

Participation of the Gurung Community in Higher Education across Various Educational Institutions in Dharan

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Abstract

The education means "to bring up" or "to bring forth" which circumscribes to deliver the knowledge, skills, experiences, and social traits that manifest in various forms. Gurung is one of the ethnic groups indigenous to Nepal. In their language, they call it "Tamu" where 'Ta' means thunder and 'mu' symbolizes the sky. The objectives of this study was to find out the number of Gurung students learning in higher education at various educational institutes of Dharan and to analyze their parents' occupations, educational status and family income. This is a quantitative, cross-sectional, perspective, observational study and data were collected from between March and April 2025. Among the Gurung community, 1.21% are engaged in higher education, with 94% pursuing bachelor's degrees and 6% enrolled at the master's level. Regarding occupation, 44% of the students' fathers are involved in farming. Additionally, 10% of the students come from families with a monthly income exceeding NPR 200,000.

Key words: Higher education, Gurung, student, occupation, family income.

Introduction

The word "education" originates from the Latin words educare which means "to bring up" or "to bring forth".¹ It circumscribes to deliver the knowledge, skills, experiences, and social traits that manifest in various forms.²

Education is a wide phenomenon that applies to all age groups and covers formal, non-formal, and informal education. In formal education, the person learns basic, academic, or trade skills on the premises of the school within a specific timeframe and guidelines. Informal education consists of experiences and persons learning from or in the family and community. Non-formal education is implemented consciously, deliberately, and systematically implemented where it serves the needs of the identified group.³

In 2011, the International Standard Classification of Education divided education into eight different levels where bachelor, master, and doctorate are grouped into higher levels.⁴ Overall, the literacy rate of Nepal is 76.30%.⁵

Gurung is one of the most counted ethnic groups indigenous to Nepal. They scattered all over the globe. In their language, they call it "Tamu" where 'Ta' means thunder and 'mu' symbolizes the sky. A theory suggests that the word 'Gurung' is derived from the word 'guru' meaning teacher. Gurungs are believed to be descendants of a teacher.⁶

According to National Population and Housing Census 2021, there are 142 caste/ethnicities in Nepal. Population-wise, the Gurung caste occupied 1.86% of the Nepali population which is 5,43,790.⁵

Dharan is a sub-metropolitan city in Sunsari District, eastern Nepal. It was established as a fourth municipality in the Kingdom in 1958 AD (2015 BS). The Nepali meaning of the word "Dharan" is a saw pit.⁷

The British Gurkha camp was established in October 1960 AD (2017 BS) and the camp ran till mid-1990 AD (2047 AD).⁸ Dharan is situated on the foothills of the Mahabharat Range in the north with its southern border of Chaar-koshe Jhandi at an altitude of 1148 ft (349m).⁹

The settlement of Dharan began with deforestation in 1950 BS. It was gradually expanded by the Rana prime ministers including Chandra Shumsher and Juddha Shumsher.¹⁰ The total population of Dharan is 1,66,531 and the population density is 864.6/km².⁵ Dharan is an emerging educational hub. In Dharan, there is a prominent deemed university, B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, along with 16 colleges: Mahendra Multiple Campus, Central Campus of Technology (Hattisar), UN College, Purwanchal Campus, Dharan College of Management, Birendra Memorial College, Dharan Multiple Campus, Alpine College, Dharan Model College, Dharan City College, National Multiple College, Sagarmatha College, Dharan Adarsha College, Pindeshwor Vidyapeeth, Sunsari Technical College, Dharan Mega College.¹¹

A Historical Overview of Nepalese Dynasties and the Evolution of Education in Nepal

Ancient history

The Naga dynasty

In ancient mythology, the Kathmandu Valley was believed to be a large lake. The lake was home to divine serpent beings called Nagas. They were ruled by a powerful serpent king known as the Nagaraja. According to the Svambhu Purana, one of the most well-known Nagaraja was Karkotaka, who ruled the lake area.¹²

It is said that the Nagas lived there before 3000 BCE and the lake was considered sacred and full of the divine energy.¹³

The Gopala dynasty

The Gopala Dynasty was the first ruling dynasty of Nepal, established by the Gopas in the Kathmandu valley. The kings of the Gopala lineage governed Nepal for a total of 505 years.¹⁴ According to historian Dhanbajra Bajracharya, the Gopala dynasty reigned from 1611 BCE to 1106 BCE.¹⁵

