

Socio-economic Status of Parents and Their Perception of Public and Private Schools in Nepal

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Abstract

Background: Education is essential for individuals as it provides skills and opportunities for livelihood. The privatization of education, which was promoted by the UK government in 1979. In Nepal, public and private schools differ in academic reputation, with private schools often perceived as having higher standards.

Methods: This study aimed to compare parents' perceptions of school quality based on whether their children attend public or private schools. A survey of 128 public and private school's students' parents was conducted using a cross-sectional design.

Results: The study found that parents of children in private schools had a more favorable view of school quality than parents of children in public schools. This could result in public schools losing high-achieving students to private schools. Factors such as land ownership ($P=0.018$), owning an ox at home ($P=0.011$), having a television ($P=0.030$), and receiving scholarships, textbook prizes, and free exam fees from the school ($P<0.001$) were statistically significant.

Conclusions: Public schools play a vital role in providing quality education, but their standards have been declining due to neglect. Despite having trained teachers and good facilities, parents are increasingly choosing private schools. The government invests in all sectors of public schools, but there is a need for a plan to improve their image.

Keywords: Education, Private, Public, Quality, Parent satisfaction

Background

Education is essential for every individual as it provides skills and opportunities for livelihood (Lawrence, 1998; Oxenham, Diallo, Katahoire, Petkova-Mwangi, & Sall, 2002). The term 'education' originates from the Latin word 'educare,' which means to learn and teach. Education is a lifelong process that begins from infancy and continues throughout life (Kumar & Ahmad, 2008; Patra, 2017; Ravi, 2022; Taneja, 1995). It encompasses not only formal schooling but also a change in attitude. UNICEF in the 1960s defined education as "learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be" (Villani, 2021; Yeung, 2016). Privatization, a concept often discussed by economists, gained momentum with the conservative government in the UK in 1979, which promoted private enterprises by reducing public spending. Milton Friedman, a proponent of the neoliberal perspective, introduced the idea of public vouchers.

Today, education is a complex and debated topic, with questions about school quality, curriculum, and teacher training being raised regularly (Arsenijević, Andevski, & Milin, 2012; Ball, 2021; Jacobson, Kapur, & Reimann, 2016). The distinction between public and private schools is no longer straightforward, as factors such as academic reputation, religious beliefs, location, costs, and school size influence parents' decisions (Burgess, Greaves, Vignoles, & Wilson, 2015; Chubb & Moe, 1988; Nichols, 2010; Nicholson, 2023). While some research suggests that private schools offer superior academic programs, this is not always the case, and various factors play a role in parents' school choices (Dronkers & Robert, 2003; Dronkers & Robert, 2008; Lubienski, 2006; Suppramaniam, Kularajasingam, & Sharmin, 2019; Zuilkowski, Piper, Ong'ele, & Kiminza, 2018).

When comparing public and private schools in Nepal, several differences emerge. Academic reputation is a contentious issue, with private schools often perceived as having higher standards. However, research indicates that public schools may be closing the gap academically. Questions arise about the eligibility of faith-based schools for government funding, the extent of privatization in education, and the overall impact of private versus public schooling on student outcomes and character development.

This study aims to explore the reasons why parents choose to send their children to private or public schools in Nepal. Specific objectives include identifying the enrollment proportions in private and community schools, examining the demographic and socioeconomic differences among households choosing private or public schools, and understanding the implications of parents' preferences for private education. This study addresses the gap between private and public education in Nepal, where private schools are increasingly meeting the demand for education. The findings will inform education policy, NGOs, researchers, and students studying the education sector. Understanding the dynamics of private education in Nepal is crucial for assessing its impact on quality, access, and equity in education.

Methods

Study site

Nuwakot district is characterized by diverse geographical and socio-cultural features, ranging from 457 to 5144 meters above sea level. The district covers a total area of 1121 sq. km, situated between latitudes 85° 0' eastern to 85° 45' east and longitudes 27° 0' northern to 28° 20' north. The study was conducted in Bidur municipality, which has a total population of 40,842 and a literacy rate of 69.6 percent (Census 2021). The area is inhabited by various caste and ethnic groups such as Brahmins, Chhetri, Newar, Tamang, and others (DDC, 2071). Bidur municipality consists of 11 wards, among them 3 wards being purposively selected for the study aims to comparison between private and public schools.

Research design and sampling

The research design employed cross-sectional, used for data collection. The study aimed to compare parents sending their children to public and private schools through quantitative methods household survey. A total of 128 households were selected from a population of 869. Selection of households in the study area using systematic random sampling and purposive sampling for study area selection. The inclusion criteria for respondents were parents with at least one child attending either a public or private school.

