



## Equity Education in Nepal

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### Abstract

This study explored issue of educational equity in l Nepal by employing a qualitative research methodology under an interpretive research paradigm. This qualitative study investigated the experiences, challenges, and opportunities associated with educational equity in four public primary schools of Chaubise Rural Municipality, located in the Dhankuta district of Nepal. Under an interpretive research paradigm, this study employed purposive sampling to select head teachers, classroom teachers, SMC members, and students from those schools. The study findings indicate that educational inequality in l Nepal is influenced by interrelated structural, social, linguistic, and institutional factors. Some of the significant challenges associated with educational inequality in l Nepal include poverty, geographical inaccessibility, infrastructural scarcity, poor governance, teachers' training, caste-based discrimination, and linguistic barriers, particularly for students belonging to marginalized castes, ethnic groups, and linguistic communities. Similarly, this study revealed that Nepali/English-medium instruction may be a barrier for students who are mother-tongue speakers.

Despite all these barriers, it was identified that schools possess certain significant strengths in their contexts too. Adaptive leadership, equity-oriented school practices, teachers' agency, mother tongue support, community engagement, and

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adaptive teaching strategies were identified to be having a significant role in the promotion of inclusive education and the encouragement of active participation. Teachers' professionalism and context-oriented practices may act as a bridge in bridging the gap between policy and practice. The study has shown that the achievement of equity in education in Nepal is not only dependent on the provisions of the policy but also on the provisions of responsive leadership and inclusive governance, culturally and linguistically sensitive education, institutional support, and the elimination of discrimination.

*Keywords:* access, discrimination, inclusive education, equity, marginalization,

## **Introduction**

Nepal has made remarkable achievements in the development of equality in education by highlighting the importance of legal and constitutional provisions. In this regard, it has been clearly mentioned in the new Constitution of Nepal (2015) that all the citizens of Nepal have a right to free and equal education with special emphasis placed on the education of marginalized communities like Dalits, Janajatis, people suffering from disabilities, and the economically poor. In a similar vein, the government has further emphasized the free and compulsory education of all the citizens of Nepal at the primary level through the Education Act of 2075 (2018). In a similar vein, the government has formulated policies like Consolidated Equity Strategy (2014) and Inclusive Education Policy (2016) in order to resolve issues like geography, language, caste, gender, and disabilities in the field of education.

However, despite the development of such progressive policies, challenges in the process of their implementation persist. In many schools, especially in rural areas, coordination between different levels of government is lacking, as is the infrastructure, as well as the availability of trained teachers. Inequalities such as poverty, caste discrimination, gender discrimination, linguistic discrimination, and geographic inaccessibility are also structural inequalities in the context of access to education. However, the recent policies that have been introduced in the context of access to education by the LIFE Project (2023), in association with the British Council and UNICEF, have attempted to reduce inequalities in access to education. These policies emphasize the need to take context-specific initiatives in the context of creating educational equity. However, the lack of in-depth understanding of the life of students, teachers, and leaders in the context of rural and linguistically diverse communities also remains a challenge. Without such an understanding, the policies remain in isolation.

To achieve this, the present study has adopted a qualitative method to understand the perspectives and experiences of marginalized social groups such as Dalits, Janajatis, girls, and rural students in relation to educational equity. The study has also examined how local education agencies, schools, and teachers contribute to promoting and hindering inclusive education. In this regard, it is believed that this study

can bridge the gap between policy and practice in promoting educational equity in Nepal. The research gap in this study is based on the fact that Nepal has excellent policies in promoting educational equity. The majority of previous research has only focused on policies. There is a need to make a link between policies and practice. There is a lack of comprehension regarding the interplay between different factors like caste, gender, poverty, language, and geography in the context of inequality in education. Issues like implementation, governance, and effectiveness in creating culturally responsive practices in Nepal have not been explored adequately. The present study seeks to make a link between policies and practice in providing context-based evidence to promote inclusive and equitable education in Nepal

The factors affecting educational equity in Nepal are many and varied and range from gaps in policy implementation to socio-economic status, gender, caste, location, and language. Although there are certain provisions in the constitution regarding the special needs of the disadvantaged sections like Dalits, Janajatis, girls, and rural children, these sections are still at a disadvantage in getting quality education, as revealed by recent research by Dhakal (2024) and Subedi (2023). The factors affecting educational equity at the classroom level in Nepal are language incongruence between teachers and students, teacher-centric approaches, and high student absenteeism, particularly in multilingual and hard-to-reach areas. Inclusive approaches like culturally responsive teaching approaches and student support have been found to be effective in creating a supportive environment for participation and inclusion, as revealed by recent research by Lamsal (2024).

