practice of present school education policy has positive impact on teaching learning activities.	3.69	0.71	13.6	48.5	34.8	3	0
The practice of present education policy has contributed positive impact on the development of student's latency.	3.56	0.757	8.33	43.94	41.67	6.06	0
Special education policy is effective for handicapped students.	3.36	1.277	25.7	22.7	28.8	12.1	10.6
It is necessary to reconsider in school education policy.	4.09	0.868	39.4	28.8	27.3	1.5	0
Students, teachers and guardians were/are participated in the formulation of present school education policy.	3.37	1.182	21.21	24.24	29.54	16.7	8.4
We are informed about the liberal class promotion policy, continuous evaluation system and new examination policy.	4.33	2.469	42.4	24.2	21.2	6.1	1.5
The present grading system of evaluation has contributed in the improvement of quality education.	3	1.218	13.6	27.3	28.8	15.2	15.2
Compulsory and free exam policy is effective in primary level.	4.17	0.883	40.9	36.4	16.7	1.5	1.5
It is necessary to provide technology and training to make effective of new policy in community school.	4.39	0.828	4.54	58.33	18.94	16.67	1.52
Safety education policy is effective in school.	3.87	0.922	7.57	28.78	27.27	31.82	4.54
It is effective and relevant to implement education policy from local level in present context/situation.	3.92	0.988	3.03	7.58	41.67	35.6	12.12
It is necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy.	3.3	0.356	63.63	21.21	10.6	1.52	0
Compulsory and free education policy is effective in using from primary level.	4.17	0.034	65.9	21.97	6.82	0	1.52
Child friendly education policy has been effectively used in school.	3.9	0.838	25	40.15	29.55	5.3	0
Students are participated in the preparation of school's code of conducts.	3.72	1.157	18.18	38.64	25	11.36	6.82
Students' code of conducts has completely been followed.	3.66	0.772	10.6	43.94	34.84	1.52	1.52

The lowest mean value observed towards the present grading system of evaluation contributed in the improvement of quality education and it was felt necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy. This indicated that the present grading system adopted by the school was not found effective in improving the quality education of Nepal. It is relevant to apply the ICT in the practice and implementation of the new education policy in the school level (See Table 1).

4.2.2. Perception of Guardians

The descriptive findings indicate that the statement regarding the provision of technology and training to effectively implement the new policy in the community school received the highest mean score of 4.31 (SD=0.976). This suggests that the guardians expressed agreement with the idea that integrating technology and providing appropriate training is necessary for the successful implementation of the new policy in the community school. The guardians/parents expressed concerns regarding the school's code of conduct for students and a lack of communication regarding the liberal class promotion policy, continuous evaluation system, and new examination policy (See Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of the perception of the guardians on the present education management at school level.

Opinion statement	Mean	Std. deviation	Totally agree (Percent)	Agree to some (Percent) extent	Agree (Percent)	Disagree to some (Percent) extent	Totally disagree (Percent)
The condition of teaching and learning in school is good.	3.97	1.016	35.5	36.4	20.7	4.1	3.3
The practice of present school education policy has positive impact on teaching learning activities.	3.59	1.190	24	33.9	21.5	9.9	7.4
The practice of present education policy has contributed positive impact on the development of student's latency.	3.44	1.106	17.4	32.2	29.8	12.4	5.8
Special education policy is effective for handicapped students.	3.56	1.199	22.3	35.5	22.3	7.4	9.1
It is necessary to reconsider in school education policy.	4.04	1.144	45.5	17.4	18.2	8.3	2.5
Students, teachers and guardians are participated in the formulation of present school education policy.	3.78	2.123	29.8	25.6	21.5	9.9	8.3
We are informed about the liberal class promotion policy, continuous evaluation system and new examination policy.	3.32	1.359	23.1	22.3	24	10.7	14
The present grading system of evaluation has contributed in the improvement of quality education.	3.63	1.182	26.4	26.4	26.4	7.4	6.6
Compulsory and free exam policy is effective in primary level.	3.77	1.417	43	19.8	15.7	5	13.2
It is necessary to provide technology and training to make effective of new policy in community school.	4.31	0.976	57	20.7	15.7	1.7	2.5
Safety education policy is effective in school.	3.89	1.02	28.1	40.5	14.9	8.3	2.5
It is effective and relevant to implement education policy from local level in present context/situation.	3.6	1.198	27.3	20.7	28.1	9.1	5.8
It is necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy.	4.25	1.12	56.2	18.2	12.4	2.5	5
Compulsory and free education policy is effective in using from primary level.	3.96	1.375	48.8	19	9.9	5	10.7
Child friendly education policy has been effectively used in school.	4.17	1.154	52.9	19	14	4.1	5
Students are participated in the preparation of school's code of conducts.	3.14	1.4	18.2	24.8	18.2	13.2	17.4
Students' code of conducts has completely been followed.	4.14	0.969	43.8	30.6	17.4	4.1	1.7