Data collection tools and technique

Data were collected through structured questionnaires using face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire included two sections a household schedule and an individual questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in the Nepali language by the first author and pilot-tested before the interviews. Pilot testing was conducted in Bidur municipality ward no.4. Changes were made to the questionnaire based on the pilot testing and suggestions from the thesis supervisor and others MPhil collages.

Data analysis

The data processing included editing the questionnaires post-field survey, creating a master table in Epi Data and SPSS, and entering and cleaning the data. The study utilized structured questionnaires for quantitative data collection, concentrating on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of parents sending their children to private or public schools. The data analysis involved descriptive analysis utilizing frequency tables, and cross-tabulations with interpretations drawn from comparisons with existing statistics. Stata SE 18 software is used for data analysis.

Limitations: The study has some limitations. Firstly, due to a small sample size, the results of this study may not be generalizable to the entire population of Nepal. And it was conducted in only one municipality 3 wards of Nuwakot district.

Secondly, this study was undertaken to fulfill the requirements of a Master of Philosophy in Population Studies at CDPS, TU, and only a small part of the first author's thesis.

Results

Respondents' perceptions of private school education

Three-fourths of the respondents are male (75.0%), while nearly all households (90.06%) own land. A minority of people cultivate others' land (3.9%). Approximately half of the respondents send their children to private schools (49.2%), with the remaining proportion (50.8%) opting for public schools. Table 1 illustrates the respondents' perceptions of private school education. More than half (58.4%) reported it as good, followed by very good (18.4%) and true (16.0%). Only a few respondents described it as general, and less than 1% were undecided. Respondents whose children receive textbooks, scholarships, etc., tend to have higher satisfaction levels.

Table 1: percentage distributions of respondent perceptions on private school education by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic status	Very good	Good	TRUE	General	Do not stayed	Total
Sex of the respondent						
Male	20.8	58.3	12.5	7.3	1	75
Female	12.5	56.2	28.1	3.1	0	25
Having land ownership						
No	8.3	66.7	8.3	8.3	8.3	9.4
Yes	19.8	56.9	17.2	6	0	90.6
Cost of land						
Less than 1000000	11.8	58.8	17.6	11.8	0	14.7
1000001-2000000	18.2	59.1	22.7	0	0	19
2000001-3000000	16.7	72.2	5.6	5.6	0	15.5
3000001-6000000	26.9	42.3	19.2	11.5	0	22.4
6000000 and more	21.2	57.6	18.2	3	0	28.4
Cultivate others land						
No	19.5	56.9	16.3	6.5	0.8	96.1
Yes	0	80	20	0	0	3.9
Sufficiency of food from land						
Less than 6 months	11.1	61.1	19.4	5.6	2.8	28.1

6 months-1 years	26.3	52.6	14	7	0	44.5
More than one years	14.3	62.9	17.1	5.7	0	27.3
House ownership						
No	9.1	63.6	27.3	0	0	8.6
Yes	19.7	57.3	15.4	6.8	0.9	91.4
Main sources of income						
Own agriculture and livestock	25.4	54.9	15.5	4.2	0	62.3
Others land	0	61.5	23.1	7.7	7.7	11.4
Business	23.1	69.2	0	7.7	0	11.4
Nonagricultural labor, Service, Remittance	11.8	64.7	17.6	5.9	0	14.9
Type of school of baby						
Private	36.5	46	12.7	4.8	0	49.2
Public	1.5	69.2	20	7.7	1.5	50.8
Get a scholarship from the school						
No	30.3	51.5	13.6	4.5	0	52
Yes	6.6	65.6	18	8.2	1.6	48
Get textbook from school						
No	31.1	50.8	13.1	4.9	0	48
Yes	7.6	65.2	18.2	7.6	1.5	52
Get price from school						
No	30.5	50.8	13.6	5.1	0	46.8
Yes	7.5	64.2	19.4	7.5	1.5	53.2
Get free exam fees from school						
No	28.4	53.7	11.9	6	0	53.6
Yes	6.9	63.8	20.7	6.9	1.7	46.4
Total	18.4	58.4	16	6.4	0.8	100.0

Respondents' perceptions of public school education

Table 2 illustrates the respondents' perceptions of public school education. Quite less than half (47.2%) reported it as good, followed by true (21.1%) and general (13.8%). Only one in seven respondents described it as very good, and around 5% were undecided. Respondents whose children receive textbooks, scholarships, etc., tend to have higher satisfaction levels.