The role played by the school leadership in the reduction of disparities cannot be overemphasized. The school leadership in promoting inclusiveness has a positive influence in the reduction of disparities in education (Dhakal, 2024). However, there is a great disparity between policy and practice in the field of education, especially in higher learning institutions. Online education has also been advocated for as a way of reducing disparities in education through online learning, but the lack of technology and poor internet connectivity in some parts of the country also acts as a barrier. Moreover, the level of digital literacy among students and teachers is also a major challenge (Rawal, 2024; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Thapa, 2022). Disparities in education can also be observed in the field of early childhood education. In this field of education, there is a significant difference in the access and quality of education in different parts of the country due to differences in community resources and family engagement (Subedi, 2023; Thapa, 2015). In the field of early childhood education, the education of marginalized groups such as Dalits and girls in rural areas is often interrupted by poverty and discrimination.

However, the same technology may also further exacerbate the existing gaps in the education system if there is no equity in the access of technology and the Internet and the effective use of the same (Lamsal, 2014; OLE Nepal, 2023; Thapa, 2022). One of the gaps in the existing literature on the education system in Nepal is that most of the

studies conducted in the past have not taken into account the qualitative approaches and the local perspectives in the studies. Most of the studies conducted in the past have been policy-oriented and have not taken into account the local perspectives, which has created a disconnect between the policy and the practice (Thapa, 2015; Dhakal, 2024). In conclusion, in order for the education equity to exist in the education system in Nepal, it would be essential to develop strategies that would be effective in the Nepalese context and would also ensure the effective pedagogy in the classroom and the effective leadership in the schools and the effective coordination between the federal, provincial, and local levels of the government.

### **Methods and Materials**

This study employed a qualitative approach and a qualitative research design in the investigation of the issue of educational equity in the context of Nepal. This research was carried out in four primary schools in the Chaubise Rural Municipality of the Dhankuta District of Nepal. Because of the constraints of time and budget, the study aimed to identify the major issues and opportunities in the provision of education in public schools in the context of the country. This study employed a purposive sampling strategy in the selection of the schools and the participants in the research. This strategy is employed in the selection of the participants who have experience and knowledge of the issues of education (Creswell, 2011). The participants of the study consisted of four head teachers, four classroom teachers, members of four SMCs, and students.

The data collection process took six months to complete. Various data collection techniques, including semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and participant observations, were used for the purpose. Interview and FGD guides, following Creswell (2011), were designed in such a way that the respondents could express their opinions in detail. Telephone calls were made to the respondents in cases where their responses were not clear. In addition to the primary data collection techniques, secondary sources of data, including government policies, educational curricula, and education policies, were also consulted to gain a better understanding of the context. Regarding the analysis of the data, the interviews, FGDs, and observations were audio-recorded after obtaining the consent of the respondents. The data was then translated into the English language from Nepali. A qualitative content analysis approach, using both interpretive and descriptive analysis, was used to identify the prominent themes in the context of educational equity. The ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents. All the research instruments were developed in simple Nepali to ensure the understanding of the research objectives by the respondents. Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of the respondents were maintained throughout the research process.

## Results and Discussion

Nepal has also made significant improvements in the promotion of access and equity in education through policy and legislative interventions. However, there are significant gaps in equity in terms of access and equity in education for the poor in the rural areas, language minorities, and marginalized caste and ethnic minorities among the students. In spite of the inclusive education ideology, the challenge of doing so with limited infrastructure and community support still defines the experience and fate of the students (UNICEF, 2022).

