Educational Leadership in Remote Rural Settings: Identifying a Relevant Curriculum [1]

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Abstract

This study explores educational leadership and curriculum relevance in DogadaKedar Rural Municipality, a remote area in Nepal. Through a two-day participatory workshop with head teachers and school management chairpersons, it examined local views on quality education and curriculum needs. Thematic analysis of discussions revealed key barriers: poverty, weak foundational learning, inadequate infrastructure, limited ICT use, teacher shortages, and student absenteeism due to economic pressures. Participants emphasized the need for vocational education, integration of local knowledge, and income-generating activities in schools to improve retention. A major research gap identified is the lack of bottom-up curriculum evaluation involving local stakeholders. The study critiques the dominance of centralized, policy-driven curricula that often overlook rural realities. It highlights the evolving role of educational leaders, who must adopt innovative, localized strategies in a competitive, neoliberal context. The study calls for greater municipal involvement in curriculum design and monitoring, promoting a more inclusive, accountable, and context-specific education system for rural Nepal.

***Key words*:** Dogada Kedar Rural municipality, entrepreneurial education, quality education, relevant curriculum

Introduction

The discourse on quality education in Nepal gained momentum with the onset of the 21st century. Over the years, various national education plans have emphasized different aspects of quality education. The Basic and Primary Education Plan (1999–

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2004) defined quality through trained teachers, relevant curriculum, improved infrastructure, and community involvement. Education for All (2000–2015) stressed inclusion, child-centered learning, life skills, and better school environments. The Secondary Education Support Project (2003–2008) focused on teacher development, ICT and vocational skills, standardized assessments, and school funding to support workforce productivity and reduce poverty (Asian Development Bank, 2011). The School Sector Reform Plan (2009–2016) highlighted competency-based learning, decentralized governance, equity, inclusion, and public-private collaboration. Later, the School Sector Development Plan (2016–2023) added holistic learning, STEM and ICT integration, outcome-based assessments, and resilience. The most recent School Education Sector Plan (2022–2032) focuses on inclusive access, improved learning outcomes, system efficiency, resilience, and alignment with national development goals (Ministry of Education, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2016, 2022).

These reform efforts have largely followed a top-down approach, involving educational policy shifts, curriculum changes, teacher training, and student assessments—mostly with donor agency support. These external actors, influenced by their global experiences and ideological leanings, have played a key role in shaping Nepal's education system. According to Tabulawa (2003), beneath the surface of curriculum support lies a strategy to promote neoliberal ideology, making Western assistance less neutral than it appears.

This context reveals a critical research problem: To what extent are the clients of school education—students and parents—satisfied with the curriculum and its outcomes? What do they expect from education, and what do they believe it has done for their children?

To answer this, the study employed responsive evaluation (Stake, 1974), focusing on stakeholder concerns and their underlying value systems (Greene, 1997). In Nepal, the central government develops and distributes the curriculum and evaluates its implementation through external exams. Thus, the education system features a centralized service provider (the government) and clients (students and parents), with school management committees and teachers acting as intermediaries. Focus group discussions with chairpersons and secretaries of school management committees were conducted to gather insights. The thematic analysis of these discussions revealed that the existing curriculum, developed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), is

suitable for only about a quarter of secondary-level students. The remaining majority would benefit more from vocational, production-oriented education that aligns with their practical needs. This suggests a pressing need to design context-sensitive, school-based or locally governed curricula under the direct oversight of local governments. Such an approach could address the real needs of learners and bridge the gap between policy and practice, ultimately enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of education in Nepal.

Review of Literature

Review of literature in the related field has been organized into different themes.

Quality education discourse: Nepal and UNESCO

Over the last two decades, debates on quality education in Nepal have expanded beyond exam scores to broader systemic concerns. Mathema and Bista (2006) emphasized that assessing quality through examination results alone is insufficient. Instead, they advocated a holistic view, including teacher quality, learning environments, curriculum relevance, equity, and governance. The disparities between urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and socio-economic groups demonstrate systemic inequality. Private schools often outperform public ones due to better resources, trained teachers, and structured pedagogy, which reflect the limitations of Nepal's public education system. A major concern is the curriculum's weak connection to real-life skills, which undermines students' employability and understanding.