The Mahisapala dynasty

The Gopala dynasty was succeeded by the rulers of the Mahisapala dynasty. Three kings from the Mahisapala lineage ruled Nepal for a total of 161 years and 2 months. The timeline of the Mahisapala dynasty spans from 1411 BCE to 1336 BCE.¹²

The Kirat dynasty

Nepal's recorded history begins with the Kiratis, who arrived in the Kathmandu valley from the east around the 7th or 8th century BCE. The Kiratis ruled the region for approximately 1,225 years from 800 BCE to 300 BCE, during which time a total of 29 kings reigned. The first and most renowned of these rulers was King Yalamber, who is mentioned in the ancient epic, the Mahabharata.¹⁶

The Licchavi dynasty

The Licchavis of Nepal ruled over a kingdom in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal from approximately 185 to 879 BCE.¹⁷ Education in ancient Nepal was primarily informal and community-based. During the Licchavi period (circa 4th to 9th centuries CE), education was closely linked to religion and statecraft. The Gurukul system, where students learned under a guru, was prevalent, focusing on Sanskrit and Buddhist teachings. Kings played an active role in promoting education, establishing educational centers known as 'Agraharas' to train ideal citizens and state officials.¹⁸

Medieval history**Thakuri dynasty**

Thakuri kings ruled over parts of the country up to the middle of the 12th century CE. Raghava Deva is said to have founded a ruling dynasty in 879 CE, when the Licchavi rule came to an end. They ruled from c. 600 to c. 1200

Malla dynasty

The Malla dynasty was the ruling dynasty of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal from 1200 A.D. to 1769 A.D. The education system was largely based on traditional Gurukul methods, with education primarily focused on religious texts and skills.

Under the Malla kings, education flourished, especially in the Kathmandu Valley. Buddhist monasteries and Hindu temples served as centers of learning, where subjects like literature, philosophy, and arts were taught. This period saw the production of significant literary works in Sanskrit, Newar, and Maithili languages, contributing to the rich cultural heritage of Nepal.¹⁹

Early modern history**Shah dynasty, Unification of Nepal**

The unification of Nepal is considered as early modern historical era of Nepal, was the process of building the modern Nepalese state, by invading fractured Malla kingdoms including the Baise Rajya's 22 kingdoms and the Chaubisi Rajya's 24 kingdoms. It began in 1743 CE (1799 BS), by Prithvi Narayan Shah, King of Gorkha. On 25 September 1768.²⁰

He officially announced the creation of the Kingdom of Nepal and moved his capital from Gorkha to a city in Kathmandu Valley.²¹

Modern history

The modern history of Nepal, roughly beginning in the late 18th century, revolves around the unification of Nepal under the Shah dynasty, the establishment of the Kingdom of Nepal.²²

History of education in Nepal

Education is considered as a fundamental indicator of learning and progress in human life. It plays a vital role in driving socio-cultural and economic transformation within society. In the context of Nepal, broad access to formal schooling began after the 1950s with the introduction of the first education plan in 1954. The Ranas got overthrown in 1951, the Ranas and their adversaries recognized education as a force for social change.²³

Education in Pre-Rana Nepal

During the Lichhavi period, education was not seen as a major responsibility of the State. Instead, it was treated as optional. Education was mostly provided by priests and monks, who taught a small number of students in Gurukuls and monasteries. The Gurukul system was similar to modern-day boarding schools, but students were mainly Brahmins or children from royal and noble families. Teachers, known as Gurus, were also spiritual guides.²⁴ The kings supported religious and educational activities by donating land, which was the main type of property at the time. Special trusts, called Guthis, were set up to manage these lands. These Guthis used the income to fund religious worship, feed monks, hermits, and pilgrims, and also to support education in Gurukuls. These trusts were already in place by the 7th century A.D. In addition to the Gurukuls, temples also helped support education through similar donations and trusts.²⁵

During the Malla period (1243–1769 A.D.), King Jayasthiti Malla believed that education was important for preparing people for life. Later, King Siddhinarsingh Malla of Patan tried to introduce secular (non-religious) education in his kingdom.²⁶

The unification of Nepal was started by King Prithvi Narayan Shah of the Gorkha Kingdom, who became the first king of a united Nepal under the Shah dynasty. During this unification process, education was not given much importance. However, King Prithvi Narayan Shah's political ideas and advice, collected in a book called Divya Upadesh, discussed many important aspects of governing a country.²⁷