### Contextual Challenges and Adaptive Leadership

In the case of Nepal, challenges to promoting equity in education are mainly related to contextual factors like poverty, inaccessibility of the school's location, and the socio-cultural background of the students. In this context, adaptive leadership by head teachers and teachers is found to be crucial in promoting equity in education among the students (Bajracharya et al., 2023). Adaptive leadership in schools is the process of decision-making in the context of the situation, mobilizing resources in the local context, and working with teachers and the community in the promotion of inclusive education among the marginalized students. In the context of the situation where the head teacher said,

*In my own school, for example, equity education can only be promoted if I understand that my students have diverse challenges such as poverty, inconsistent attendance, lack of learning resources, and inconsistent support from their families. I have come to understand that being a head teacher is not about being rigid. I have realized that I can only promote equity education in my school if I can exhibit adaptive leadership. This means that I can promote equity education in my school if I can make quick decisions that can help my students succeed in life.*

Similarly, just as I would advocate for the promotion of equity education in my own school, classroom teacher reported that,

*"I work with students from diverse backgrounds with varied learning abilities. These are among the challenges I have come to understand. In my effort to promote equity education among my students, I have come to understand that I need to make adaptations depending on the realities. I have also come to understand that adaptive leadership from the management can also help in promoting equity education."*

Furthermore, one of the members of School Management Committee stated,

*"In terms of challenges, it is apparent that from the SMC perspective, challenges such as poverty, inaccessibility, and resource challenges in schools are a barrier to successful implementation of equitable education. Adaptive leadership in schools is therefore crucial in addressing this problem. This is because, by so*

*doing, it is possible for the SMC to support initiatives such as student engagement, waiving of fees, and introduction of special programs for disadvantaged students. This is because it ensures that appropriate steps are taken to ensure that every student benefits from such initiatives."*

Further, one of the students said,

*"I am facing many challenges in attending school, such as long distances, lack of learning materials, and challenges at home. I notice when teachers and school leaders adjust their approach to help us overcome these problems. For instance, when teachers adjust their methods to help us overcome our challenges, it is apparent that adaptive leadership in schools is essential in ensuring that all students learn and that everyone has a fair chance to succeed despite the challenges we face in our lives."*

These statements indicate that Students in Nepal are facing different challenges, including poverty, attendance, learning materials, distance, and family support. The conventional method of administration is not sufficient in this case, and it is necessary to possess adaptive leadership skills, including empathy and creativity. The headmasters, teachers, and SMCs are working together in order to provide the necessary support for the students in a given context, such as special lessons, remedial lessons, waiving of fees, and family support. Adaptive leadership is instrumental in implementing national policies in a given context, such as the marginalized students, in order to improve their participation and engagement.

### **Language Obstacles and the Function of Mother-Tongue**

Language barriers in schools, particularly in multilingual areas in Nepal, also affect the understanding and learning of the students since learning cannot be conducted in the mother tongue, resulting in a high repetition and drop-out rate (UNICEF, 2022). Using the mother tongue in education has also resulted in a positive impact on the learning outcomes of the students since it has helped in increasing the involvement and understanding of the students in the learning process. However, the challenges that have always limited the full implementation of mother tongue education include the lack of multilingual learning materials and the lack of teacher training in different languages. In this case, one of the head teachers reported that,

*Language has become a major barrier in the education sector since most children in schools are learning in a language that is not their mother tongue or the local language that they understand at home, and most schools are conducting lessons in either Nepali or English languages. However, the involvement of the mother tongue in the learning process has become essential in promoting equity and inclusion in the education sector.*

In the same way, classroom teacher said,

*"One of the major classroom issues is the language difference. Many of the children find it difficult to comprehend the lessons taught only in Nepali and English languages because their mother tongues are different. This is a major challenge in the classroom. Therefore, the use of the mother tongue of the students and local expressions is vital in making the lessons more understandable and inclusive in the classroom."*

Moreover, one of the members of the school management committee said,

*"From the perspective of the School Management Committee, language is a vital component in making education inclusive and equitable in the classroom." This is because there are many children who begin their education with rich mother-tongue abilities but are taught through other languages. This creates barriers in their learning and makes them less active in the classroom. Therefore, valuing local languages and mother-tongue instruction is vital not only for better understanding but also for the pursuit of equity and the inherent dignity of all learners."*

