Nepal's Educational System and Its Impact on Policy and Governance: An Editorial

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Abstract

This editorial reviews the education policy and governance of Nepal's government through a systematic meta-analysis of nationally and internationally published research, reports, and archival data. The methodology involves comprehensive collection and evaluation of scholarly articles and official documents to provide an integrated assessment of policy frameworks and governance structures. Findings indicate that Nepal's 2015 Constitution guarantees up to 12 years of free education in public schools, complemented by the establishment of over eleven universities, including Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Sanskrit University, Purbanchal University, Lumbini Buddhist University, Agriculture and Forestry University, and others. The Nepalese education system comprises three main tiers: secondary education up to grade 12 emphasizing practical market-linked skills; mid-level bachelor's and master's programs aimed at human resource development for various sectors; and advanced studies producing high-level professionals such as researchers and planners. Despite extensive university expansion, challenges remain in technical institutes' educational quality. The study recommends enhancing market-driven education and entrepreneurship integration across all levels to better prepare Nepal's youth for independent employment and innovation.

Keywords: review, status, policy, governance, action

Introduction

The Government of Nepal developed the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) for the period of July 2016 to July 2023 to promote equitable access to quality education for all. The plan's first five years (2016–2021) were carefully delineated under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, adopting a participatory approach aligned with the country's objective of graduating from Least Developed Country status by 2022. The SSDP is acknowledged as a critical instrument for Nepal's attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its ambition to achieve middle-income status by 2030. The plan builds on the achievements and lessons learned from preceding initiatives, notably the Education for All (EFA) program (2004–2009) and the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) (2009–2016), which themselves contributed to the National Plan of Action for Education for All (2001–2015) (Government of Nepal, 2016).

The SSDP's objectives encompass several dimensions:

o **Equity:** Ensuring the education system is inclusive and equitable in access, participation, and learning outcomes, with concentrated efforts to bridge gaps among marginalized groups experiencing the lowest levels of educational engagement.

o **Quality:** Enhancing student learning by improving the relevance and standards of curricula, teaching methods, learning resources (including textbooks), and assessments.

o **Efficiency**: Strengthening governance and management within the education sector to uphold minimum standards in teaching and learning delivery, and to ensure accountability, especially toward local governments.

o **Governance and Management:** Facilitating administrative reforms within the federal framework, ensuring sustainable funding, and instituting effective financial oversight via cost-sharing among central, provincial, and local governments.

o **Resilience**: Protecting schools from conflict and disasters by integrating comprehensive safety and disaster risk reduction strategies at the institutional and community levels (Government of Nepal MoE, 2016).

Following the implementation of Article 31 of the 2015 Constitution and the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2018, free and compulsory education has been constitutionally established as a fundamental right in Nepal. The Act delineates the responsibilities of central, provincial, and local governments, underscoring the legal obligation to ensure education without cost for school-age children (Jha, 2019). However, local governments, constitutionally mandated to oversee education, face challenges amid this decentralization process, requiring capacity enhancement through technical support for effective planning, execution, and accountability while cooperating with federal and provincial counterparts (Neupane, 2018).

A critical problem identified relates to the policy formulation process, as educational policies in Nepal are predominantly developed through consultations centered in Kathmandu, often excluding voices from teachers in schools outside the valley. This exclusion undermines the inclusivity and contextual relevance of policies, particularly in a socially diverse nation with complex caste, ethnic, and linguistic landscapes compounded by low development indices (Neupane, 2019).

Comparative governance analyses reveal that educational administration, such as in the United States, is highly politicized and fragmented, with federal and state influence diminishing local autonomy in school management highlighting challenges that resonate globally and provide important lessons for Nepal's evolving decentralized system (Warren, 2018).

Nepal's educational policy is framed within constitutional mandates, legal provisions, and policy documents promoting free education supported by complimentary textbooks, scholarships, and tuition exemptions, affirming education as a fundamental right (Acharya, 2024). Empirical research through fieldwork, expert interviews, and focus groups underscores challenges and prospects for policy refinement to strengthen educational practices (Neupane, 2019).