Table 2 displays that the lowest mean value observed towards the statement on students participation is in the preparation of school's code of conduct, and information about the liberal class promotion policy, continuous evaluation system and new examination policy. It indicated that the school's code of conduct found inadequate at present and the present process of let the guardians and parents of information flow is inadequate (See Table 2).

The parents mentioned that it was necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy ($M = 4.25$), and there was a child friendly education policy used presently in the schools ($M = 4.17$). It was also emphasized on the necessity of reconsidering the school education policy. However, the guardians were not positive towards the condition of teaching-learning in school and the implementation of compulsory and free education policy in present form in primary level.

4.2.3. Perception of Students

The descriptive findings show that the highest mean of 4.51 (SD= 0.847) was of the statement providing technology and training to make effective of new policy in community school, which can be regarded as the students generally agreeing that the community schools require technological integration and training in order to effectively implement the new policy. Likewise, the condition of teaching and learning in school is good, as it shows mean of 4.48 (SD=0.953), which can be interpreted as the schools were able to maintain the conducive environment for teaching and learning (See Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive analysis toward the perception of students.

Opinion statement	Mean	Std. deviation	Totally agree (Percent)	Agree to some (Percent) extent	Agree (Percent)	Disagree to some (Percent) extent	Totally disagree (Percent)
Condition of teaching and learning in school is good.	4.48	0.953	58.8	13.3	8.8	0.4	2.9
The practice of present school education policy has positive impact on teaching learning activities.	3.87	1.395	38.8	21.3	8.8	3.8	11.3
The practice of present education policy has contributed positive impact on the development of student's latency.	4.05	1.193	40.8	17.9	14.6	2.9	5.4
Special education policy is effective for handicapped students.	3.16	1.766	33.8	7.9	7.5	6.3	27.9
It is necessary to reconsider in school education policy.	3.96	1.223	38.3	20.8	11.3	8.3	4.6
Students, teachers and guardians were/are participated in the formulation of present school education policy.	3.61	1.38	28.7	22.1	18.3	2.5	12.9
We are informed about the liberal class promotion policy, continuous evaluation system and new examination policy.	3.66	1.438	37.9	9.6	19.2	7.5	10.8
The represent grading system of evaluation has contributed in the improvement of quality education.	3.44	1.395	24.6	23.8	9.2	16.3	10
Compulsory and free exam policy is effective in primary level.	3.44	1.469	30.8	11.3	20.4	8.3	13.8
It is necessary to provide technology and training to make effective of new policy in community school.	4.51	0.847	57.1	13.3	10.4	0.4	1.3
Safety education policy is effective in school.	4.04	1.309	47.1	13.3	11.3	5.4	7.1
It is effective and relevant to implement education policy from local level in present situation.	3.75	1.319	34.6	15.8	20.8	4.2	8.8
It is necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy.	4.34	1.087	54.6	15.4	5	6.7	2.5
Compulsory and free education policy is effective in using from primary level.	4.15	0.992	42.9	16.3	22.5	2.1	1.3
Child friendly education policy has been effectively used in school.	3.54	1.51	32.5	16.7	15	3.8	16.3
Students are participated in the preparation of school's code of conducts.	4.09	1.133	46.3	8.8	24.2	2.1	3.3
Students' code of conducts has completely been followed.	3.38	1.15	12.1	16.7	22.5	7.1	5

The students mentioned that it is necessary to apply the ICT in the practice of present education policy ($M=4.34$), and there is an effective implementation of compulsory and free education policy in primary level ($M=4.15$). Students mentioned that they participated in the preparation of the school's code of conduct. Similarly, the practice of present education policy has contributed positive impact on the development of student's latency, as well as safety education policy was effective in school.