His sons and grandsons continued the unification efforts, but these efforts stopped after Nepal was defeated by the British in the Anglo-Nepal War of 1814. After that, and until 1846, the royal court of Nepal was filled with power struggles and conspiracies. This ended with a violent coup led by Jung Bahadur Rana. He imprisoned the king, placed the king's son on the throne, and took all the power for himself. In August 1856, Jung Bahadur was given the title of Maharajah.²⁸

Education during the Rana period in Nepal

Although Jung Bahadur Rana was not formally educated, he understood that education could make people more aware and possibly challenge his rule. Because of this, he decided not to promote education for the general public. This policy was continued by the Ranas who came after him, and it was similar to the way Japanese shoguns also kept education limited to control their people.

However, after visiting Europe, Jung Bahadur realized that learning English was important for communication with the outside world. He wanted his sons to receive a "Western" education, so in 1853, he brought two teachers from England and started an elementary English school at his residence. Later, more teachers were hired from Bengal, India. The school was moved between different Rana palaces and became known as Durbar School.²⁹

At first, only the sons of the Rana rulers and nobles were allowed to attend. This school is considered the beginning of modern education in Nepal. No other schools were opened during Jung Bahadur's rule from 1846 to 1877. Historian Wright noted that during this time, most ordinary people had no education. Children were either taught at home by parents or by family priests or scholars. Poorer families had no access to education at all. In 1947, the Jayatu Sanskritam movement emerged, led by students demanding the inclusion of modern subjects in the curriculum and greater educational access. This movement played a pivotal role in the political changes leading up to the 1951 revolution.³⁰

Later, Durbar School became affiliated with Calcutta University, so it had to follow their curriculum and rules. English was used for both teaching and exams. Before 1929, students had to

travel to Calcutta to take their high school exams. After an exam center was opened in Kathmandu in 1929, students could take exams locally. By then, the school had also started admitting students from the general public. The costs of travel and rewards for good performance were paid using funds from Guthis (religious and social trusts).³¹

Post-Revolution and Institutionalization

Following the end of the Rana regime in 1951, Nepal embarked on a journey to democratize and expand education. The establishment of the National Education Planning Commission in 1954 marked a significant step towards formalizing the education system. The commission's report laid the groundwork for future educational policies and reforms.³²

In 1971, the New Education System Plan (NESP) was introduced as part of the Fourth Five-Year Plan, aiming to provide free primary education and improve educational access across the country. Despite these efforts, challenges such as regional disparities, economic constraints, and cultural attitudes towards education, especially for girls, hindered progress.³³

Recent Developments and Challenges

The 1990 People's Movement led to significant political changes, and education became a focal point for national development. In the 1990s, a massive literacy campaign targeted 8 million people aged 6 to 45, aiming to improve literacy rates. By the early 21st century, the influence of private schools grew significantly, leading to a more diverse educational landscape.³⁴

Dharan's legacy of learning: The first school and college

The first government school established in Dharan, Nepal, is Public High School, founded in 1946 (2003 BS). It holds the distinction of being the oldest educational institution in the city. The school was established through the collective efforts of notable individuals including Late Pandit Chhabilal Pokharel, Mahananda Sapkota, Surendra Maskey, Pt Meghraj Sharma, and Devlal Shrestha.³⁵ It is located in Chatara Line, Dharan-12, Sunsari. Initially, it was operated as a private institution but has since become a government-recognized school. It offers educational programs from PlayGroup to Grade 10, as well as Plus Two (+2) programs in Management, Science, and Education streams. Additionally, the school provides a Diploma in Computer Engineering affiliated with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT).³⁶

The first government college in Dharan, Nepal, is Mahendra Multiple Campus, established in 1955 (2012 BS). It is a constituent campus of Tribhuvan University and stands as one of the oldest and most prominent higher education institutions in eastern Nepal.