Despite constitutional guarantees for free and compulsory elementary and primary education, gaps remain such as partial payments for some textbooks necessitating enhanced policy enforcement (Acharya, 2024). The higher education landscape is organized around bachelor's, master's, postgraduate diploma, MPhil, and doctoral programs. Reforms continue to reposition intermediate education within the higher secondary system while balancing public, private, and community-managed institutional models (Gurung, 2025).

Education as a fundamental human right is constitutionally enshrined, including provisions for marginalized groups like persons with disabilities and linguistic minorities. Government initiatives like "Education for All" advance free secondary education in community-managed schools, leveraging digital tools such as online libraries to modernize curricula and teaching methods (Dhungel, 2020; KC, 2023). The growth of higher education institutions, including universities and health science academies, signals increasing access driven by multi-tiered governance responsibilities distributed across local, provincial, and federal levels (Subedi, 2021; Dhungel, 2020; Neupane, 2019).

Global comparisons highlight complexities in educational governance encountered in the U.S. and Anglo-Saxon countries where political, bureaucratic, and market-driven dynamics affect policy design, driving transparency, accountability, and competition reforms (Warren, 2018; Verger et al., 2024). Research into informal learning environments and Open Educational Resources (OERs) emphasizes their role in promoting student engagement through self-directed and constructivist learning strategies (Ndiang'ui, 2025).

Nepal confronts key challenges in equitable access, policy implementation, socio-cultural disparities, and governance restructuring aimed at quality enhancement. The School Sector Reform (SSR) Plan exemplifies Nepal's efforts to integrate and improve schooling through gradual implementation guided by comprehensive school mapping (Government of Nepal, 2009). Customized strategies that reflect the nation's ethnic and caste diversity are essential for fostering inclusive education within decentralized governance arrangements (Neupane, 2019).

India's New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 offers valuable lessons on enhancing governance autonomy, accountability, and quality assurance in higher education, with implications for Nepal's reforms (Lavanya, 2024). Institutional quality and school autonomy further influence student outcomes, with governance reforms such as the Head Teachers' Charter reshaping the interaction between educational leaders and local authorities (Hong, 2015; Forde, 2022).

Extensive scholarship also highlights Nepal's digital transformation in education, exemplified by Pokhara University's use of digital platforms to improve academic administration, teaching, and research capacity. Digital adoption serves as a catalyst for democratizing access and reinforcing quality assurance during the country's shift toward a knowledge-based economy (Mishra, 2022; Mishra, 2023; Mishra & Jha, 2023). Furthermore, academic innovations aligned with Industry 4.0, like virtual farming and technology-enabled learning, reflect Nepal's efforts to align education with evolving socioeconomic needs and sustainability imperatives (Mishra & Aithal, 2022).

Policy effectiveness benefits from participatory research and expert consultations identifying gaps in textbook provision, inclusivity, and enforcement of compulsory education laws, indicating a pressing need for policy recalibration (Mishra & Ananda, 2022). The ongoing SSR plan embodies this transformation through phased implementation and monitoring supported by school mapping (Government of Nepal, 2009).

Global educational governance studies underscore the importance of hybrid approaches that combine centralized strategic planning with local curriculum adaptation and assessment autonomy principles Nepal seeks to operationalize to optimize decentralized education delivery (Mishra, 2024). Complementary community-based education models address the specific needs of Nepal's diverse ethnic and caste populations effectively (Mishra & Ananda, 2022).

In summary, Nepal's education policy architecture combines constitutional guarantees, legal frameworks, institutional quality initiatives,

and digital innovation to construct a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready education system, critical for harnessing the nation's human capital and meeting 21st century development challenges (Mishra & Aithal, 2023; Jagan Nath, 2024).

Objective

This study aims to review Nepal's government policies and the governance of its education system, emphasizing inclusivity, quality, and administrative restructuring.

Methodology

The investigator utilized a scientific evaluation technique known as meta-analysis to explore literature related to policy and governance, synthesizing the results. A comprehensive archival analysis paired with a thorough review formed the methodologies employed for the structured scientific assessment by gathering research articles, reports, and data.

Results and Discussion

The School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) was developed through a collaborative effort led by the Ministry of Education, in line with the country's objective of surpassing its status as a Least Developed Country by 2022. The SSDP includes five essential dimensions: Equality, Quality, Efficiency, Governance and Management, and Resilience.