However, the concerns of the students were on special education policy that was not effective for handicapped students. It can be interpreted the lowest mean value ($M=3.16$), observed towards the statement toward special education policy is effective for handicapped students. It indicates that the schools do not have proper policy in this front. The student respondents did not agree that students on code of conducts have completely been followed; it shows that the students were not in full preview of follow the students' code of conducts, despite of their involvement in preparing that.

4.3. Responses from Interviews toward the Practices of Education Policies

School principals believed that education policy measures including textbooks, mid-day meals, tuition fees, stationary materials, scholarships, and incentives for particular student groups encouraged free and compulsory education. Many believed these characteristics were necessary to provide high-quality education and efficiently execute it with adequate resources. The group eliminated entry fees, test fees, and textbook charges to ensure free basic and primary education. The study themes were successfully executed by focusing on human, technical, capital, skilled teaching, financial and public awareness resources. The group attempted to efficiently manage and distribute limited resources and rights while ensuring their accessibility and availability.

4.4. Practices of Education Policies as per Policy Experts, Educationalists and Local Leaders

As per the study, over 65 percent of educationalists believe there are obstacles to effective implementation, including human resources constraints, teacher management issues, lack of competent head teachers, inadequate teaching staff, limited non-teaching staff, financial shortages, and teacher and staff training issues. As suggested them, boosting student achievement, more teachers need to be employed as far as possible. These obstacles impede quality improvement programs and education development. Nepalese politicians were questioned toward their duty to provide free and compulsory education for all children. Over 80 percent offered free elementary education in their districts. Local governments run schools, while the federal government pays instructors, textbooks, and facilities. However, the central government funding alone could not improve education. Local leaders must invest in schools to improve education.

4.5. Enrolment Growth Rate of Basic and Primary Education

The education system of Nepal has enormously expanded over the period of 1990-2020. The enrolment at primary education (1-5) and basic education (1-8) has seen remarkably changes during the period of 1990-2020. There were 2,884,000 students enrolled in primary education and 3,262,000 students enrolled in basic education in 1990 whereas the student's enrolment number has significantly increased in 2020.

In 2020, the total enrolment number of students has reached 3,521,000 and 5,338,000 respectively in primary education and basic education. The growth rate of enrolment trends in primary education and basic education has found the fluctuating nature. It was 3.41 percent and 4.12 percent enrolment rate in primary education and basic education in 1990. While it has found negative enrolment rate in primary education (-0.65 percent) and positive enrolment rate in basic education (0.38 percent) in 2020.

Net school enrolment rate is the ratio of official school aged children enrolled in schools to the corresponding official school-aged children. The net enrollment rate for primary education is calculated by dividing the number of children in the official primary school enrolled in primary, basic and secondary education by the population of the same age group and multiplying by 100 (UNESCO, 2014).

Table 4. Trends of net enrolment at school education (2006- 2020) (in percentage).

Year	Net intake rate (Grade-1)	Net enrolment rate at primary (1-5)	Net enrolment rate basic (1-8)	Net enrolment rate secondary (9-12)
2006/07	75.2	86.5	68.6	18.2
2007/08	78.0	89.1	71.0	20.0
2008/09	81.0	91.9	73.0	21.0
2009/10	86.4	93.7	83.2	23.9
2010/11	89.0	94.5	86.0	27.1
2011/12	90.7	95.1	86.6	30.6
2012/13	91.2	95.3	87.5	32.4
2013/14	91.6	95.6	86.3	33.2
2014/15	93.0	96.2	87.6	34.7
2015/16	93.9	96.6	89.4	37.7
2016/17	95.2	96.9	91.0	38.9
2017/18	95.9	97.2	92.3	43.9
2018/19	96.3	96.5	92.7	46.4
2019/20	96.9	97.1	93.4	47.6
2020/21	97.3	97.4	94.7	64.6

Source: MOF, Economic survey (2010/11 & 2020/21).