Initially founded as Mahendra College in 1956, it was later renamed to Mahendra Multiple Campus. The college offers a wide range of programs, including Bachelor's and Master's degrees in various disciplines such as Humanities, Management, and Science. It has played a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape of Dharan and continues to be a cornerstone of academic excellence in the region.³⁷

According to the National Population Census (2011), it confirmed that there are 125 different castes and ethnic groups and 123 mother tongues as a national language. We know that the medium of instruction is the Nepali language in schools. Every research has its importance because it gives detailed information in any field of study. This research is significant as it explores the factors, which contribute to study in higher-level education by Gurung.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study was to find out the number of Gurung students learning in higher education at various educational institutes of Dharan. This study aims also analyse the Gurung and non-Gurung students in higher education at different educational institutes of Dharan, explore the number of male: female ratio of Gurung students, analyse the correlation between Gurung students and their parents' occupations and analyse the correlation between Gurung students and their parents' income.

Methodology:

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, perspective, observational approach. Data were collected from various educational institutes of Dharan between March and April 2025.using various tools and methods.

This research aimed better understand the educational and socio-economic condition of the Gurung community involved in these institutions. To achieve this, the study looked at independent variables such as age, gender, religion, level of education along with dependent variables like family income, parents' occupation and education status. The study was approved by the institutional ethical committee of school of education, Kathmandu University.

Dharan has total of 14,901 registered households, of which 461 (3.09%) belongs to the Gurung community. The city is home to a deemed University and 18 government and non-government colleges.

Results and Discussion:

The present study conducted between March and April 2025 in various government and non-government colleges. Households from the Gurung community home make up 3.09% of total in Dharan.

Figure 1: Distribution of household across the wards of Dharan

Ward	Gurung household	%	Ward	Gurung household	%
1	1	0.21	11	127	27.54
2	0	0.00	12	5	1.08
3	5	1.08	13	55	11.93
4	2	0.43	14	3	0.65
5	5	1/08	15	90	19.52
6	7	1.51	16	28	6.07
7	13	2.81	17	3	0.65
8	26	5.63	18	12	2.60

9	17	3.68	19	8	1.73
10	52	11.27	20	2	0.43
Total				461	100

As the table shows, the distribution of Gurung household varies across the different wards of Dharan, the highest concentration is in ward number 11 accounting for 27.54% and lowest is in ward number in 1, with only 0.21%.³⁸

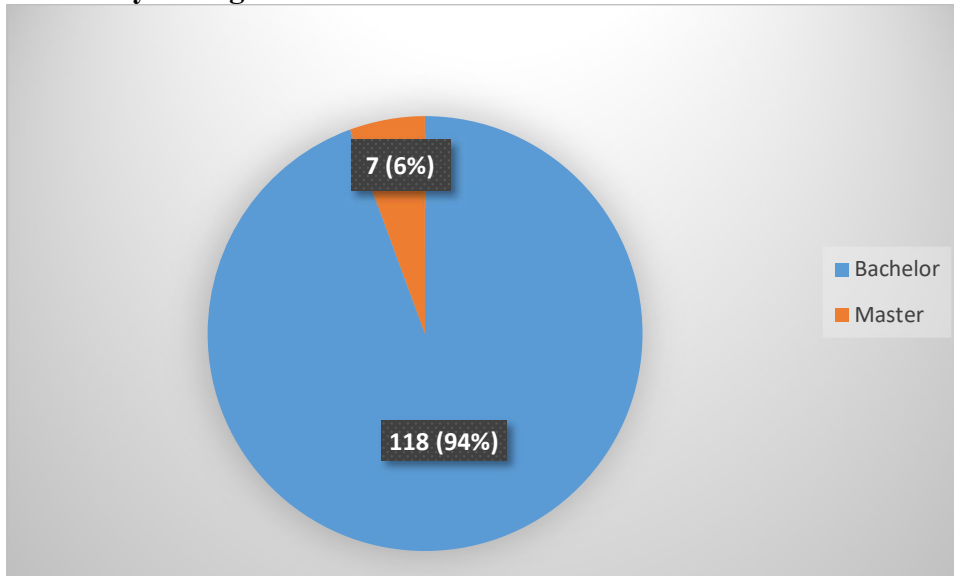
Figure 2: Distribution of Gurung students across different University/Colleges

University/Colleges	Gurung students			Total students of University/Colleges
	Male	Female	Total	
B P Koirala Institute of Health Sciences	9	7	16	1785
Birendra Memorial College	4	0	4	180
Dharan Model College	1	5	6	277
Purwanchal Campus	5	4	9	2365
Sunsari Technical School	1	1	2	91
Dharan College of Management	2	4	6	182
Central College of Technology	5	11	16	1108
Mahendra Multiple Campus	18	38	56	4005
Dharan City College	7	3	10	350
Total	52	73	125	10343

The distribution of students across a University and eight different colleges shows a total population of 10,343 students. Among them, 125 (1.21%) belongs to Gurung community including 52 (0.51%) males and 73 (0.70%) females. According to report of Nepal Human Development of UNDP, 1.04%³⁹ Gurung community is engaged in higher education which is closely aligned with findings of this current study.