Regarding this one of the student explained,

*"I also experience difficulty in understanding what is taught by the teachers if they are taught only in the Nepali or English language if their mother tongue is different. This makes the students feel shy and also affects their self-confidence. The students may be able to understand what is taught by the teachers in their own language; however, if the students are expected to say what is taught in another language, it somehow limits the students' participation in the class. So, it would be easier for the students to learn if the teachers say their mother tongue or some local words that are commonly used by the people of the country."*

These comments indicate that the language acts as a major barrier in the way of inclusive and equitable education in the classrooms of Nepal since most of the students experience difficulty in understanding what is taught by the teachers if it is taught only in the Nepali or English language if their mother tongue is different.

### **Equity-Oriented Leadership in Practice**

Equity-oriented leadership in schools in Nepal involves the promotion of inclusion by changing the curriculum, working with the community, and supporting disadvantaged students, including girls and disadvantaged children (Bajracharya et al., 2023). This calls for creativity in that the leadership has limited resources, the schools are in remote areas, and the linguistic and cultural diversity of the environment may be a challenge. Equity-oriented leadership, including working with the community, mentoring, and working inclusively in the classroom, ensures that the policies set by the government on equity in education are realized in the schools. In this case, one of the head teachers said,

*"Equity-oriented leadership in our school involves ensuring that every student in the school gets the support that he or she needs, not the same support for everyone. It involves practical leadership that ensures that the needs of the disadvantaged, including poverty, irregular attendance, linguistic barriers, and lack of support at home, are addressed."*

In addition, the following was reported by one of the classroom teachers,

*Equity-oriented leadership in the classroom entails tailoring the classroom instruction to meet the varied needs of the students. This entails the backgrounds of the students, their level of confidence, language abilities, and the environment of the students' homes. Therefore, equity-oriented leadership is attained through the provision of equal support and the creation of an inclusive environment where there is no learner left behind.*

More over the following is reported by one of the members of the school management committee,

*From the perspective of the School Management Committee, equity-oriented leadership entails the provision of fair opportunities for all the students in the school. This is attained through the collaboration of the management and teachers with the parents in the elimination of barriers such as poverty, gender, and exclusion in the community. In practice, equity-oriented leadership entails the community and the creation of an inclusive environment where all the students are valued.*

Regarding this, as one of the students explained,

*I think equity-oriented leadership means understanding that students face different challenges in their lives and provide assistance accordingly. In this case, the students feel motivated by the assistance offered by the teacher and the school leadership in response to the challenges they face. Therefore, equity-oriented schools offer assistance to the students as individuals in a supportive environment.*

These comments indicate that the equity-oriented leadership in the schools of Nepal entails the adaptation of the curriculum and the provision of assistance to the marginalized students in the country. In this context, the leadership in the schools of Nepal has been creative in offering the solution to the challenges such as the availability of resources and the distance between the schools in the country, as well as the linguistic and cultural diversity in the country.

### **Adaptive Teaching in Resource-Constrained Settings**

This is especially true for teachers in schools that are resource-constrained and have challenges such as poverty, learning materials, and infrastructure challenges, which affect the quality of learning of the students (Khatri, 2023). In this case, teachers apply unique teaching approaches that work effectively for the students. Therefore, it is

through the use of adaptive teaching strategies that the disadvantaged and disadvantaged students are able to participate effectively in their learning. In this case, one of the head teachers said,

*In our school, adaptive teaching is essential since there are limited resources and learning needs of the students are diverse. Therefore, teachers who are able to teach effectively by changing their strategies depending on the learning materials and needs of the students are able to ensure effective participation of the students.*

In the same way, one of the classroom teachers said,

*Teaching in resource-limited settings requires creativity and continuous adaptation to respond to the diversity of students' needs. Teachers use local examples, group work, mutual support among students, and self-produced materials to make their teaching more inclusive and easier to understand." Adaptive teaching thus entails the ability of teachers to effectively use the available resources to ensure that all students, including those with difficulties, are able to actively participate in the learning process.*