Table 2: percentage distributions of respondent perceptions on public school education by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic status	Very good	Good	TRUE	General	Do not stay	Total
Sex of the respondent						
Male	15.6	45.8	21.9	13.5	3.1	76.2
Female	6.7	50	20	13.3	10	23.8
Having land ownership						
No	0	54.5	18.2	18.2	9.1	8.7
Yes	14.8	46.1	21.7	13	4.3	91.3
Cost of land						
Lessthan 1000000	0	52.9	17.6	23.5	5.9	14.8
1000001-2000000	4.5	72.7	18.2	4.5	0	19.1
2000001-3000000	16.7	33.3	33.3	16.7	0	15.7
3000001-6000000	32	36	0	20	12	21.7
6000000 and more	15.2	39.4	36.4	6.1	3	28.7
Cultivate others land						
No	14	47.1	22.3	11.6	5	96
Yes	0	40	0	60	0	4
Sufficiency of food from land						
Less than 6 months	8.3	44.4	27.8	11.1	8.3	28.6
6 months-1 years	20	41.8	16.4	18.2	3.6	43.7
More than one years	8.6	57.1	22.9	8.6	2.9	27.8
House ownership						
No	0	50	0	40	10	7.9
Yes	14.7	46.6	23.3	11.2	4.3	92.1
Main sources of income						
Own agriculture and livestock	18.6	35.7	27.1	14.3	4.3	62.5
Others land	8.3	41.7	33.3	8.3	8.3	10.7
Business	15.4	76.9	0	7.7	0	11.6
Non-agriculture labor, Service, Remittance	5.9	64.7	11.8	11.8	5.9	15.2
Type of school of baby						
Private	25.8	35.5	19.4	16.1	3.2	49.2

Public	1.6	57.8	23.4	10.9	6.2	50.8
Get a scholarship from the school						
No	21.5	41.5	20	13.8	3.1	52
Yes	5	53.3	21.7	13.3	6.7	48
Get textbook from school						
No	21.7	40	20	15	3.3	48
Yes	6.2	53.8	21.5	12.3	6.2	52
Get a prize from the school						
No	22.4	41.4	19	13.8	3.4	46.8
Yes	4.5	51.5	24.2	13.6	6.1	53.2
Get free exam fees from school						
No	21.2	42.4	18.2	15.2	3	53.7
Yes	3.5	52.6	24.6	12.3	7	46.3
Total	13	47.2	21.1	13.8	4.9	100.0

Status of sending baby to school

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents based on their choice of school for their babies. Approximately half of the respondents (49.2%) opt for private schools, while the remaining half (50.8%) choose public schools. Public schools offer more facilities such as textbooks, prizes, free exam fees, and scholarships compared to private schools. Respondents with better household amenities tend to send their babies to private schools rather than public schools. Factors such as land ownership ($P=0.018$), owning an ox in the household ($P=0.011$), having a television at home ($P=0.030$), and receiving scholarships, textbook prizes, and free exam fees from the school ($P<0.001$) show statistical significance.

Table 3: Distributions of respondent sending their baby to public and private school education by socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic status	Send baby to Private school		Send baby to Public School		Total		P value	Odds ratio (95% of CI)
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Having land ownership								
No	2	16.7	10	83.3	12	9.4	0.018	0.180 (0.038–0.859)
Yes	61	52.6	55	47.4	116	90.6		
Cultivate others land								
No	61	49.6	62	50.4	123	96.1	0.674	1.476 (0.238–9.143)
Yes	2	40	3	60	5	3.9		

House ownership								
No	4	36.4	7	63.6	11	8.6	0.372	0.562 (0.156–2.022)
Yes	59	50.4	58	49.6	117	91.4		
Get a scholarship from a school								
No	59	89.4	7	10.6	66	52	>0.001	120.107 (33.352–432.530)
Yes	4	6.6	57	93.4	61	48		
Get textbook from school								
No	58	95.1	3	4.9	61	48	>0.001	235.867 (53.918–1031.806)
Yes	5	7.6	61	92.4	66	52		
Get prize from school								
No	55	93.2	4	6.8	59	46.8	>0.001	177.857(32.710–424.654)
Yes	7	10.4	60	89.6	67	53.2		
Get free exam fees from school								
No	57	85.1	10	14.9	67	53.6	>0.001	72.691 (19.385–188.316)
Yes	5	8.6	53	91.4	58	46.4		
Having cow in household								
No	39	47	44	53	83	64.8	0.493	0.776 (0.375–1.605)
Yes	24	53.3	21	46.7	45	35.2		
Having ox in household								
No	58	54.2	49	45.8	107	83.6	0.011	3.788 (1.294–11.085)
Yes	5	23.8	16	76.2	21	16.4		
Having she buffalo in the household								
No	28	41.8	39	58.2	67	52.3	0.079	0.533 (0.264–1.076)
Yes	35	57.4	26	42.6	61	47.7		
Having the buffalo in the household								
No	51	47.7	56	52.3	107	83.6	0.427	0.633 (0.266–1.755)
Yes	12	57.1	9	42.9	21	16.4		
Having goat/sheep in the household								
No	43	55.8	34	44.2	77	60.2	0.065	1.960 (0.954–4.027)
Yes	20	39.2	31	60.8	51	39.8		
Having a pig in the household								
No	57	50.9	55	49.1	112	87.5	0.316	1.727 (0.588–5.075)
Yes	6	37.5	10	62.5	16	12.5		