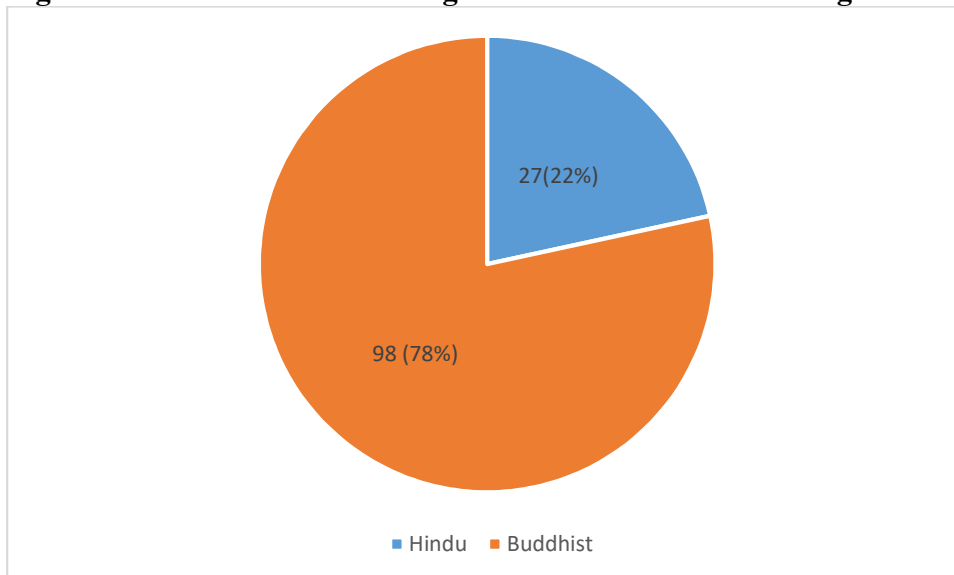
The Gurung students are enrolled in a University and different colleges. B P Koirala Institute of Health Sciences is deemed university, has 16 (12.8%) students enrolled. Among colleges, the highest number of students attend Mahendra Multiple Campus with 56 (44.8%) students while lowest enrolment is at Sunsari Technical School with only 2 (1.6%) students.

Figure 3: Distribution of Gurung students in various academic levels across different University/Colleges

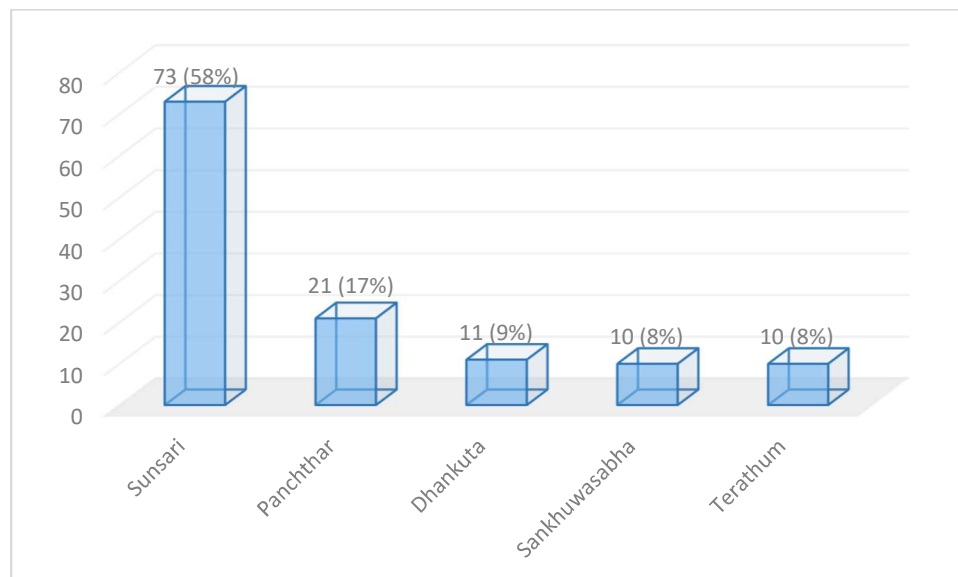


The above figure show that a total of 125 students, with 94% enrolled in bachelor levels and 6% in master levels across different colleges.

