

Post-School Transition Challenges for Students with Disabilities in Nepal: Perspective from Disability Interpretive Lens

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Abstract

This study attempts to address the issue of post-school transition which is very important yet ignored in the field of special education in Nepal. The study is a qualitative research based on the phenomenological approach using disability interpretive lens. Three special schools from three different districts of Kathmandu valley were selected as sample schools by convenience sampling method. There were 8 respondents in total where 3 were head teachers and 5 were experts; and all the respondents were selected by purposive sampling method. All the head teachers of three special schools of the study area and experts of special education were considered the population of study. Interview guidelines were prepared and validated after reviewing by special education experts. Document study was also another method of data collection and the obtained data are used to support the result of the study. Data triangulation was done to maintain the reliability of the study. The result indicated that there has been a huge gap in understanding and implementing post-school transition in special education of Nepal. The educational policies and documents lack incorporating this segment of educational issue. Schools having IEPs and existing curriculum lack planning on post-school transition. Similarly, lack of disable-friendly school infrastructures, lack of people's awareness and poverty are also some challenges for effective implementation of post-school transition process. It is very important for concerned authorities and agencies to address this left

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over vital educational issue in their policies and educational documents as soon as possible.

Keywords: Post-school transition, student with disability, special school

Introduction

Planning for post-school transition is an essential part in special education process where Individualized Education Programme (IEP) is prepared (Heward, 2013). According to Barbara and Cynthia (2006), IEP includes planning for post-school transition for the holistic development of an individual child. Post school transition is an important event where a student has to adapt in completely new situation with the help of the knowledge and skillshe/she has carried with him/her. Therefore, schools should provide necessary knowledge and skills relevant to their post-school life to those students before leaving their schools. Especially, post-school transition planning for students with special needs or students with various types of disabilities such as having physical disabilities is one of the most concerning issues in Nepal.

Successful transition makes easier to find jobs, enroll into higher education, and builds confidence in participating in social and community activities (Bangser, 2008). More specifically, the objective of transition planning is to help the students after school life ends, into the world of employment, further education and assimilation in societies (Greene, 2003; Baer and others, 2003). According to Strategic Plan 2016-2020 of Queensland USA, students with disabilities have more complex, focused, and intensive transition requirements to empower them and find the pathway towards successful goals of life. A good transition planning process brings students, their educational or life goals, hopes and aspirations together to form a firm foundation of their future. Careful planning and preparation helps smooth transition into employment, vocational training, higher education, and life in the community.

According to United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2015), the experience from the Republic of Korea has been useful where promotion and enabling collaboration and communication among three major stakeholders of high schools, colleges, and the government are generally expected. Similarly, for transition in the world of employment, generally people with disabilities have to face more difficulties. This is because, during school period, they need to be involved

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in vocational training programs so that they acquire the necessary skills to enter in the skilled occupations (Bradley and Ngoc, 2003). Arulampalam (2001) has argued that probability of employment, future earnings and risk of future unemployment to the students for transition called ‘scarring effect’ is also prevailing in the context of Nepal, especially for students with disabilities. Transition planning is considered a process of empowering students with knowledge and skills to participate effectively in the community and the sphere of economy.

Statement of the Problem

Disability in Nepal has occurred due to various reasons like difficult geography, conflict, road and other accidents, congenital disability etc. There is a large population of people with physical disability in the country. In this regard, students with physical disabilities constitute the largest number of students in the general and special schools of Nepal. The school cycle completion rate of students with disabilities is low; hence dropout rate is seriously higher. Furthermore, employment opportunities for such students during post school transition are critically rare. Students with disabilities enter the government job and higher education in very nominal number; and most of the students with disabilities return to their communities after the completion of schooling year. Hence, students with disabilities face many barriers and issues in their schooling years. In this situation, transition programs can be the most relevant strategy for helping them succeed in their adult life (Heward, 2013).