Table 4 displays the net enrolment status of school education at different levels over the period of 2006-2020. The increasing net enrolment shows that country is a way to provide free and compulsory education to everyone. The net intake rate at grade one was 75.2 percent in 2006/07 while it reached to 97.3 percent in 2020/21, the net enrolment rate at primary education (1-5) was 86.5 percent in 2006/07, it reached 97.4 percent in the year of 2020/21, the net enrolment rate was 68.6 percent in 2006/07 while it reached 94.7 percent in 2020/21. Similarly, the net enrolment rate was just 18.2 percent in 2006/07; it has reached 64.6 percent in 2020/21. Data speaks that there has been significant improvement in the net enrolment rate as per the latest constitution of Nepal and the education policies of Nepal.

Table 5. Province-wise details of students enrolment at primary & basic education in 2020 (in percentage).

Provinces	Primary education (1-5)			Basic education (1-8)		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Koshi	98.0	97.4	97.7	97.1	96.5	96.8
Madhesh	97.2	96.2	96.2	87.0	84.4	85.7
Bagmati	97.7	96.3	97.0	96.7	95.3	96.0
Gandaki	98.0	97.6	97.8	97.1	97.0	97.0
Lumbini	97.8	96.9	97.4	96.0	95.2	95.6
Karnali	97.9	96.6	97.3	95.8	94.0	94.9
Sudurpashchim	98.2	97.2	97.7	97.0	96.0	96.5
Total	97.8	96.9	97.4	95.2	94.1	94.7

Source: MOF, Economic survey, 2020/21.

Table 5 depicts the province-wise details of enrolment at Primary education (1-5) and Basic education (1-8) in 2020/21. The table reflects the gender-wise enrolment status in different provinces where Sudurpashchim Province was found with the highest enrolment rate of boys (98.2 percent) and the lowest enrolment of boys' enrolment rate in Madhesh Province in primary education. In the same education, the Gandaki Province shows the highest enrolment rate of girls (97.6 percent) whereas Madhesh Province signifies the lowest enrolment rate (96.2 percent) in primary education.

While comparing the net enrolment rate in basic education (1-8), Gandaki Province was found with the highest net enrolment of boys and girls whereas Madhesh Province seems the lowest net enrolment rate of intake of students in the year of 2020/21. Data speaks that Madhesh Province has categorized the lowest position of education status of Nepal.

4.6. Training Status of Teachers at Basic and Primary Education

Due to rapid technological innovation and development, training, education, and learning are indispensable. As a service function, training practices are becoming increasingly important for organizations that wish to enhance performance. Training and development programs enhance teaching-learning and assist in defining educational strategies and goals. George and Scott (2012) noted that trainings for organizations must effectively initiate training, facilitate employee learning, and enhance individual capacities for future responsibilities. The training and development of instructors is viewed as an ongoing effort to improve their skills and coordinate their performance. The study found that expanding societies require education and development. Poor employee performance is harmful to the business.

As per the study, there were 25,304 trained teachers out of 63,945 teachers at primary education which covers around 40 percent in 1990/91. In the year 2002/03, the number of trained teachers at primary education had decreased at 11.70 percent with the reasons of employment transition and the highest number trained teachers (95.05 percent) were found in 2015/16 as per the policy of trained teachers for improving quality education at school level. Likewise, the number of trained teachers has decreased representing 74.11 percent in 2019/20 because of the provision of teacher relief quota and temporary teachers.

The 1990/91 academic year saw 29,875 basic level teachers were trained which was around 40 percent of the total teachers. Employment changes reduced the number of educated teachers to 13.85 percent in 2002/03. According to the educational plan to provide high-quality education, 91 percent of teachers were obtained formal training in 2015/16. In 2019/20, 73.32 percent of basic education teachers were found trained. The drop of competent teachers may be due to temporary teachers, teacher relief quotas, and delayed job ads due to Nepal's political upheaval.