Internationally, the concept of quality education gained visibility through the Education for All (EFA) initiative (2000–2015), with UNESCO (2005) providing diverse perspectives: (a) Indigenous Perspective: Emphasizes culturally relevant learning rooted in local traditions, knowledge, and languages. It seeks to preserve cultural identity and ensure education empowers local communities. (b) Behaviorist Perspective: Focuses on measurable outcomes such as performance on tests and task proficiency, emphasizing reinforcement and conditioning in learning. (c) Constructivist and Social Constructivist Perspectives: Highlight active learning, problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. Learning occurs through interaction, and knowledge is co-constructed in social contexts. (d) Humanistic Perspective: Prioritizes personal growth and holistic development—emotional, intellectual, and social. Learners are intrinsically motivated and guided by self-directed learning. UNESCO also outlined operational aspects of quality education: (a) Learner Characteristics: Health, nutrition, and prior experiences influence outcomes. Disadvantaged students require targeted support. (b) Enabling

Inputs: Adequate resources, trained teachers, and infrastructure are essential. (c) Teaching and Learning Processes: Engagement, pedagogy, and relevant curriculum are critical for effective learning. (d) Outcomes Perspective: Focuses on what learners gain—cognitive skills, social behaviors, and personal development. (d) Contextual Perspective: Policy environment, governance, and financial resources shape educational quality. Education, seen as an abstract ideal, is realized through the curriculum, which provides a structured framework for what and how students learn.

Curriculum ideologies and their implications

Curriculum ideologies shape the delivery and purpose of education. Schiro (2013) identifies four key ideologies: (a) Scholar Academic: Centers on intellectual disciplines, with teachers as transmitters of knowledge and learners as passive recipients. The goal is cultural literacy and academic rigor. (b) Social Efficiency: Prepares students for societal and economic roles by emphasizing practical, vocational skills. Teachers are facilitators, and students are active skill acquirers. (c) Learner-Centered: Emphasizes personal growth, self-direction, and intrinsic motivation. Teachers act as guides, and students take ownership of their learning. (d) Social Reconstruction: Education is a tool for addressing societal injustices. Teachers are change agents, and students are critical thinkers encouraged to reform society.

Each ideology represents a different vision of what constitutes quality and relevant education. For instance, David Snedden (1910) championed Social Efficiency, advocating vocational education tailored to labor market needs. He believed in differentiated education for social classes—practical training for workers and liberal education for elites. While criticized for reinforcing social stratification (Kliebard, 2004), Snedden's model significantly influenced U.S. vocational education policy. Snedden's ideas resonate with Nepal's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) goals. Given Nepal's reliance on agriculture, tourism, and foreign employment, vocational tracks can prepare students with employable skills. Institutions like CTEVT support this vision. However, Nepal must ensure vocational education remains flexible and equitable, allowing upward mobility rather than limiting social advancement.

Curriculum effectiveness in Nepal must be contextual. With its vast economic, cultural, and geographical diversity, a one-size-fits-all curriculum is impractical. Instead, contextual relevance is a key. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) emphasize that education should be responsive to cultural, social, and economic conditions. Examples of context-

appropriate curriculum ideologies are discussed here. In the industrialized Contexts, Social Efficiency approaches prepare a skilled workforce. Societies Facing Injustice: Social Reconstruction helps address inequality and promote social change. Knowledge Economies: Scholar Academic curriculum emphasizes disciplinary mastery.

Individual Growth: Learner-Centered approaches prioritize flexibility and student interests. Thus, instead of asking "What is the best curriculum?" educators should ask, "What curriculum is most relevant here and now?"

Teachers' and parents' expectations on quality education

Quality education is also shaped by local actors—especially parents and teachers. Parents, often excluded from policymaking, form their own views based on their children's lived experiences. Parental Expectations: (a) Parental Involvement: Parents value schools that maintain strong communication and collaboration with families (Taguma et al., 2012). Involvement improves academic outcomes (Erdogan, 2020). (b) Holistic Development: Many parents look beyond academics to include emotional, social, and moral development (Tayler, 2016; Bennet, 2010). (c) Safe Learning Environment: Infrastructure, resources, and student safety are seen as markers of quality (La Paro et al., 2014; Slot, 2018). (d) Post-Graduation Aspirations: Academic Success: Higher education is viewed as a route to better employment and social mobility (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2016). (e) Career and Financial Stability: Job security and financial well-being are major goals (Eccles, 2009; Spera, 2005). (f) Social Responsibility: Parents expect schools to instill values for responsible citizenship (Wigfield et al., 2015; Gutman & Akerman, 2008).Nepal's socio-economic stratification means parental expectations vary significantly. Wealthier urban parents may emphasize academic achievement, while rural or working-class parents prioritize employability and life skills. Thus, expectations are both contextual and personal. In Nepal, the type of school a child attends often reflects the parents' social position and educational aspirations.

