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KMC Journal is a refereed journal which adopts a rigorous process of screening, reviewing, editing and proofreading. The editorial board makes the first decision regarding the submitted articles as the first step of the review process. The board can reject the articles if they do not meet the author guidelines. Accepted articles are sent to two anonymous reviewers for review. Papers are accepted for review on the understanding that they have not been published or accepted for publication elsewhere. If the reviewers recommend the article for publication with some feedback, the reviewed articles are sent back to the concerned authors to revise addressing the comments and feedback of the reviewers. Finally, the editorial board makes the decision whether to publish the revised article or reject. The journal does not take any charge for publication. The Research Management Cell of Kailali Multiple Campus bears all the expenses.

KMC Journal, Volume 7, Issue 2 includes 23 research-based articles from English education, English literature, Education, Management, Science and Humanities. All these empirical papers have been published after undergoing the rigorous processes of reviewing, editing and proofreading. We believe that all these articles will be fruitful for the practitioners in the concerned disciplines around the globe. We request to all the valued readers, academicians and scholars to contribute by being published in the coming issues of this journal.

We express our sincere gratitude to all the authors for their appreciable contribution. We are thankful to our valued reviewers for their scholarly work and support to the Editorial Team throughout the process. We are grateful to the Research Management Cell of Kailali Multiple Campus for the publication of the journal.

Happy Reading!

Editor-in-Chief

KMC Journal

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Developing Writing Competence through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Multilingual Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal's secondary classrooms are rich in linguistic and cultural diversity. However, traditional writing instruction frequently overlooks students' lived experiences and multilingual backgrounds. In this regard, this study examines how culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) can enhance writing competence by integrating students' home languages, local knowledge, and cultural narratives into classroom practices. The purpose is to assess the impact of CRP-based strategies on students' writing skills, engagement, and sense of identity. Drawing on pilot interventions conducted in three districts, the study involved classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of student writing samples. Learners participated in writing tasks that encouraged the use of their mother tongues and community storytelling traditions. Results show that students produced more coherent, expressive, and structurally diverse texts. Teachers also reported a shift toward more interactive and meaningful writing instruction, leading to increased student motivation and participation. The findings demonstrate that CRP not only improves grammatical accuracy and genre understanding but also fosters a deeper sense of ownership and confidence in writing. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for curriculum and policy reforms that recognize linguistic diversity and cultural heritage as essential resources for effective writing instruction.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity, multilingual education, cultural identity, linguistic empowerment

Introduction

Nepal is a multilingual and multicultural country with 124 distinct mother tongues and 142 caste and ethnic groups (National Statistics Office, 2023; Saud, 2024).

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Despite this rich multilingual landscape, educational practices particularly in writing instruction continue to reflect a predominantly monolingual orientation, privileging Nepali and English as the primary languages of instruction. This narrow linguistic focus often marginalizes the home languages and cultural expressions of students from indigenous, rural, and historically underrepresented communities. As a result, many learners experience a disjunction between their lived experiences and the content and form of academic writing tasks. This disconnection can lead to feelings of exclusion, reduced engagement, and persistent underachievement in literacy development, particularly among students whose linguistic and cultural identities are not reflected in the classroom.

This systemic privileging of dominant languages such as Nepali and English not only erodes students' confidence but also delegitimizes their home languages and cultural narratives. By reinforcing a hierarchy of knowledge that prioritizes standardized linguistic norms over local epistemologies, the education system marginalizes the diverse voices of learners. Writing, within such a framework, is often reduced to a mechanistic exercise emphasizing grammar and correctness, rather than a creative, reflective process rooted in personal voice and cultural relevance. This model fails to engage students meaningfully, particularly those whose linguistic repertoires are excluded from mainstream curricula. As Phyak (2013) notes, many children are compelled to write in languages that do not reflect their home experiences, rendering writing a disconnected and disempowering activity. This linguistic misalignment hinders students' ability to express themselves authentically and diminishes their emotional and cognitive investment in learning. Consequently, writing instruction that ignores students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds risks alienating them from the very act of literacy it seeks to cultivate.