5. FINDINGS SUMMARY

The study highlights that although education policy promises compulsory and free education, schools often charge exam fees and additional costs. The examination of the education landscape in Nepal reveals multifaceted challenges and noteworthy practices. Although textbooks are provided, delayed availability and financial constraints pose hurdles, contributing to student dropout and repetition influenced by factors such as migration, financial difficulties, poverty, and lack of awareness. Despite incorporating diverse teaching practices, including analysis, interaction, presentation, discussion, practical work, and project-based learning, persistent challenges exist in engaging students, particularly in math and science. While teachers generally find professional development opportunities satisfactory, obstacles arise in involving guardians, some of whom lack awareness of compulsory and free education policies.

The study underscores the importance of teacher-guardian interactions, school management committees, and local support for education, with guardians advocating for quality and equality. Positive attitudes towards integrating technology are noted, but regional disparities persist despite improved net enrollment rates. The findings highlight a substantial increase in enrollment, particularly at the primary level, though differences among provinces underscore significant disparities. In conclusion, these insights contribute to a comprehensive assessment of education management and policies in Nepal, emphasizing the need for a focus not just on increasing enrollment but also on enhancing the quality of teaching and learning to address persistent challenges in teacher training, student-teacher ratios, and the availability of teaching materials.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

In conclusion, there is a discrepancy between the desired goals of free and compulsory education policies and the reality of schools levying fees and charges. Issues such as delayed access to textbooks and the complex

relationship between migration, poverty, and gaps in awareness are contributing factors to student attrition and academic repetition. Various teaching methods have been recognized; however, challenges continue to exist in effectively engaging students, particularly in the subjects of mathematics and science. Interactions between teachers and guardians may face challenges as a result of differing levels of awareness among guardians.

The support for policies promoting free and compulsory education by both parents and students underscores the commitment to achieving high standards and equal opportunities. The matter of curriculum availability and materials raises significant concerns that require dedicated attention. There is a noticeable positive inclination towards the integration of technology, accompanied by promising signs of enhanced net enrollment rates. Significant progress has been achieved in the realm of teacher training; however, obstacles related to political transitions and temporary appointments continue to pose challenges. The significant increase in enrollment, particularly at the primary level, highlights the influence of policies, while the existence of regional disparities calls for the implementation of focused strategies.

6.2. Recommendations

6.3. Recommendations for Academic Professionals

To advance the quality of education in Nepal, a holistic approach is essential. It is imperative to develop and implement research-based teaching methods, with a particular emphasis on math and science, to enhance student engagement.

Simultaneously, efforts should be directed towards creating and disseminating educational materials that cater to the specific needs of students while aligning with global standards. Furthermore, research initiatives should be conducted to evaluate the impact of technology on teaching and learning within the Nepalese context. Teacher training programs on the effective utilization of technology in the classroom are crucial for fostering a technologically adept educational environment. To address challenges within the education sector, collaboration with industry practitioners is essential, promoting the development of innovative solutions tailored to the unique landscape of Nepal's educational challenges. This comprehensive strategy aims to elevate the overall educational experience, fostering a dynamic and effective learning environment for students in Nepal.

6.4. Recommendations for Industry Practitioners

In contributing to the enhancement of education in Nepal, a multifaceted approach is recommended. Providing financial support to schools and educational organizations is pivotal to addressing resource gaps. Additionally, the donation of textbooks and other learning materials can significantly bolster educational resources in schools. Collaborative efforts with schools and educational organizations to develop and implement innovative educational programs offer a proactive approach to fostering a dynamic learning environment.

Leveraging expertise to train teachers in Nepal, particularly in the effective use of technology in the classroom, is crucial for aligning educational practices with modern advancements. Furthermore, advocacy for policies that support quality education for all children in Nepal plays a key role in promoting systemic improvements. This comprehensive strategy aims to contribute significantly to the overall advancement of education in Nepal, addressing both immediate resource needs and fostering long-term educational innovation and development.

This study has policy implications at national, state, and local levels. It highlights the need for national policymakers to evaluate different options and assess their impact before adopting a policy perspective. The results also encourage reassessing support for reform programs and promoting the status of supplementary programs that support current and future reforms.

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