Teachers' perspectives on quality

Teachers navigate between global ideals and local realities. While international frameworks like UNESCO emphasize lifelong learning and equity, teachers often focus on practical conditions such as class size, student background, teaching resources, and curriculum relevance. For instance, Barrett et al. (2007) found that in low-resource contexts, teachers define quality education as having adequate facilities, trained teachers, and manageable workloads—rather than abstract ideals. Pherali and Garratt (2014) noted

that Nepali teachers emphasize culturally relevant teaching methods over standardized metrics. Similarly, Ghimire (2022) criticized Nepal's standardized curriculum for ignoring the lived realities of working-class children. Especially in subjects like mathematics and science, disconnection from local contexts leads to disengagement and low achievement. Ghimire advocates integrating students' socio-economic backgrounds and experiences into teaching to make education more meaningful.

Teachers in both South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa stress student engagement, discipline, and community support as core components of quality education (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2013). This indicates that while global benchmarks guide policy, implementation relies on localized interpretation and action.

Defining quality education in Nepal requires synthesizing global discourse, curriculum ideologies, and local stakeholder expectations. UNESCO's frameworks and diverse philosophical perspectives offer valuable guidelines, but the realities of Nepal's diverse contexts demand flexibility and adaptability in policy and practice. Curriculum ideologies—whether scholar academic, social efficiency, learner-centered, or social reconstruction—should be applied based on specific needs and goals. Parents and teachers bring context-sensitive perspectives shaped by socio-economic realities and educational environments. Therefore, policymakers should prioritize local voices when designing curricula and quality benchmarks, ensuring education is both equitable and relevant. Quality education is not a fixed standard but a dynamic, evolving concept best understood through the lens of those directly engaged in the teaching and learning process.

Research Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research methodology. The ontological position is constructivist, recognizing that the existence and meaning of "quality education" depend on individuals' subjective interpretations. Knowledge in this study is viewed as being socially constructed through participants' experiences and perspectives, and the truth generated is considered tentative and contextual (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Recognizing that researchers' and participants' values influence both data collection and interpretation, the study emphasized confidentiality, privacy, and reflexivity. The researchers were particularly attentive to amplifying the voices of primary-level, female, and working-class participants. Importantly, the study was not limited to exploring participants' constructs about quality education; it also aimed to raise

their awareness about broader issues of education, policy, economy, curriculum, and social justice related to their children's futures (Freire, 1970). Additionally, the study intentionally engaged local government officials not merely as readers of final reports but as active participants and observers in the live discussions. This approach was designed to expose them to the ground realities, challenges, and aspirations of the communities they are mandated to serve and empower (Sachs, 2003).

The research design adopted was a focus group discussion (FGD) within a participatory framework. The study was conducted in a rural municipality of Far Western Nepal. All the schools in the municipality were requested to send the chairperson and secretary of their school management committees to a two-day workshop, organized jointly by Shreekot Multiple Campus and Dogada-Kedar Rural Municipality. Participants were divided into ten groups, with twelve participants each, ensuring a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds in education, occupation, and years of service (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Besides these participants, the chairman, administrative officer, and education officer of the municipality attended and observed the FGDs live, rather than only relying on written reports. Their presence served the purpose of grounding their administrative decisions in the lived experiences and voices of the educational stakeholders.

The main method employed was a semi-structured group discussion guided by open-ended questions. The authors of the study acted as facilitators and moderators, striving to encourage open participation while minimizing moderator bias (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Discussion prompts were pre-structured to maintain focus and depth, covering ideas and practices related to quality education. The interaction was designed not only to collect information but also to stimulate critical reflection among participants about their roles in shaping the educational and social futures of their communities (Freire, 1970). The two-day sessions were conducted from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., allowing two hours for meals and refreshments each day.

For data collection, audio recording was the primary tool. All discussions were recorded to ensure that participants' voices were captured accurately. Structured question sets provided consistency across the groups while allowing flexibility for emerging ideas (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants engaged in discussions within their sub-groups, which served as "platforms" for expressing diverse opinions and preferences about quality education, aligning with Walker's (1971) concept of a curriculum platform—a

space where a hotchpotch of ideas, beliefs, and values about curriculum emerge naturally.

The technique used for data analysis was thematic analysis. The recorded discussions were transcribed verbatim and subjected to open coding to identify initial concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This was followed by axial coding to connect categories and selective coding to refine the emerging themes. Member checking and peer debriefing were carried out to ensure credibility and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants were asked to validate the generated themes, and researchers discussed findings among themselves to address any potential biases.