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) presents a transformative alternative to this deficit-oriented model. Initially developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) and later expanded by Geneva Gay (2010), CRP emphasizes the importance of using students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and language practices as essential tools for learning. When applied to writing instruction, CRP encourages teachers to view cultural diversity not as a barrier but as a resource for enhancing literacy. By integrating local stories, oral traditions, and multilingual strategies into the classroom, educators can empower students to write from a place of authenticity, thereby fostering deeper engagement, improved linguistic competence, and the affirmation of cultural identity. This paper explores how CRP can be meaningfully implemented to strengthen writing development in Nepal's multilingual education system, with a focus on equity, inclusion, and educational justice.

Literature Review

In recent decades, increasing attention to educational equity and inclusion has led to the widespread adoption of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), particularly in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms. CRP emphasizes the integration of students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and identities into the teaching and learning process, with significant implications for academic achievement, identity development, and the cultivation of critical consciousness. In the context of writing instruction, CRP aligns closely with sociocultural theories of learning, highlighting how students' linguistic and cultural repertoires can be meaningfully harnessed to enhance engagement, creativity, and communicative competence. This literature review examines the theoretical foundations of CRP and its evolution into culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP), focusing specifically on its application within multilingual writing classrooms. By synthesizing key studies and frameworks, this review aims to illuminate the pedagogical potential of CRP and CSP in transforming writing instruction to be more inclusive, empowering, and responsive to diverse learners.

CRP is a transformative educational approach that emphasizes the centrality of students' cultural identities in shaping meaningful learning experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) conceptualizes CRP as a framework that empowers learners intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by embedding cultural referents into the teaching of knowledge, skills, and values. Rather than viewing students' cultural backgrounds as barriers, CRP recognizes them as critical assets that enrich classroom instruction. Gay (2010) further defines CRP as the practice of using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as essential tools for more effective teaching. This pedagogical orientation not only supports academic achievement but also fosters students' critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness (Paris & Alim, 2017; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Together, these perspectives underscore the transformative potential of CRP in promoting inclusive, equitable, and culturally affirming education.

Gay's (2010) model of CRP emphasizes the importance of embedding students' cultural knowledge, lived experiences, and worldviews into the curriculum to create more meaningful, inclusive, and accessible learning environments. By affirming students' identities and making instruction culturally relevant, this approach not only strengthens academic engagement but also fosters a deeper connection between learners and the content being taught. Expanding on this foundation, Villegas and Lucas (2002) argue that CRP functions not only as a strategy for improving academic performance but also as a powerful vehicle for cultivating students' critical consciousness. Through culturally responsive teaching, students are encouraged to recognize, question, and challenge social inequalities, thereby developing the analytical tools necessary to

engage with issues of power, privilege, and injustice. This pedagogical orientation positions learners not merely as recipients of knowledge, but as active agents capable of transforming oppressive structures within their schools, communities, and broader society. In doing so, CRP contributes to a more equitable and socially just education system that values diversity as a strength rather than a deficit.

In the context of writing instruction, CRP aligns closely with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that cognitive development is socially mediated and deeply rooted in cultural and linguistic contexts. Vygotsky argues that higher-order thinking skills emerge through dialogic interactions and scaffolded support within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Consequently, writing should be understood not merely as an isolated cognitive task but as a socially and culturally situated practice (Moll et al., 1992; Wertsch, 1991). When educators intentionally incorporate students' linguistic repertoires and cultural narratives into writing instruction, they validate students' identities, enhance engagement, and promote a stronger sense of agency in the writing process (González et al., 2005). This approach transforms writing into a collaborative and meaningful activity, fostering both academic competence and personal expression.

Recent scholarship in literacy education has shifted toward Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP), which extends the principles of CRP by emphasizing the ongoing support and development of students' cultural and linguistic identities (Paris, 2012). This pedagogical evolution reflects a nuanced understanding of culture as dynamic and ever-changing, necessitating instructional approaches that not only validate students' backgrounds but also equip them with critical literacy skills to engage with and transform cultural narratives (Alim & Paris, 2014). As such, embedding CRP and by extension, CSP into writing instruction contributes not only to academic success but also to the cultivation of students as critical thinkers and agents of social change.

Methods and Procedures

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, enriched by elements of action research, to examine how culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) influences writing competence in multilingual classrooms in Nepal. The case study design enables an in-depth, contextually grounded exploration of how teachers integrate students' cultural identities, mother tongues, and community narratives into writing instruction. By focusing on a purposively selected group of schools that reflect Nepal's linguistic and cultural diversity, the study aims to capture the lived realities of both educators and learners as they navigate and negotiate CRP practices. Data collection involves classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students,

and analysis of student writing samples, allowing for triangulated insights into the pedagogical process.