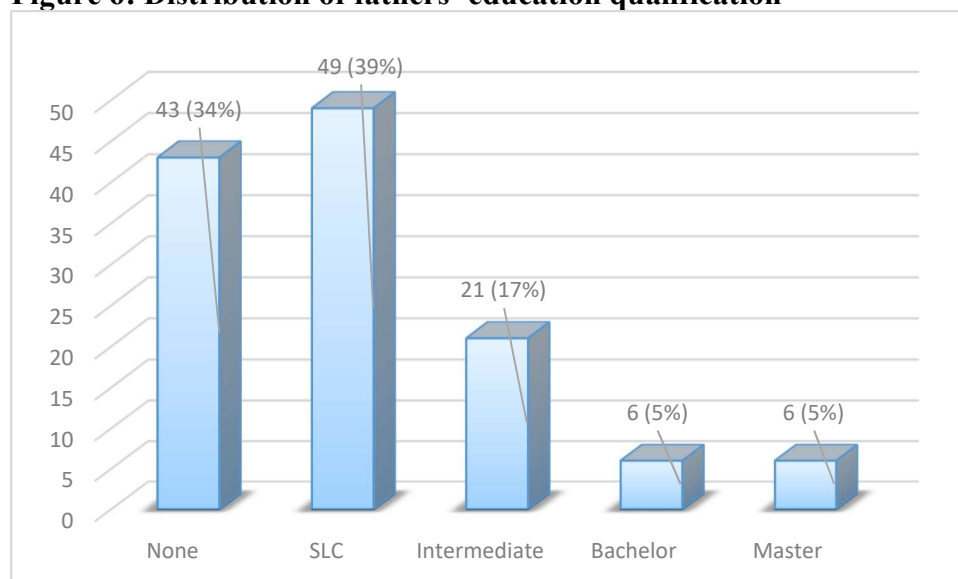
Figure 4: Distribution of Gurung students on the basis of religion.



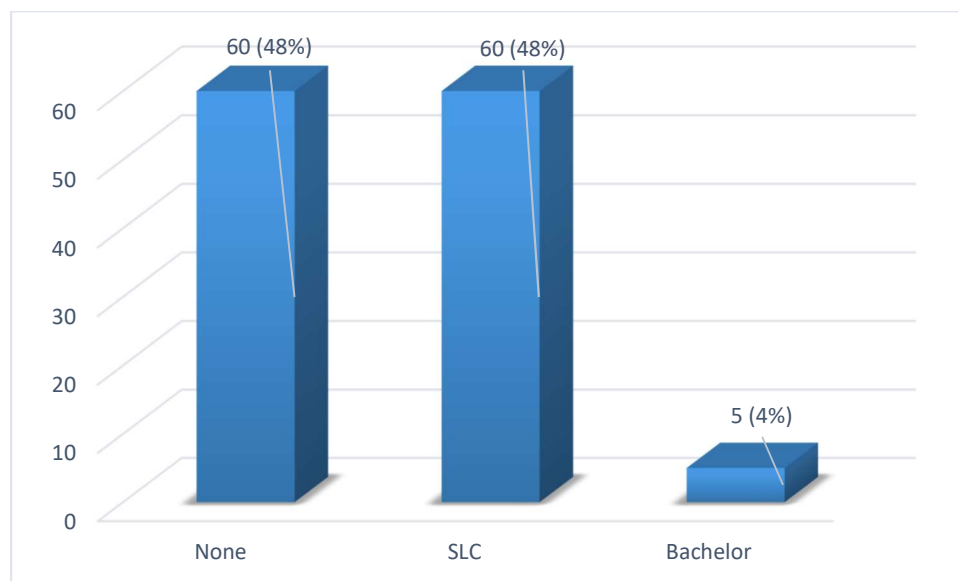
Among the total of 125 students, a significant majority 78% students identified as follower of the Buddhist religion and the remaining 22% students follow Hindu. Notably, none of the students reported to adhering to any other religious.