In Nepal, majority students with disabilities studying in high schools follow the common curriculum along with their normal counterparts. Some special schools (for example, schools for the students with intellectual disability) follow special education curriculum which focuses on learning activities of daily living, communication, and other adaptive skills (Curriculum Development Centre, 2010). Majority of students study either in regular school across the country or in the schools specially targeted for the students with physical disabilities. But they have to follow the same curriculum as done by their normal counterparts of other schools. In such cases, there are no any special provisions of transition planning for their post school life.

Recently, the high school education of Nepal has been continuously reformed by incorporating vocational skills-based curriculum, whereby students can study science, agriculture, engineering, law, education etc. as an

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elective subject. The provision of local curriculum also addresses the learning needs of vocational education for all the students including those with physical disabilities. It provides autonomy in setting twenty percent of local and relevant contexts for enriching curriculum (Curriculum Development Centre, 2010). However, concrete transition plans targeted for individual students are lacking. Education policies are also silent in this regard despite consisting of some relevant educational programmes for the development of the student’s schooling life.

Methods

This study was carried out by using qualitative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) and following descriptive research design. There are 32 special schools in Nepal (Ministry of Education, 2016), among which three special schools of Kathmandu valley (one each from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts) were selected by using convenience sampling method. All the head teachers of special schools of Nepal and experts in the field of special education working in the country were considered as the population of the study.

Altogether 8 respondents were selected by purposive sampling method (Merriam andTisdell, 2016). Altogether 3 Head Teachers (each one from a selected school), and 5 experts (especially those who have direct involvement in the process of policy formulation regarding special education) were selected. The following table shows the demographic information of the respondents.

Table 1
Demographics of the study

Respondent categories	Sex		Age		Training received on special education			Teaching experiences (Yrs)	
	M	F	20-40 (yrs.)	40-60 (yrs.)	Less than 10 days	10 days to 1 month	1 to 5 months	Less than 2 yrs	More than 2 yrs
Head teachers	2	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	2
Experts	4	1	1	4	-	-	-	0	5

Different interview guidelines (Creswell and Poth, 2018) were developed and given to the head teachers, and experts. Validity and reliability of the

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research tools were ensured by receiving consultation and revision with peers and experts of special education. Document study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) was another important method used for enriching data. Document study was done mainly to support the data which were collected by the interview process. The information obtained from document study was helpful for triangulating interview data to increase the reliability of study.

In qualitative research, respondents' consent is an important ethical issue (Creswell and Poth, 2018) which was established from the chosen respondents. Mostly the interviews were conducted during the convenient time of the head teachers. Some interviews were also done by telephone calls. However, the duration of time allocated for each participant was similar. Interview was conducted in 25 minutes for each respondent; and it took almost four days to complete the task of data collection. Document study was focused on finding the existing situation of special education in Nepal and providing insights on transition education. Documents were reviewed after data collection process was completely over. Hence, all the data were triangulated (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. The data were sorted out and categorized to form different sub-themes. Similar sub-themes were grouped under one major theme. Thus, the study incorporated the data obtained from multiple sources (Creswell and Poth, 2018); and major themes were generated through category formation. Finally, rigorous interpretation and analysis of the data was carried out to find meaningful results.

Results

Challenges in national laws and policies regarding education persisted in post-school transition of the students. Management activities are the tools to translate legal provisions practically into reality; but there are problems in this regard. Some other challenges in this connection are presented below.

1) Lack of legal provision

Nepal has formulated Disability Act 2017, and Inclusive Education Policy 2017, Equity Strategy 2014, and many other laws related to the rights of people with disabilities. Most of the laws ensure accessibility and equality in opportunities of education; but these are silent on how high school students with disabilities will be managed in the world of job in post-school life. The

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constitution of Nepal has ensured receiving education for the students with all types of disabilities; but there is no provision that can guarantee employment during post-school period. Therefore, clear legal guidelines are needed for schools to plan post-school transition for their students.

One of the headteachers stated:

Obviously, we are facing the deficit of necessary policies and technical guidelines for post-school transition planning. Personally, I'm also in favour of providing necessary skills and knowledge for students with disabilities for their post-school life but we need to have clear policies and guiding documents for planning and providing post-school transition education [Head Teacher of School A].