Action research principles are embedded within the case study framework to facilitate collaborative inquiry and reflective practice. Through cycles of planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, teachers co-develop and test CRP-based writing strategies in real-time classroom settings. This integration of action research enhances the case study by promoting iterative adaptation and responsiveness to local needs, while also positioning educators as co-researchers in the pedagogical transformation. The combination of case study and action research is particularly effective for investigating complex, situated phenomena such as writing development in multilingual contexts, as it allows for both descriptive depth and practical intervention. Together, these methodologies provide a robust framework for understanding and improving writing instruction through culturally responsive approaches.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the findings from the study and offers a detailed discussion of how culturally responsive pedagogy impacts writing competence in Nepal's multilingual secondary classrooms. Drawing on qualitative data collected through classroom observations, interviews, and student writing samples, this analysis highlights the ways in which integrating students' cultural identities, home languages, and local narratives influences their engagement, writing quality, and sense of agency. The discussion contextualizes these results within existing theoretical frameworks and prior research, exploring both the successes and challenges encountered in implementing CRP strategies. Through this lens, the study elucidates the transformative potential of culturally grounded writing instruction while also addressing the complexities and constraints faced by educators and learners in diverse linguistic settings.

The implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy in Nepal's multilingual classrooms demonstrated a significant positive impact on students' engagement with writing tasks. Classroom observations and interviews revealed that when students were encouraged to incorporate their home languages and cultural narratives into writing assignments, their participation and enthusiasm visibly increased. For example, one teacher from a public school named Adarsha Secondary School, Madhyapur Thimi, Bhaktapur remarked, "When students write stories from their own culture, they become more excited and confident about sharing their ideas" (Teacher Interview, March 2025). A student from the same school similarly shared, "Writing in my mother tongue makes me feel that my voice matters" (Student Interview, March 2025). These testimonies align with Ladson-Billings's (1995) framework, which argues that students who see their cultural identities reflected in learning materials develop stronger motivation and

connection to the content. Similarly, Gay (2010) emphasizes that culturally relevant pedagogy fosters emotional and cognitive investment by validating students' lived experiences.

Beyond engagement, students' writing quality improved notably when CRP principles were applied. Analysis of student writing samples showed richer narrative structures, increased use of culturally specific idioms, and greater linguistic complexity, especially when students were allowed to write in their mother tongues or engage in translanguaging practices. One teacher from private school named Orbit English School, Madhyapur Thimi, Bhaktapur observed, "I noticed that when children use their home languages alongside Nepali, their writing became more expressive and meaningful" (Teacher Interview, April 2025). These findings support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which posits that cognitive development—including writing competence—is mediated by cultural and linguistic tools embedded in social interaction. González et al. (2005) further argue that leveraging students' cultural resources enhances both identity affirmation and academic skill development. The study's findings reinforce this notion, showing that culturally grounded writing instruction fosters both narrative depth and genre awareness, contributing to more authentic and confident writing.

A critical outcome of the study was the empowerment students experienced through CRP-informed writing instruction. Many learners expressed a stronger sense of agency and ownership over their texts, as they were no longer required to suppress their linguistic identities in favor of dominant languages. One student of Orbit English School, Madhyapur Thimi, Bhaktapur noted, "For the first time, I feel proud to write stories that reflect my life and traditions" (Student Interview, April 2025). Teachers also reported a shift toward more student-centered and dialogic classroom dynamics, with one commenting, "Our role changed from correcting grammar to facilitating meaningful conversations about culture and identity through writing" (Teacher Interview, March 2025). This echoes Villegas and Lucas's (2002) emphasis on CRP as a means to foster critical consciousness and challenge traditional power relations in schooling. These voices illustrate how CRP enhances not only writing skills but also identity affirmation and socio-emotional development.