In addition to this, one of the members of the school management committee said,

*From the point of view of the school management committee, adaptive teaching is important in resource-limited schools where students have various disadvantages. The creativity and responsiveness of teachers in local contexts contribute to the maintenance of equity in education and students' engagement in the learning process. Adaptive teaching thus needs to be recognized and supported as an important approach to fostering equity and fairness in education.*

In reference to this, one of the students explained,

*I have realized that it is easy to learn when teachers adjust their work according to how we have understood it and the resources we have in school. Sometimes we lack books and resources; therefore, it becomes hard for us to learn. When teachers use simple concepts and resources we have, it becomes easy for us to learn. We have learned that when teachers adjust their work according to what we have and how we understand it, it becomes easy for us to learn even in a resource-constrained school.*

These comments indicate the adaptive teaching method is crucial in the resource-constrained school setting, where the teachers use creative strategies to ensure that all the students learn. The strategies used include the use of group work, the use of the mother tongue, and the use of self-made resources.

## Commitment during Limited Formal Training

However, teachers in Nepal have demonstrated commitment towards supporting disadvantaged and marginalized students, even though they lack adequate training in inclusive and equity-based education. This was revealed by Shrestha and others in 2023. This means that the commitment of teachers in Nepal is crucial in ensuring the promotion of equity-based education, such that students continue to learn effectively despite the limited formal training of teachers in the same. In this context, one of the head teachers in the schools stated,

*The challenge to promoting equity-based education in our school is the limited formal training of teachers and head teachers in promoting equity-based education. However, the commitment of teachers to supporting disadvantaged and marginalized students is crucial in promoting equity-based education in our school. This is despite the limited formal training of teachers and head teachers in the same.*

In the same way, one of the teachers in the classroom reported,

*Even without extensive formal training on equity and inclusive education, I am committed to supporting all students, especially those with greater learning challenges. I do this by drawing upon my professional experience and knowledge of my students' backgrounds. Commitment to professional practice helps ensure that students receive attention and support, even if teachers have had little formal training in equity and inclusion.*

In addition to this, one of the members of the school management committee said,

*The School Management Committee recognizes that many teachers and school management have had little formal training in equity and inclusion in supporting students with diverse needs. However, they have demonstrated strong commitment to delivering their professional responsibilities and supporting students equitably. This is one of the greatest strengths of teachers and school management in schools in rural and disadvantaged areas.*

Moreover, one of the students stated,

*I can see that the commitment of the teachers is another major factor that contributes to our learning process, even though they are not trained. This is so because when the teachers go out of their way to ensure that we understand the work, go out of their way to assist those who need assistance, and go out of their way to boost the morale of those who need it, then we feel worthy. It is the commitment of the teachers that provides a fair learning environment for the students.*

The quotes of the students have proved that the commitment of the teachers and the administrators towards equity and inclusive education is good for the learning of the disadvantaged and marginalized students, even though the teachers and the

administrators are not trained in equity and inclusive education. The commitment of the teachers is beneficial to the learning of the disadvantaged and marginalized students. It is possible through the commitment of the teachers to the situation of the students.

### **Shared Systemic Constraints across Regions**

The systemic constraints include poverty, exclusion, lack of resources, and schools being poorly resourced, which are some of the challenges that teachers from different geographical locations of Nepal face in promoting equity education (Shrestha & Khatri, 2023). In such a case, it becomes imperative for teachers and school leaders to be innovative and adaptive in addressing the challenges faced by students even when they are faced with systemic constraints.

In such a case, one of the head teachers stated,

*The challenges facing schools in different geographical areas of Nepal are similar when it comes to equity education promotion, regardless of their geographical and social location. The systemic constraints facing schools include issues of resource constraints, teacher vacancies, school infrastructure, bureaucratic constraints, and support for disadvantaged groups, among others. To achieve equity education, there is a need for efforts to be made at the school level and to address the systemic constraints.*

In a similar way, one of the classroom teachers reported,

*Most of the challenges being experienced in education are universal, meaning that they are not restricted to a particular geographical location or region. For example, teachers are facing challenges such as overcrowding, lack of resources, students' needs, lack of support from institutions, and lack of training or expertise.*