During the second phase of interaction, platforms from all sub-groups were merged to create a collective platform. Participants were encouraged to brainstorm possible curriculum reforms, such as changes in pedagogy or the addition of annexes. Discussions focused on identifying reforms specific to municipalities, individual schools, or school clusters. On the first day, the discussion themes were (a) What is quality education?, (b) What content should be taught for quality education?, and (c) What skills and attitudes should be developed to achieve quality education? On the second day, discussions addressed (d) the roles of different stakeholders in promoting quality education. School leaders were encouraged to propose quality enhancement projects, with promises of technical support from Shreekot Multiple Campus and logistical and legal facilitation from Dogada-Kedar Rural Municipality.

Findings and Discussion

Each group was asked to put their common views (if possible, otherwise individual) by a team leader, and any member was allowed to put their view if different and specific. Their dozens of opinions were organized to generate the themes as described below.

Effective implementation of curriculum

Most of the participants were thinking about why the majority of students fail to pass the grade 10 examination. They explained that education from the 1st grade is weak, since, unless we improve the teaching-learning process we cannot get students to pass-i.e., quality education. For them, education that enables students to achieve high scores in external exams, command the English language, and skills of ICT and thus make them competitive in the global market is quality education. Therefore, they identified the lack and suggested ways of effective implementation of the curriculum that are in practice.

They stress on addition of physical facilities including educational materials. Technology should be incorporated into school so that school is well managed. They focus on technology in school management, classroom management, and teaching. They argued that ICT-aided education and teaching is not only essential for effective learning but also for skills inculcation for school graduates. They demanded internet facilities in schools.

They stress making availability of subject teachers in schools and arranging the proper ratio of students and teachers in school. To reduce absence and frequency of school bunk they recommended two ways- first, educate the parents on the importance of education and motivating their children for school education even by tolerating constraints; and second, day meal at school- that can be both pull and push factors for the students. For them, there should be a continuous interaction between school-community to supervise the students learning.

The participants in the field study highlight several critical issues affecting the effective implementation of the curriculum and quality education, particularly in underdeveloped contexts. Their concerns align with various educational theories and empirical research on curriculum effectiveness, resource allocation, and student performance. Their concerns are classified as:

(1) Weak foundational education and quality

The respondents argue that weak education from the 1st grade contributes to high failure rates in the 10th-grade examination, emphasizing that quality education should lead to better exam performance, English proficiency, and ICT skills. This perspective resonates with Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that education enhances productivity and economic competitiveness. However, their view of quality education as primarily exam-driven aligns with outcome-based education (Spady, 1994), which has been critiqued for neglecting holistic learning (Sahlberg, 2015), Humanistic development is the aim of education in Nepal.

(2) Need for physical facilities and technology integration

During one of the discussions, a headteacher sighed and said, "Our students are supposed to learn about computers and the internet, but we barely have electricity for two hours a day." This honest reflection captures a major concern shared by many: the pressing need for better physical facilities, particularly ICT infrastructure, in rural schools. The conversation clearly showed how the digital divide (van Dijk, 2006) continues to widen the gap between students with access to technology and those

without. It's not just about having devices — it's about electricity, internet access, and digital literacy. Research from UNESCO (2017) confirms that integrating ICT meaningfully into classrooms can greatly improve learning outcomes. However, Trucano (2016) notes that in many underdeveloped regions, poor infrastructure makes this integration extremely difficult. Our local findings echo global realities. Rwanda's One Laptop Per Child initiative distributed thousands of laptops, but without consistent electricity and teacher training, the benefits fell short (Nkubito, 2020). It's a reminder that technology alone cannot transform education; the groundwork has to be laid first.

(3) Teacher availability and student-teacher ratio

One chairperson candidly said, "Teaching in one school and another school is different because of the different quality of teachers and there is no equality and justice for all the students" This simple statement cuts to the heart of another urgent issue: the shortage of qualified teachers and the overcrowded classrooms they are expected to manage.Decades of research show that lower student-teacher ratios improve students' attention, participation, and overall achievement (Blatchford et al., 2011). Yet, UNESCO (2021) has repeatedly pointed out that rural and remote areas across the globe, including our study site, continue to struggle with acute teacher shortages. The situation is hardly unique. India's Right to Education Act (2009) legally mandates better ratios (MHRD, 2020), but in reality, rural Indian schools still often have one teacher juggling multiple grades. Unless we focus on recruiting, training, and retaining enough teachers, all other education reforms will likely fall flat.