Despite these promising results, the study uncovered several challenges in operationalizing CRP in Nepal's educational context. Resource constraints, including limited availability of culturally relevant materials and insufficient teacher training on CRP, hindered the full realization of its potential. One teacher from public school named Bal Premi Secondary School, Madhyapur Thimi, Bhaktapur reflected, "I want to teach in a culturally responsive way, but I don't have enough resources or training to do it effectively" (Teacher Interview, May 2025). Moreover, systemic pressures to prioritize Nepali and English for national examinations created tensions that discouraged the extensive use of mother tongues in writing instruction. These obstacles reflect broader

issues documented in multilingual education research, where institutional policies and dominant language ideologies often marginalize minority languages (Cummins, 2001; Hornberger, 2003). Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms that align policy, teacher development, and curriculum design with the goals of linguistic inclusivity and cultural responsiveness.

In light of these findings, this study underscores the importance of integrating CRP strategies into writing pedagogy to support multilingual learners effectively. Practices such as mother tongue scaffolding, community-based writing projects, and reflective classroom dialogues emerged as particularly effective in promoting linguistic empowerment and writing competence. One student from Bal Premi Secondary School shared, “Working on stories from my village helped me see that my culture is important in school too” (Student Interview, April 2025). However, sustainable implementation depends on policy support, professional development, and the production of culturally relevant teaching resources. Aligning with Moll et al.’s (1992) advocacy for funds of knowledge, educational stakeholders must recognize and build upon the rich cultural and linguistic assets students bring to the classroom. Ultimately, this approach has the potential to transform writing instruction in Nepal, making it more inclusive, engaging, and empowering for all learners.

Case Example

A Writing Workshop in a Limbu Community School

In a pilot writing workshop conducted in a primary school in eastern Nepal, students were encouraged to write short poems and stories in both Nepali and Limbu. One child wrote a story about her grandmother’s weaving practice—a narrative deeply rooted in her ethnic heritage. The integration of her home language and cultural knowledge allowed the student to weave a rich and vivid narrative that transcended the constraints of standardized writing tasks. She described intricate weaving techniques passed down through generations, reflecting not only her linguistic fluency in Limbu but also her profound connection to cultural traditions. Her work, which would typically have been limited by a formulaic approach to writing in Nepali, became a powerful and coherent expression of identity and family history. This example highlights the potential of culturally responsive pedagogy to bridge the gap between academic expectations and students’ lived experiences, demonstrating how culturally situated writing tasks can lead to more authentic and expressive outcomes.

A Writing Workshop in a Magar Community School

In a school located in the hill regions of Nepal, a similar workshop was conducted with students from the Magar community. The students were asked to write about the significance of the Magar New Year (Maghe Sankranti), incorporating both their personal experiences and cultural practices surrounding the festival. One student,

deeply engaged in the task, wrote about the preparation of traditional food, the rituals involved, and the sense of unity that the festival brings to the community. The student's narrative, written in Nepali, was enriched with Magar vocabulary and descriptions of local customs, which would not have been possible in a purely monolingual writing context. The student's writing, far more detailed and evocative than typical classroom essays, reflected a deep understanding and connection to cultural heritage. This example underscores how CRP allows students to express their cultural identities in their writing, fostering a sense of pride and belonging while simultaneously enhancing language and writing skills.

A Writing Workshop in a Chepang Community School

In another pilot workshop held in a remote Chepang community in central Nepal, students were tasked with writing about the significance of the forest in their daily lives—an essential aspect of Chepang culture and livelihood. One student wrote a compelling piece about the traditional methods of hunting and gathering, describing the forest as a place of both sustenance and spiritual connection. This story, deeply embedded in the student's cultural context, was far richer and more vivid than typical assignments in Nepali, which often lacked such cultural depth. The use of the Chepang language in preliminary drafts allowed the student to fully articulate their experiences, which were then translated into Nepali, preserving the cultural nuances. Through this exercise, the student not only honed their writing skills but also engaged in a form of cultural storytelling that affirmed their identity and heritage. The success of this workshop exemplifies the power of CRP to foster an environment where students can express themselves freely, strengthening both their cultural understanding and literacy skills.

The pilot writing workshops conducted in Limbu, Magar, and Chepang community schools in Nepal vividly demonstrate the transformative potential of culturally responsive pedagogy in multilingual classroom settings. By encouraging students to write in both Nepali and their respective mother tongues, these workshops enabled learners to draw deeply on their cultural knowledge and lived experiences, producing narratives rich in detail, emotional resonance, and cultural significance. For example, a Limbu student's story about her grandmother's traditional weaving, a Magar student's reflection on the Maghe Sankranti festival, and a Chepang student's vivid depiction of forest life all illustrate how CRP fosters authentic self-expression and reinforces cultural identity. These culturally grounded writing tasks not only heightened students' engagement and motivation but also challenged prevailing notions of linguistic diversity as an obstacle to literacy development. By validating students' home languages and cultural practices, CRP cultivated inclusive learning environments in which writing served as both a tool for academic advancement and a means of cultural affirmation, effectively bridging the divide between standardized curricula and students' sociocultural realities.