In addition, one of the members of the school management committee reported,

*There are a number of universal systemic barriers that are being experienced across different regions of the country; for instance, there is a lack of resources in many of the schools, lack of infrastructure, lack of staff, and difficulties in addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. These are some of the systemic problems that are facing the education sector rather than a problem of individual schools; therefore, promoting equity demands commitment at both school and institutional levels.*

Moreover, one of the students said,

*Some of the learning challenges I have currently facing, such as the lack of books, lack of facilities, lack of teachers, and lack of equity, are common challenges faced by students in various schools in various geographic locations. In order for all students to have equal opportunities to learn, change is required*

*from both the teachers/schools and the system to address the common challenges faced by the students.*

From the above statements of the students, it is very clear that the numerous problems faced by the equity education initiative in Nepal, such as the lack of resources, infrastructure, teachers, and equity, are common challenges faced by the students in different locations in Nepal. It has also been realized by the teachers and students that the problems faced in the equity education initiative in Nepal are due to the systemic problems.

### **Teacher Agency and Equity**

This is particularly true for teachers in Nepal, who are able to exercise considerable agency in promoting equity by making pedagogical changes, utilizing a mother-tongue approach, and fostering close relationships with students and their communities to meet learning demands (Khatri, 2023). In essence, teacher agency-based efforts and practices are able to fill the loopholes created by the implementation of formal policies at the local level, providing disadvantaged and disadvantaged students with quality learning opportunities. In this regard, teacher agency is critical in promoting equity in learning, providing a clear case of how local efforts are able to bridge the learning gaps created by systemic barriers at disadvantaged schools. In this context, one of the head teachers stated that

*Teacher agency is also important in promoting equity since it helps teachers be proactive in catering to the needs of their students. In other words, the daily activities of teachers are important in promoting a sense of inclusiveness for all the students in the classroom. In line with the personal experience of the author as a head teacher, empowering teachers to be independent is crucial in actualizing the concept of equity in education.*

In the same way, one of the teachers in the classroom said,

*Teacher agency is the willingness and commitment to make decisions to ensure fair support for all learners, even in difficult school contexts. In the classroom, this involves adapting teaching methods, providing examples from the context, providing extra support, and creating an inclusive learning context. From my own experience, equity is not only about the right policies and curriculum but also about teachers making a difference by taking the initiative to make opportunities for students to learn.*

On the other hand, one of the members of school management committee reported,

*From the perspective of the School Management Committee, teacher agency matters in the development of educational equity. When teachers demonstrate their agency and commitment to make a difference by being flexible and taking responsibility, schools have the capacity to respond to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized students. Empowering teachers to be agentive*

*and act with confidence and commitment helps bridge the policy-practice gap to achieve a fairer and more inclusive education system.*

In addition, one of the students said,

*Teachers do extra things to ensure that all students are included. This means that if I realizes that the students do not comprehend something, he/she will clarify it to them again. This will ensure that all students are included. When teachers show initiative and genuine concern for students' learning, it makes education fairer and more supportive and inclusive of all students.*

These comments show that the importance of the teacher's agency cannot be overstated in the achievement of equity among students through empowering them to be initiative-takers for the disadvantaged students. On the other hand, empowerment with responsibility, flexibility, and commitment helps bridge the gap between policy and practice because it ensures equity in education for all students.

### **Variations in Representation and Capacity**

The variation in the representation and the capacity of the School Management Committees (SMCs) is also a crucial aspect in the implementation of equitable education, as the involvement of more people in the committees is likely to address the inequalities in the system (Shrestha & Gurung, 2022). In the case of the rural setting, the dominance of males in the committees might also contribute to the implementation of physical infrastructure rather than the needs of the disadvantaged. Thus, in the case, it has been stated by one of the head teachers of the school that,

*The effectiveness of school governance is dependent upon the representation and capacity of the people involved in the decision-making process. Inclusive leadership and diversity in the representation of the school committees have the potential to address the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized students. Therefore, it is essential to ensure the broad representation and capacity of the people in the decision-making process for the promotion of equity in education.*