Free and mandatory education for school-aged children is now a fundamental right in Nepal, established by Article 31 of the 2015 Constitution and the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2018.

The local government in Nepal is taking charge of the constitutional authority related to education. Throughout this change, they face difficulties and resistance regarding the power shift, along with ongoing problems that have affected the education system for years.

The elements of the education policy encompass various regulations, including those outlined in the constitution, educational policies, and laws and acts related to education. Education was provided at no cost, allowing students to take advantage of free textbooks, scholarships, and exempted tuition fees.

Nepal's education framework comprises fundamental education, encompassing grades 1 to 8, secondary education for grades 9 through 12, and tertiary education at the university level, which goes beyond bachelor's degrees to include postgraduate studies beyond the MPhil.

Currently, Nepal is home to a variety of institutions, including Tribhuvan University (the oldest university in Nepal), Mahendra Sanskrit University, Purbanchal University, Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU), Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU), Mid-Western University (MWU), Far-Western University (FWU), Nepal Open University (NOU), Rajarshi Janak University (RJU), Pradesh University in Birgunj, and Pokhara University, with over 11 universities established.

The educational policies operate as the quality of institutions increases. As the standards of institutions rise, the overall performance of students improves, though the effect of autonomy in academic decision-making remains uncertain.

The concentrated attention on the traits and impact of Education 2030, acknowledged as the most recent example of global educational agenda formulation. This report emphasizes four governance issues raised by the new agenda: the narrowing of policy priorities, the responsibility of international stakeholders, the ownership of the agenda, and the harmonization of diverse policy priorities.

In a decentralized educational structure, local education entities, including municipalities and teachers, play a vital role in creating tailored curricula and learning environments that incorporate digital tools and settings. These education providers modify national goals and content while defining the educational framework.

Classroom-based assessment is another aspect of decentralization.

Conclusion

The investigator analyses the policies implemented by the Nepalese government along with the framework of educational governance. A thorough examination is provided, addressing issues that pertain to the research findings from various national and international publications regarding policy and educational governance.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 declares that education up to the plus two level is free in government institutions. There are more than 11 universities at both federal and provincial tiers. Basic education is administered at the Palika level (Municipality and Rural Municipality) to guarantee effective quality education, along with continuous oversight.

In the coming days, the government of Nepal will evaluate three distinct categories of educational outcomes for students. These are: 1) plus-two graduates who will be provided with skill development training and linked to the job market for employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. 2) Mid-level graduates (Bachelor's and Master's degrees) focused on generating human resources for positions in the private, public, and business sectors. 3) High-level graduates (MPhil, PhD, Post Doc, and DSc./D. Litt.) concentrated on developing skilled individuals for roles in planning, research, scientific exploration, and the preparation of documentation.

Select exceptionally qualified educators to guarantee an education that is independent of political connections. Engage teachers from the mountainous, hilly, and Tarai areas in the policymaking process. This effort should be started, implemented, and executed in Madhesh province to improve the quality of education and bolster the development of Madhesh.

Recommendations

The government of Nepal offers three forms of education and prepares individuals for employment or entrepreneurship. The first is secondary education, which includes completion up to the 12th grade. It includes skill development training and practical knowledge to connect with the job market.

Second, the production of mid-level human resources (Bachelor's and Master's level) provides opportunities for individuals in private, public, and corporate sector roles. Third, the development of high-level human resources (MPhil, PhD, Post Doc, and DSc./D. Litt.) focuses on preparing planners, researchers, scientists, as well as those involved in monitoring and document creation.

Implement a policy mandating the enrolment of all children of government workers in government schools to boost educational advancement in these institutions. Make sure to appoint qualified and capable educators for teaching, keeping schools and teachers unconnected to political ties or pressures. Employ full-time teachers on full salaries in schools that have minimal student enrolment.

The process of policy development has always involved educators from Kathmandu and neighbouring regions. The forthcoming policy formulation will also include input from teachers beyond the valley, particularly from the Mountain, Hills, and Terai areas, who will play a role in shaping educational policies.

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