Implications for Educational Policy and Pedagogical Practice

To genuinely transform writing pedagogy in Nepal and ensure equitable opportunities for all students to develop their writing competence, comprehensive educational policy reforms are imperative. Foremost among these is the development and institutionalization of multilingual curricula that actively incorporate students' home languages alongside dominant languages such as Nepali and English. This multilingual approach is vital not only for preserving and promoting linguistic diversity but also for advancing cognitive development and academic achievement. Research consistently shows that allowing students to engage with their full linguistic repertoires facilitates deeper comprehension, more nuanced thinking, and richer expressive abilities in writing (Cummins, 2001; García & Wei, 2014). For Nepal's diverse classrooms, multilingual curricula would bridge the linguistic divide, enabling students to connect formal education with their lived realities.

Implementing such curricula necessitates a fundamental overhaul of existing teaching materials to authentically represent Nepal's cultural and linguistic heterogeneity. Textbooks, learning aids, and digital resources must be enriched with examples drawn from a wide array of indigenous languages, oral histories, and community traditions. By embedding these cultural references, educational materials can foster students' cultural pride and identity affirmation, thereby narrowing the disconnect between students' home experiences and school-based literacy practices. Such culturally inclusive content is essential for creating learning environments where students feel seen, valued, and motivated to engage meaningfully with writing tasks.

Equally critical is the prioritization of sustained professional development programs that equip teachers with the pedagogical expertise and cultural competence necessary for effective implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy. Teachers must be prepared not only to recognize but to honor the linguistic and cultural identities of their students as foundational assets in the learning process. As Gay (2010) asserts, "Culturally responsive teaching demands that educators understand, respect, and utilize the cultural frames of reference of their students" (p. 35). Professional development should emphasize practical strategies for integrating students' personal and communal experiences into writing instruction such as incorporating local narratives, oral traditions, and community knowledge by transforming writing from a decontextualized exercise into a meaningful, identity-affirming practice.

Moreover, educational policies must reconceptualize writing as a powerful form of self-expression and identity construction rather than merely a tool for assessment. Encouraging students to explore and articulate their own stories through writing fosters a greater sense of agency, ownership, and intrinsic motivation (Paris & Alim, 2017). This shift aligns with culturally sustaining pedagogy's goal of not only validating students' cultural identities but actively nurturing their ongoing linguistic

and cultural growth. By fostering writing as a creative, reflective, and socially relevant act, educators can cultivate learners' confidence and critical consciousness, ultimately enhancing both academic success and socio-emotional development.

To sum up, transforming writing pedagogy in Nepal requires coordinated policy efforts that integrate multilingual curricula, culturally relevant teaching materials, and comprehensive teacher training. Such reforms must be underpinned by a commitment to viewing students' cultural and linguistic diversity as educational strengths rather than obstacles. By embracing these principles, Nepal's education system can create more inclusive, empowering, and effective writing instruction that honors students' identities while preparing them for academic and civic participation in an increasingly interconnected world.

Conclusion

Developing writing competence in Nepal's multilingual classrooms requires pedagogical approaches that genuinely recognize and incorporate students' linguistic and cultural assets. The findings of this study reveal that traditional writing instruction often grounded in standardized, monolingual norms frequently marginalizes students who speak minority languages or come from culturally distinct communities. Such approaches fail to reflect students' lived realities, leading to disengagement and limited progress in writing. In contrast, the implementation of writing tasks that encouraged the use of home languages, community narratives, and local cultural knowledge significantly increased student participation and engagement. Learners responded enthusiastically to assignments based on storytelling, oral histories, and culturally relevant themes, as these allowed them to write with authenticity and personal investment. These results suggest that when students are empowered to use their full linguistic repertoires, they develop a stronger sense of voice, ownership, and confidence in their writing abilities.