Significantly, one of the teachers in the class stated,

*Differences in representation and capacity among school stakeholders have a direct impact on the extent to which the needs of the students are addressed. Schools with diverse and competent leadership are likely to address learning, inclusion, and welfare issues in a fair manner. Fair education is achieved in schools that have a representative and competent leadership.*

In order to, one of the members of the school management committee said,

*This has a direct impact on the extent to which the needs of the students are being addressed. It is likely that a school with diverse and competent leadership would address learning, inclusion, and welfare issues fairly. Fair education is achieved in schools that have a representative and competent leadership.*

In the same way, one of the students said,

*I perceive that school equity improves when leaders and committees recognize the needs of diverse students. Inclusive and equitable decision-making by representative and capable leaders make all students feel included. On the other hand, some students feel excluded if the school leadership does not represent them, thus the importance of representation and capacity in enhancing equity.*

These comments suggest that the equity in schools relies on the representation and capacity of the school leadership and committees, where inclusive leaders can address the needs of disadvantaged students. The lack of representation and capacity among school leaders and committees make some students feel excluded, thus the significance of representation in enhancing equity in schools. Schools become inclusive when the governance structure consists of diverse students, where the members have the capacity to make decisions for the students.

### **Governance and Effectiveness Constraints**

The governance and effectiveness restrictions in the school might impede the development of equitable education since the availability of resources and administrative systems is limited, and there is a lack of accountability in addressing the needs of all the students. Inadequate finance and human resources, as well as social prejudices and political interference, impede the effectiveness of the schools in utilizing their potential to address the needs of inclusive education (Khadka, 2021). Moreover, there is empirical evidence to prove that such restrictions might impede the SMCs from becoming capable of promoting educational justice in the society (Shrestha & Gurung, 2022). In such a context, one of the head teachers said,

*School administrators may also be challenged to promote equity in education due to resource constraints and issues of administration and delays in making decisions and effective support from the school system. It is essential to understand that effective and dedicated school administrators and effective school systems are required to promote equity in education.*

In the same way, one of the classroom teachers said,

*As a teacher, I have realized that poor governance and poor school systems also impact the effectiveness of the classroom directly. As a teacher, I have seen how poor school systems and poor governance impact the effectiveness of the classroom directly. Delays and poor support make it difficult for teachers to be effective in their classrooms. It is not only the teachers but also the effectiveness of the school system as a whole that impacts equity in education.*

In addition to this, one of the members of the school management committee said,

*The School Management Committees face many challenges in promoting educational equity, such as lack of resources, lack of technical knowledge, social pressures, and political interference. Good governance in the context of*

*educational equity involves empowering the management committees with the power, capacity, and support they need to perform their roles effectively..*

These quotes illustrate how the School governance and effectiveness constraints, like lack of resources, delayed decisions, and lack of support from institutions, hinder the effective implementation of education equity by schools. These constraints have a direct effect on classroom practices, making it difficult for teachers to ensure equity and support for disadvantaged students, and thus the need for effective governance, adequate resources, and empowered school management committees to ensure all students have a appropriate environment for learning.

### **Geographic Disparities and Physical Barriers**

The geographic and physical barriers have a great impact on the quality and accessibility of education, and it is not easy for the students in the remote and underserved regions to participate in the opportunities for learning. Girls have to undergo a long and hard journey to attend school. This affects the students in such regions to attend school. The high rates of dropouts from schools in such regions can also be attributed to the long and hard journey to attend school. As per the UNICEF report (2022), “Every day, 25 percent of rural children do not attend school due to issues of access.” In the context of the above, one of the head teachers mentioned,

*Geographic and physical barriers are major challenges to achieving equity in education, particularly in rural and remote regions. Long distances to travel to school, poor road conditions, and lack of transport facilities may affect the punctuality and continuity of young children and girls. In such remote and underserved regions, the quality of infrastructure and resources is also limited.*

In the same way, one of the classroom teachers said,

*As a teacher, I have realized that the geography and physical conditions have a great impact on the students’ learning. Students who have a long and hard journey to get to school attend school less often and arrive tired and therefore do not learn as much as they should not because of their own abilities. In order to promote equity in education, the geographic and physical conditions should be addressed.*