Unless there are guiding documents and policies, schools and teachers alone cannot plan for post school life because of knowledge deficit, lack of physical infrastructure and other related services needed for providing transition education. Therefore, policies are the pioneering factors which lead to the development of other supportive documents and human resources.

2) Lack of IEP

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is the blueprint for schools to educate students mainly in special schools. IEPs are the legal and binding documents for schools to know the strengths and weaknesses, intervention strategies, and plan for the future life of students. The special schools of Nepal have no proper IEPs because there are no systematic efforts and adequate expertise in preparing IEPs. Regarding preparation of IEP, one of the head teachers stated:

It is not that we have no IEP; we have it, but its perfection may be questionable because we have no specialized IEP team to prepare it. We have not received proper training to prepare it either from government or from other private organizations. We would like to appeal to the concerned parties to provide us the expertise service in preparing actual IEPs incorporating transition planning for our students [Head Teacher of School A].

IEPs generally consist of planning for post-school transition of an individual student considering his/her strengths, weaknesses, and interests. Transition

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planning in IEPs should take into consideration the student's post school life in terms of independent living, pursuing a career, or their higher studies.

3) *Lack of managerial competency*

Management is a process of achieving best result out of the limited resource available for any organization. Schools of Nepal are often criticized for their poor managerial competencies in mobilizing resources. A strong and efficient school management can make big difference in the life of the students with disabilities. In this regard, one of the head teachers opined:

I believe that apart from many other challenges in school, lack of managerial competency is one of the major challenges for post school transition of the students. My school needs good leadership for better outcome for transition planning. Present school leader probably does not know about the necessity and preparation of post-school transition planning [Head Teacher of School C].

The above statement clearly explains that school leaders either do not have adequate managerial competencies or are reluctant in improving the school situation. In many cases, despite having adequate training and authority, head teachers' managerial competencies are not at satisfactory level. Regarding this, one of the education experts said, *it is imperative to provide transition related training to the head teachers of the schools [Expert 2].* Therefore, school administration should be aware about how successful transition planning of students with physical disabilities can be made.

4) *Lack of post-school transition provision in curriculum*

In the high school curricula of Nepalese schools, schools generally assume that planning for post school transition is not their area of execution. Therefore, schools are free even to prepare twenty percent of local curricular contents where schools can manage planning for transition. Regarding this, one of the education experts opined, *it is necessary to reform school curriculum to include this issue. Making post-school transition plan has already been delayed in Nepal [Expert 3].*

From the above statement, the scenario is clear that the curricula for high school students with physical disabilities need adjustment in providing transition education.

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5) Lack of school infrastructures

Good physical infrastructure is an essential condition when students with disability in post-school life wish to go to the world of job or to lead independent lives. Schools also need good infrastructures to translate their post-school transition planning into practice. In many cases, schools are willing to prepare and implement post-school transition planning; but they are not able to arrange necessary amenities for the students with physical disabilities. Regarding this, one of the head teachers said, *it is the most striking subject for me, but I am unable to undertake any new planning for the sake of students due to the lack of infrastructures* [Head Teacher of School C].

Another reality also persists that school managements are also unable to show competency in planning and executing of transition education. Another head teacher opined, *schools should enhance their administrative and managerial capacities to develop school infrastructure* [Head Teacher of School B]. In this regard, developing school infrastructures is essential to plan post-school transition for the students with physical disabilities.

6) Poverty of the people

One of the widespread problems limiting access to the minimum level of services for all kinds of people in the society is poverty. Approximately, one-third of the population is living below the poverty line in the country. Amongst them, the people with disabilities are the most marginalized segment of the society deprived from many human rights. In this connection, one of the head teachers said:

Many parents are so poor that they do not have enough time to think about their children's future. Their entire efforts are for their hand to mouth. Government should launch poverty reduction programmes so that parents could think out of the box from their poverty. [Head Teacher of School B]

Many people use their entire efforts to manage their household problems including the hand to mouth problem. School education and future transition of their children usually becomes their lowest priority. The vicious cycle of poverty is creating chaos in their lives; therefore, an essential step from the authority is required to uplift the parents of the students with special needs from their never-ending poverty.