Figure 5: Distribution of Gurung students on the basis of place of origin

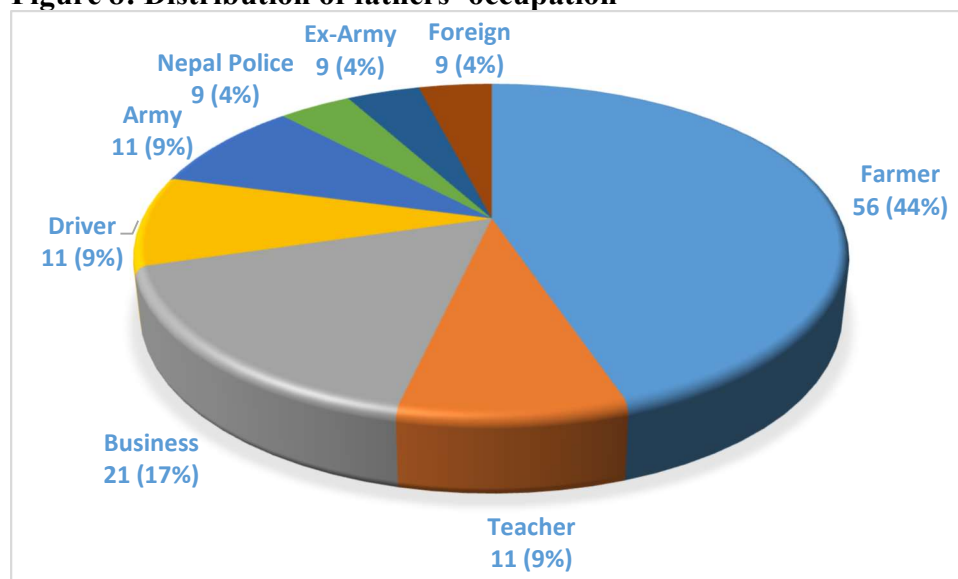
The students enrolled in different colleges come from five different districts, which are Sunsari, Panchthar, Dhankuta, Sankhuwasabha and Terathum. Among them the highest proportion 58% are from Sunsari with Dharan alone accounting 25.2% of total student population. Panchthar contributes 17% while 9% come from Dhankuta. Both Sankhuwasabha and Terathum each represents 8% population students respectively.

Figure 6: Distribution of fathers' education qualification

Regarding the educational qualification of students' fathers, the largest group 39% have an education level above the SLC. Additionally, 5% of the fathers have attained bachelor level and another 5% holds master level. Notably 34% of fathers are not educated. Despite this, they are still committed to ensuring their children to receive higher education, reflecting a strong belief in education as a key pathway to a better future.

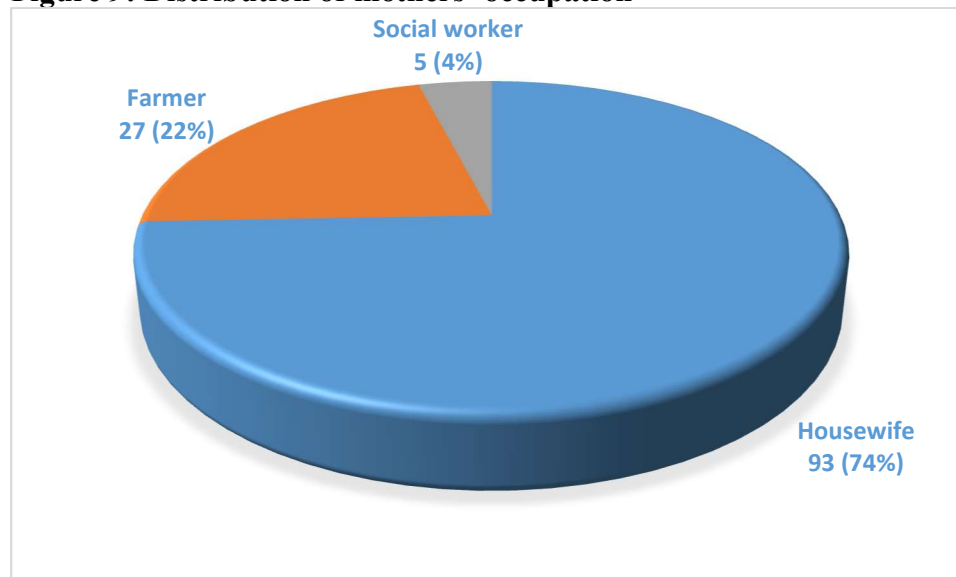
Figure 7: Distribution of mothers' education qualification