Moreover, the study's discussions underscore that when instruction affirms students' identities and cultural backgrounds, writing evolves from a mechanical task into a dynamic means of self-expression and cultural affirmation. Students reported feeling more connected to writing activities when they could incorporate elements of their daily lives, traditions, and languages by indicating a deeper emotional and intellectual engagement with the process. This connection not only enhanced their academic growth but also fostered a stronger sense of agency and pride in their heritage. The observed improvements in writing fluency, creativity, and coherence among participants further affirm the potential of culturally grounded instruction to enhance writing competence. By centering education on students' lived experiences

and linguistic diversity, educators can create inclusive, empowering classrooms where all learners are equipped to thrive both academically and socially. Thus, these findings point to the urgent need for policy and curriculum reforms that institutionalize culturally responsive writing practices across Nepal's diverse educational settings.

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Enacting Anti-Discriminatory Pedagogy in Compulsory English Classrooms in Grades XI and XII in Nepal: Challenges and Possibilities

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Abstract

This study argues that the pedagogy in compulsory English classrooms for grades XI and XII in Nepal can be reoriented to actively promote justice by challenging the social problem of untouchability and caste-based discrimination experienced by the Dalits, the assumed lowest caste. The study has two objectives: to critically review legal provisions and compulsory English textbooks of grades XI and XII by tracing the caste issues, and to theorize and propose the possibilities of implementing anti-oppressive pedagogy in those classrooms. While achieving those objectives, this paper performs content analysis of the constitutional/legal provisions, the curriculum, and compulsory English textbooks from the theoretical perspective of critical pedagogy and multiliteracies. The analysis reveals that the prescribed compulsory English textbooks for grades XI and XII are neutral about the caste discrimination experiences of the Dalit identities. Therefore, this study proposes and exemplifies a possibility of pedagogical interventions against the caste discrimination faced by the Dalits. Hence, this study advocates for integrating anti-discriminatory pedagogical approaches to foster critical consciousness among students, and proposes to promote social harmony and justice across the nation.

Keywords: Caste, untouchability, the Dalits, social justice, teaching English

Introduction

This study explores and advocates for strategies to integrate discussions of caste issues into the compulsory English classrooms in grades XI and XII in Nepal,

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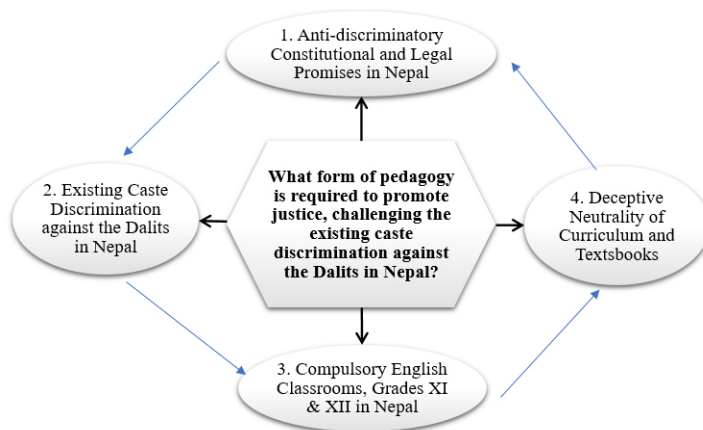
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empowering students to challenge and disrupt the discourses and practices of caste-based discrimination. As a qualitative study, it mainly seeks to promote justice by addressing caste-based discrimination experienced by the Dalit communities, who are often categorized and marginalized as ‘low caste’ in Nepal. Despite being legally outlawed and punishable, caste-based discrimination continues to persist, with the Dalits frequently subject to treatment as ‘untouchable.’ To achieve this goal, the study draws on the theoretical frameworks of critical pedagogy (Freire, 2014) and multiliteracy pedagogy (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015) to analyze and interpret the qualitative data.