(4) Reducing absenteeism through parental engagement and school meals

Several participants spoke passionately about the link between poverty and absenteeism. One mother shared, "Sometimes my son comes to school with an empty stomach. He sits there but he cannot think." These words hit hard, reminding us that for many children, learning is impossible when basic needs go unmet. This fact reminds the fate of the Seti Project where the project was diverted to students' hunger, nutrition, and sanitation and parasites suffering stomachs before the quality education (Robinson-Pant, 2023). Unless their physiological need is satisfied they cannot engage in thinking and learning (Maslow, 1943). Calls for school meal programs and increased parental engagement align perfectly with global experiences. For example, school feeding programs in Ghana and Kenya have dramatically improved both attendance and performance (Adelman et al., 2008).

Bangladesh's success story with school feeding programs also offers hope. Their simple, low-cost intervention led to a 9% increase in attendance rates (Ahmed, 2004). These examples show that ensuring a child's well-being is not charity - it's a foundational step toward real education.

(5) School-community collaboration for supervision

A chairperson raised an important point: "Parents must come not just to complain, but to participate. Otherwise, how will we change anything?" This plea underscores the vital role that community participation plays in improving schools. This aligns with Community Engagement Theory (Epstein, 2011), which emphasizes that real educational improvement happens when schools, families, and communities work together. Our discussions showed a strong willingness among participants to strengthen this partnership, but also frustration at how difficult it often is. Countries like Uganda have shown that empowering school management committees can lead to better monitoring, less teacher absenteeism, and improved student performance (DeStefano, 2006). Our participants' hopes mirror this idea: they know that change is possible when everyone gets involved, not just educators.

The challenges voiced by participants — lack of infrastructure, teacher shortages, food insecurity, and weak community involvement — are not isolated problems. They are mirrored around the world. Rwanda's struggles with ICT (Nkubito, 2020), Bangladesh's success with feeding programs (Ahmed, 2004), and India's battle to enforce teacher-student ratios (MHRD, 2020) show that while contexts differ, many fundamental issues are the same. The important takeaway is that there are models and lessons from other countries. But unless solutions are rooted in local realities, even the best global ideas will not work. The conversations that unfolded during the focus groups were not just about listing problems; they were about sharing lived realities, frustrations, and dreams for the next generation. Participants offered a raw, vivid picture of what "quality education" means when seen from the ground - beyond slogans, beyond policies. Education reform, they reminded us, isn't about throwing money or technology at problems. It's about understanding that learning cannot happen without basic dignity, infrastructure, qualified teachers, and community trust. The true quality education demands listening clients, partnership with them, and a commitment to address their problems both structural inequities and human needs.

(6) Local knowledge and skills

The moderator asked them- if they are aware that the school should equipped with technology and teaching materials; engage in educating parents and frequently interact with parents on their children's progress; what are your initiations, obstacles, overcoming, and asking for support from the municipality? Then they shifted the discourse. They explained that poverty is the root cause of school absences and dropouts, and suggested linking education to earning. They suggested some ways of entrepreneurial education; incorporating local knowledge and skills in the school curriculum; identifying the people with local skills and knowledge and utilizing them in the education system. They added that students can earn themselves for the day meal in school. They suggested that the municipality should provide internet facilities to all schools; and construct hostels to manage subject teachers according to the proper ratio of students. Students living in hostels, engaging them in production, and developing enterprising skills, automatically lead them to participate in extracurricular activities.

Understanding of local educational leaders on sustaining students in school education visits some other practices. Integrating income-generating activities into school education has proven effective in enhancing student engagement and addressing economic challenges in impoverished communities. For example, Janajyoti Secondary School in Nepal offers interest-free loans to students for agricultural projects, enabling them to earn income while pursuing their studies (Regmi, 2020). Similarly, the New Sudan Education Initiative incorporates agricultural and animal husbandry projects within schools, providing food, teaching valuable skills, and generating income for both students and the institution (Deng, 2013). These initiatives resonate with the findings of this research, which advocate for linking education to earning, incorporating local knowledge and skills into the curriculum, and engaging students in productive activities to foster enterprising skills. Integrating income-generating activities (IGAs) into school education enhances curriculum design by incorporating practical entrepreneurial experiences alongside theoretical learning. School-based enterprises (SBEs) serve as hands-on learning spaces where students manage real-world operations, reinforcing classroom instruction while embedding business, marketing, and financial literacy into the curriculum (Iowa Department of Education, 2021). However, IGAs can also divert attention from core academic objectives if not carefully aligned with educational goals (Direct Research Journal of Education and Vocational Studies, 2022). While they offer

financial benefits and skill development, their effectiveness depends on structured implementation that prioritizes learning over mere revenue generation. Educational institutions must establish clear policies to ensure IGAs complement rather than compromise learning outcomes.