Additionally, one of the members of school management committee reported,

*From the point of view of the School Management Committee, the geographic and physical barriers to educational equity are the most challenging obstacles. In certain geographic areas, the facilities and infrastructure for sanitation and education are not good, and it becomes hard for the disadvantaged to attend school. To achieve equity in education, the geographic and physical barriers need to be addressed.*

In order to achieve this, one of the students said,

*I feel how geography and physical conditions affect our education negatively. For instance, a long and unsafe or uncomfortable trip, especially when the weather is bad or when we are in a remote area, may cause us to be tired or skip school. A just education system should consider these factors and provide more assistance to us who are affected by these conditions.*

These statements indicate that the geographic inequalities and the physical conditions, such as distance, road conditions, and absence of infrastructure, have a major impact on the students' access to education. These conditions have created inequalities in education, which have nothing to do with the potential of the students, but everything to do with the students' access to education and the conditions they are in.

### **Caste Discrimination within the Classroom**

The caste-based discriminations faced by children inside the classroom are one of the major barriers to equity in education, which ultimately affects the dignity of the child. All of these discriminations against children have a negative effect on their self-esteem, as well as on the dropout rate of Dalit children. This whole process of discrimination against Dalit children leads them into a cycle of poverty, thus depriving them of the opportunity of quality education (Koirala, 2021). In this context, one of the head teachers stated,

*Discrimination on the basis of caste within classrooms is considered to be one of the biggest hurdles for equity in education and could affect the dignity of the child. Children belonging to Dalit communities are discriminated against; for achieving equity in education, it is not sufficient to ensure that children are able to go to school; it is also important to ensure that children are not discriminated against within classrooms.*

In the same way, one of the Classroom Teachers reported,

*I have witnessed how caste discrimination impacts students' academic achievement and their self-confidence and school belongingness. It is critical for teachers to be aware of their roles and behaviors in the classroom so that an environment of inclusion and respect for all students is promoted.*

In addition to, one of the members of school management committee said

*Caste discrimination is one of the major social factors affecting equity in education. It is possible to have school policies or school regulations to prevent discrimination; however, the marginalized students may be discriminated against. It is not only necessary to have school regulations but also to raise awareness among the people and to have good leadership and commitment to social justice in education.*

These comments indicate that the impact of caste discrimination' in the classroom is negative on the 'Dignity and Confidence' of the students as it is manifested in the form

of unequal treatment and discouragement of the students belonging to the marginalized caste background. Therefore, for the promotion of 'Educational Equity' in the classroom, it is required to eradicate such practices by the teachers, the school authorities, committees, and the community as a whole to equally respect, include, and encourage all the students despite their social background.

## Conclusion

The study has shown that the issue of educational equity in Nepal is not only a commitment but also a challenge at the national level. Although Nepal has been successful in developing good constitutional, legal, and policy frameworks for promoting equitable education, it is important to strengthen their effective implementation, particularly in rural and remote areas of Nepal. This study has also shown that educational inequality is affected by the interplay of various structural, social, cultural, geographic, and institutional factors, including poverty, caste discrimination, linguistic differences, gender disparities, and remoteness of areas, lack of infrastructures and resources, and poor governance systems.

This research also reveals the need to go beyond the formulation of policies to their effective implementation and adaptation to the contexts of the areas involved in achieving equity in education. It is also essential to comprehend the contribution of school leaders, teachers, School Management Committees, and other stakeholders at the local level toward equity in education. Based on the results of the conducted study, it was revealed that adaptive leadership, equity-based governance, teacher agency, teacher professionalism, mother tongue-based instruction, inclusive teaching practices, and community engagement are essential strengths for equity in education, particularly in resource-constrained school settings. Teacher flexibility and professionalism are also essential for bridging the gap between national policies and practice.

At the same time, the research also highlights the fact that the efforts which are being made are not sufficient enough to bridge the gaps. Regarding the equity of education in Nepal, the significance of institutional support, the efficiency of the government, the development of infrastructure, the development of learning resources, the development of teachers, the eradication of discrimination, the eradication of exclusion, etc., are some of the factors. It is also clear that the voices of the marginalized learners should be placed at the core of education in Nepal. In this way, another step can be added for the formation of a just education system in Nepal.

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