Having a hen/duck in the household								
No	40	51.3	38	48.7	78	60.9	0.56	1.236 (0.607–2.518)
Yes	23	46	27	54	50	39.1		
Having electricity in the household								
No	4	44.4	5	55.6	9	7	0.776	0.814 (0.208–3.179)
Yes	59	49.6	60	50.4	119	93		
Having Solar at household								
No	58	49.2	60	50.8	118	92.2	0.266	0.967 (0.266–3.5150)
Yes	5	50	5	50	10	7.8		
Having radio/ castes at household								
No	13	50	13	50	26	20.3	0.929	1.440 (0.440–2.461)
Yes	50	49	52	51	102	79.7		
Having a television in the household								
No	10	32.3	21	67.7	31	24.2	0.030	0.395 (0.169–0.927)
Yes	53	54.6	44	45.4	97	75.8		
Having a mobile in the household								
No	9	52.9	8	47.1	17	13.3	0.742	1.118 (0.427–3.301)
Yes	54	48.6	57	51.4	111	86.7		
Food sufficiency for one year								
No	16	45.7	19	54.3	35	27.3	0.627	1.213 (0.557–2.645)
Yes	47	50.5	46	49.5	93	72.7		
Total	63	49.2	65	50.8	128	100		

Discussion

This article contributes to the argument regarding parents' preferences for school choice, whether private or public. Much of the research on parent choice in education focuses on public and private schools separately. In this article, we aim to understand the dynamics involved in parents' decision-making between public and private schools. The results of this study indicate that parents have a more positive perception of private schools compared to public schools. Additionally, when children receive textbooks, scholarships, prizes, etc., parents tend to be more satisfied with the school. Textbooks, scholarships, and prizes show significant results.

The study reveals that the choice between public and private schools varies based on socioeconomic status. Parents with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to choose private schools over public schools due to the financial burden

associated with private school fees, uniforms, books, and other expenses for parents with lower socioeconomic status. Other studies have also shown similar results. Academic performance was ranked third in preference, with the quality of teachers being the fourth factor considered (Rehman, Khan, Tariq, & Tasleem, 2010; Yaacob, Osman, & Bachok, 2014; Yaacob, Osman, & Bachok, 2015). Private schools of high socioeconomic status tend to outperform similar public schools, while private schools of low socioeconomic status tend to underperform, even for students with high socioeconomic status (Pandolfini, 2013; Rowe & Perry, 2020; Yaacob et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the majority of respondents have a favorable view of private schools compared to public schools. This positive perception is influenced by factors such as payment methods, English medium instruction in private schools, and the care provided by teachers to students (Amponsah-Efah, 2021; J. S. Coleman, 1981; Dearden & Macaro, 2016). Other research studies also support this view (Dearden & Macaro, 2016), highlighting the positive influence of private schools on measures of educational attainment (Charles, 2011; Cohen-Zada & Sander, 2008; J. Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982).

Moreover, the availability of free textbooks, scholarships, prizes, and waived exam fees significantly influences school choice. Many participants opt for public schools due to the availability of these incentives. Others research also show same results (Glynn, 2017; Maiyo, 2016).

The study offers recommendations for improving school quality and criteria for school selection. It suggests that the government should implement policy measures to ensure the use of effective criteria in all schools. Future research recommendations include conducting studies with a larger and more diverse participant population, qualitative studies with in-depth interviews to explore educational attributes affecting perceptions of school quality, and additional measurements to assess parental satisfaction.

Conclusion

Public schools are crucial education institutions for providing quality education. However, due to negligence from stakeholders, the quality of education in public schools has been declining. Despite offering free education to children, parents are increasingly drawn to private schools. Public schools have trained teachers, and good physical facilities, and receive investments from the government in all sectors. Nepal's federal governance and local governance need to create a plan for improving people's perceptions of public schools. And School Management Comity (SMC) regularly monitors the work of public school teachers as well as students' progress.

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Availability of data and materials: All data and materials from this study are available and can be accessed from Sukuman Dangol via email at sukumandongol@gmail.com

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