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7) Lack of awareness

Any new ideas or thoughts to be implemented successfully in society or organizations requires awareness of the stakeholders. Many good ideas that could have brought change in society may go unnoticed due to the lack of awareness of the people. In the same vein, in public, the need, importance, and process of post-school transition planning is a new concept and difficult to comprehend. Not much attention has been paid by the government in the educational policies. For instance, in the Inclusive Education Policy 2017, lack of such attention is noticed. In this regard, one of the experts said:

It is a new concept in the education system of Nepal and a much-neglected issue needed to be addressed by the government as soon as possible. The education policies in special education needs to be revised; and this issue should be addressed for the sake of students with disabilities who are leaving school and going to the world of work or higher education. The role of parents is vital in this regard, from transition planning to their implementation. So, they should be made aware first; and later we can discuss the framework of the contents regarding transition education to be taught [Expert 4].

Thus, the government needs to address this new idea in policies as well in school curricula to help students for smooth transition into post school life.

Similarly, one of the head teachers opined:

First, education policies should address the issue. Second, schools need adequate resources and trained human resources to teach vocational skills. The vital aspect of this issue is the awareness of parents. Parents should be prepared and ready to co-operate the school to implement post-school transition planning and programs [Head Teacher of School A].

Obviously, parents are the inevitable stakeholders of the entire education system. In special education, their roles are much more in every step of planning and decision making for the students with special needs. In this sense, parents have to be well informed, and aware about the actions and activities undertaken by the school for the sake of the students' future wellbeing.

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Discussion

Effective post-school transition has been a critical issue in Nepal since there are no specialized provisions, policies, and laws. In the entire history of special education, post-school transition for the students with physical disabilities has not been discussed as part of special education. Therefore, there are very few literatures available in the field of transition in education. However, the study has revealed some important challenges regarding post-school transition planning in Nepal.

Education policy documents are very important for understanding transition. In this regard, policy is an essential tool to conceptualize the affecting structures and practices available to the young students (Billett and others, 2010). There has been a huge lack in the necessary provisions for educational policies and laws. Unless the policies make the ways to plan for such students, the effect of disabilities cannot be reduced in their post school lives. Their assimilation in the society, career, and independent living are heavily compromised to such extent that their entire efforts of learning, knowledge, and skills may go into vain. In this regard, developing self-determination and self-advocacy is essential but challenging to the related educational institutions (National Centre on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). Because of inappropriate acknowledgement by the policies, students 'at risk' may have limited access to resources that can best support them. Therefore, policies ensure the rights of the people and provide tremendous opportunities for students with physical disabilities.

IEPs are the most important documents in this regard, which are lacking in schools in preparing the students for transition. National Centre on Secondary Education and Transition (2004) stated that these IEPs simply include how the students with disabilities are oriented towards self-reflection and self-advocacy about their rights and how to be successful in the post-school period. Therefore, students should be kept in the central position to make necessary decision for their future trajectory. IEPs not only provide directions for the students about their post-school life, but also ensure them to learn the necessary vocational and pre-vocational skills.

School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023 of Nepal stated that secondary education is aimed to make students ready for work or transition to higher education. For this, there are the needs of strong institutional links in the school for facilitating transition (Ministry of Education, 2016). Schools in Nepal are often criticized for undergoing poor managerial

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practices and weaker utilization of resources. Furthermore, schools also lack the enabling environment (Human Rights Watch, 2011) due to the absence of minimum level of infrastructures and support services. Head teachers in schools are responsible for overall management, monitoring, and taking responsibilities in schools, developing future plans of the students either in the form of IEP or another. Unfortunately, schools are found with no concrete transition planning for the students with disabilities.

The school curriculums of Nepal are focused mainly on building the future career for general students. Many students with disabilities who study the same curriculum cannot prepare themselves for the post-school transition situation because these curriculums do not provide adequate skills and experiences for post-school life. According to National Curriculum Framework for school education, the curriculums contain some work-based skills, employment oriented education targeting the future life of students. However, comprehensive transition planning targeting the students with physical disabilities are lacking (Curriculum Development Centre, 2010). In a nutshell, there is no formal curriculum that involves systematic planning for post-school transition for the students with physical disabilities in Nepal. Only few vocational activities are done in some schools targeting their future livelihood of students.