(7) Programs ahead

At the end of the two days of discussion school leaders- head teachers and chairman were convinced to initiate even a small reform in school. More than half of them were interested in entrepreneur education to generate income. Student earning is the solution for students' absences, bunk, and dropouts. Half of the students from 6th grade feel economic pressures in their homes that detract their attention to education. Two schools (head teacher and chairman participated in the program) proposed to the municipality (the chief executive officer was sitting on the stage observing the discussion of the school leaders on the floor) to ensure the market of the product that they will start entrepreneur education to make mats and other items from maize husks and wheat straw. Another school proposed to facilitate having land for farming nigalo and bamboo and to ensure the market of the different items produced. Students from 6th grade will be involved there along with their study. The other five schools stressed horticulture (especially, capsicum and cabbage).

The school leaders realized that our state has no centralized planning on human resources- invented by the state, and utilized for the state. Therefore, only parents are responsible for educating their children though a little support from the local government and schools as institutions can be expected. They proposed parents' education activities to get their support on 'earning and learning program'.

A few leaders proposed education for controlling, directing, and supporting their children for school education, along with enduring further economic pressure for their children's education. They proposed the municipality to support teacher so that they can teach extra classes to students free of cost. Another camp of leaders proposed experience sharing among the schools, involving students in extracurricular activities, and mobilizing 'mother group' for controlling and directing their children to education, since, almost fathers are out of home for earn.

To ensure the success of entrepreneurial education programs there a structured, community-driven approach is essential. Begin with pilots in 2-3 schools, integrating vocational training (e.g., bamboo crafts, horticulture) into curricula with municipal/NGO

support, similar to Nepal's "Karnali Education for Employment Program" (Asian Development Bank, 2019). The municipality must secure markets for student products, leveraging local cooperatives and schemes like "One School One Product" (Nepal Law Commission, 2017). Since economic migration leaves mothers as primary caregivers, "AamaSamuha" (mother groups) should be trained to monitor attendance and manage earnings, mirroring Nepal's Female Community Health Volunteers (FCHV) model (Ministry of Health and Population, 2018). Teachers need Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT)-led vocational training, while the municipal education unit should form an entrepreneurship committee and allocate budgets (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2020). Monitoring via mobile tools (e.g., Shiksha App) can track attendance and income (UNICEF Nepal, 2021). Lessons from Karnali and Sudurpaschim's vocational programs show that localized, income-linked education reduces dropout rates (Asian Development Bank, 2019). Key steps for this can be to start small, ensure market access, engage mothers, train teachers, and monitor progress- aligning with Nepal's federal education policies for sustainability.

Conclusion

Nepal's evolving quality education discourse, influenced by top-down, donor-driven approaches (Ministry of Education, 1999, 2022; Tabulawa, 2003), exhibits a research gap in client satisfaction (Stake, 1974; Greene, 1997). Our rural study, using FGDs, reveals a mismatch between the standardized curriculum and local demands for vocational relevance. Participants prioritized effective implementation, infrastructure (ICT), teacher availability, and attendance, defining quality through exam success and ICT skills. This aligns with human capital theory but risks neglecting holistic development (Sahlberg, 2015).

Literature emphasizes context (Mathema & Bista, 2006; UNESCO, 2005) and diverse educational ideologies (Schiro, 2013). While social efficiency (Snedden, 1910) is relevant, a uniform curriculum is inadequate for Nepal's diversities (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Parental expectations (Fan & Chen, 2001; Eccles, 2009; Wigfield et al., 2015) and teacher perspectives (Tikly & Barrett, 2011; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Ghimire, 2022) are context-dependent.

Our constructivist, participatory methodology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) highlights a demand for vocational courses beyond the current academic focus. We advocate for a contextually responsive and

diversified curriculum framework with decentralized development, varied pathways, responsive evaluation, and resource investment. This client-centric approach, informed by democratic accountability, social capital, and participatory governance, aims to align policy with local needs, fostering a more equitable and effective education system in Nepal. The study empirically underscores the necessity of prioritizing client perspectives in curriculum design.

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