Mothers are epitome of selfishness and play an irreplaceable role within the family. Mothers nurturing nature is beyond the description. Whether educated or not, mothers are greatest educators in the universe. Regarding the educational qualification of students' mothers, 48% have an attained education level above the SLC while 4% of the mothers have completed bachelor level. However 48% of mothers have not any formal education. Despite this, they deeply committed to their children's academic success, demonstrating a strong belief in education as vital foundation for a better future. In comparison of study conducted by Dhakal AP where 25% of women are engaged in higher education, the percentage observed in the present study is lower.⁴⁰

Figure 8: Distribution of fathers' occupation

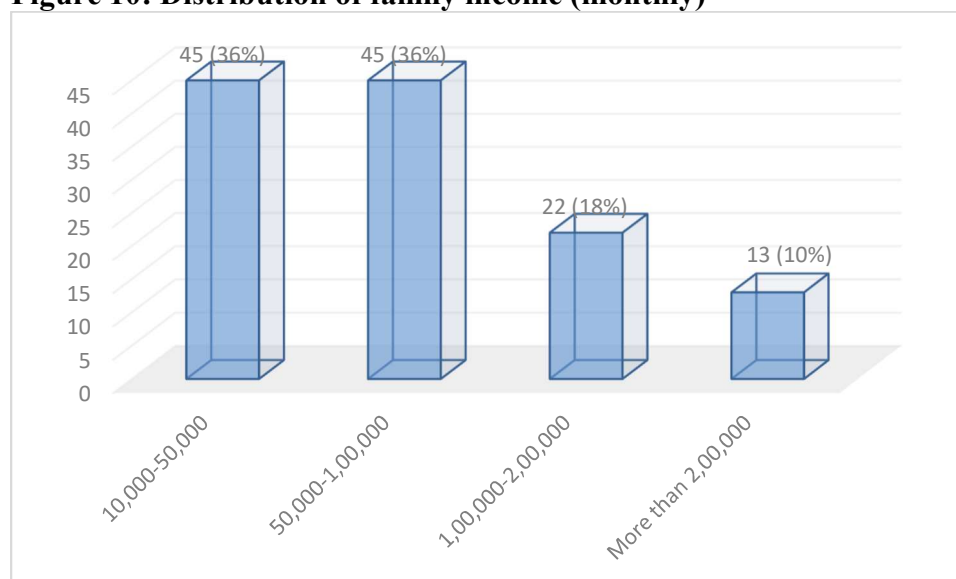
Occupationally 44% of total population of the fathers are engaged in farming. Additionally, 17% are involved in business, while 9% work as teacher, driver and serve in the Army. Another 4% are employed in roles such as Nepal police, ex-army personal and working abroad.

Figure 9: Distribution of mothers' occupation



Although housewife is often not classified as an occupation undoubtedly it is most important role to build up good family. In this present study, 74% reported being housewives. Additionally, 22% are engaged in farming and 4% work social workers. In comparison, a study conducted by Dhakal, A. P. that only 12% were housewives a figure significantly lower than this present study.⁴⁰

Figure 10: Distribution of family income (monthly)



This present study categorised into four different group on the basis of monthly family income. Among them, 10% students came from the families with a monthly income of over NPR 2,00,000.

Meanwhile, 45% students belongs to family whose monthly income ranges between ten to fifty thousands and fifty thousand to one lakhs.

Conclusion

The study is related to the participation of the Gurung community in higher education, with the objective of exploring and describing the number of Gurung students enrolled in higher education at various educational institutes in Dharan. It also aims to analyse the participation of Gurung and non-Gurung students, explore the number of male-to-female ratio among Gurung students, and examine the correlation between Gurung students and their parents' occupations and parents' income. To carry out the objective, social science research methodology has been applied.

There are 1.21% Gurung community engaged in higher education with the number of female students exceeding that of male. Among them, 94% enrolled at bachelor levels while 6% are pursuing in master levels. By religion, Buddhists constitute the majority which belongs to 78%. The students come from five different districts, with the highest from Sunsari and Dharan itself 25.2%. Regarding parents education, most parents have completed education up to the SLC level. In terms of occupation, most fathers work as farmers, while the least number are employed in foreign country, the Nepal police and as ex-army personnel. Similarly, the majority of mothers are housewife and few works as social worker.

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