Schools' overall educational system is driven by the fuel of financial or economic proposition. Schools' sustained financial situation have great effect on creating better school environment and making new plans for students' wellbeing (Bangser, 2008). Nepal's annual budget for school stands between 16 to 19.5% of the total budget of the government of Nepal (UNESCO, 2016). In this context, the budget allocated for the schools are considered inadequate for improving school's situation. The growing number of students in Nepal has created challenge to manage the necessary services and physical infrastructures (Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development, 2006). In this connection, there is serious lack of economic and other resources to provide the required services to the students with physical and other disabilities in Nepal.

Another challenge for post school transition is related to poverty. The wealthy parents have access and linkage to the opportunities of higher education or employment; but poor families cannot afford to do that. Sirsch (2003) stated that personal factors along with socioeconomic status and gender are some predictive factors which are viewed as threat to the

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transition of students in secondary level. Similarly, due to the poverty of family, children are deprived of adequate learning opportunities, learning materials, texts, and other vital aspects. Study revealed that higher cost of schooling and poverty are the factors to impact the educational achievement of students with disabilities (Wagle, 2012). This is more relevant in the case of students with special needs.

Public awareness allows people to cope with the changing situation for individual and social well-being. Imparting knowledge in some specific subject helps people to think critically. The study revealed that students and parents are mostly unaware about the potentialities and necessary skills and knowledge needed for post-school transition. Therefore, it is important for the students and parents to be aware of decision making and self-advocacy skills during transition process (Bangser, 2008). Government, schools, and educators have roles for awareness of the parents about their changing roles, responsibilities, and relationships for transition of their children to post-school life (Traum and others, 2016). In sum, students, school staffs and parents need to be aware about the planning and implementation of post-school transition to higher study, job world or self-dependent life for students with special needs.

Conclusion and implications

Effective post-school transition of students is one of the vital issues specifically in the field of special education. In the special schools of Nepal, neither the formal curriculum includes transition education nor do the standard IEPs incorporate transition planning for the students with disabilities. School administrators, teachers, head teachers, and even parents are less aware about this issue. In this regard, the study enunciated that there are no concrete legal provisions to support post-school transition of the students with disabilities. Similarly, schools' managerial aspects are too weak to make relevant transition planning. Additionally, preparation of standard IEPs is the most essential aspect of transitional planning which is considered the most vital document for post-school transition. But IEPs prepared by the schools contain no space for post-school transition planning. Also, the formal curricula also do not adequately cover the issue of post-school transition since they include some pre-vocational training without any organized contents. Lack of financial provision leading to poor and disability-unfriendly infrastructures of the schools are other challenging factors. Apart from these, poverty of the people comes as a major factor

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influencing educational efficiency of schools contributing to the ineffective preparation of the students to take the challenges of their upcoming post-school lives. In addition, the low level of awareness of the people, especially families of the students with special needs has huge impact on making and implementing such transition plans.

This study involves entirely a new educational issue in the field of special education in the context of Nepal. This descriptive research raises several opportunities for further research, both in terms of the understanding the concept of transition education and revealing the challenges of planning and implementing transition education in the country. First and the foremost implication is that it provides an insight to develop awareness among the school family, community and society. As mentioned above, there is no any systematic and organized study about transition education in the field of special education till the date in Nepal. So, this study would be useful to identify the challenges of post-school transition and provide effective ways of empowering children with disabilities in their post-school life. Similarly, this study will also provide effective guidelines to the parents, teachers, and educators regarding the importance and ways of preparing transition plan and their implementation for the children with disabilities. Likewise, this study will be fruitful in enhancing collaboration among parents, teachers, higher education institutions, etc. to provide them comfort in their post-school life. Finally, this study will also be supportive for the education policy makers to develop specific and appropriate plans, policies, and programmes, regarding post-school transition.

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