This study’s qualitative data comprise legal and constitutional provisions against caste discrimination, the curriculum, and primarily two English textbooks: *English (Grade 11)* (2020) and *English Grade 12* (2021). By critically examining these materials, the study proposes some innovative and justice-oriented pedagogical strategies that educators can implement to foster critical consciousness and advance social justice, disrupting the caste-based discrimination that some Dalit communities continue to endure in Nepal. Although Nepal’s current constitution envisions the establishment of social justice through the protection of citizens’ dignity and rights, along with the eradication of all forms of discrimination, including casteism, the actualization of these ideals has remained incomplete. However, despite these theoretical promises, the policies, programs, and practices embedded within the compulsory English curriculum for grades XI and XII have inadequately addressed systemic caste-based discrimination discourses and practices. In response to this gap, the study advocates for integrating critical and multiliteracy pedagogies in these classrooms. Hence, this study highlights the need for a pedagogical shift in compulsory English classrooms to better align with the country’s constitutional vision of social justice and equity. The conceptual framework guiding this study has been presented as follows:

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Based on this conceptual framework, our paper is an attempt to answer the following research question:

1. In what ways can compulsory English pedagogy in grades XI and XII be designed to disrupt discrimination against the Dalits in Nepal?

To investigate the concerns of this research question, this study explores the *why* and *how* of introducing and applying critical and multiliteracy pedagogies in teaching *English (Grade 11)* (2020) and *English Grade 12* (2021). The objective is to spark dialogue and engage the educational discourse community in Nepal on this crucial topic. In addressing these pedagogical issues, we consciously reflect on our positionality as non-Dalits and approach the subject with critical reflexivity and a commitment to honesty, avoiding distortions or stereotypes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To strengthen our analysis, we employ triangulation by drawing on multiple data sources and theoretical frameworks (Flick, 2018). The texts include legal documents, newspaper articles, curriculum materials, and textbooks, whereas the theoretical insights include critical and multiliteracy pedagogy.

Literature Review

This section positions our study within the broader discourse of alternative pedagogy in Nepal, focusing on caste, untouchability, and educational reform. Nepal is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural country. However, the Dalits, mainly from the rural parts of the country, remain the most marginalized group, often treated unlawfully as an ‘untouchable’ caste. As stated in *National Population and Housing Census 2021 (National Report)* (2023), the Dalits comprise 13.8% of the population. Despite legal protections, they sometimes face exclusion from basic social functions, including temple entry, access to public water sources, and inter-caste marriage. With Nepal’s lowest human development index, the Dalits experience gross violations of human rights and dignity (Dahal et al., 2002; Sob, 2012; Kharel, 2010). The caste-based social hierarchy—Brahmin, Chhetri, Vaishya, and Shudra—is responsible for the perpetuation of discrimination and hindering development, as reported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005). The report of ILO also highlights that caste-based discrimination in Nepal violates both the ILO Convention 1958 and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). It emphasizes the need to eliminate discrimination in the workplace and society, ensuring that Dalits can live and work with “freedom, equity, security, and dignity” (Consult, 2005, p. xi). Consequently, addressing discrimination for justice, freedom, and equality must include reforms in educational materials and pedagogical practices. In addition, existing research corroborates this urgency. Folmar (2007),

who studied untouchability and the Dalit issues in Nepal since 1979, notes that while the Dalits strive to blur caste boundaries in political participation, the elimination of discrimination will be “slow and painful” due to entrenched beliefs and practices (p. 51).

In addition, the revised curriculum for grades XI and XII, developed under the *Secondary Education (Grade 11 & 12) Curriculum, 2076* (2020), aims to cultivate students as responsible citizens who uphold human values and democratic culture and contribute to building an equitable society. Despite these progressive goals, the Dalits continue to face systemic discrimination that demonstrates a gap between curricular ideals and societal realities. The compulsory English curriculum in grades XI and XII plays a significant role. As stated in the curriculum, “For some students, secondary education serves as a basis for preparation for university education, whereas for some other students, it may be a preparation for entry into the world of work” p. 35). Thus, it serves as a foundation for university education entrance and prepares them for the workforce. It is evident that compulsory English is mandatory for all students, regardless of their chosen streams and disciplines. This makes the course a critical transition point that equips students for higher education or professional life. Therefore, addressing caste-based discrimination through education becomes a social and pedagogical exigency.

Advocating for social justice through pedagogy has become an increasingly prominent trend, particularly in the Western academic context. First-Year Composition (FYC) courses in North American universities frequently incorporate social issues into writing instruction as part of this broader movement. A notable example is the *Ferguson Syllabus*, a movement that emerged in response to the police killing of Michael Brown on August 9, 2014. This initiative offers a powerful model for integrating social justice concerns into the classroom. McCoy’s “Writing for Justice in First-Year Composition” (2020) builds upon the principles of the *Ferguson Syllabus*, promoting the incorporation of social justice themes in FYC courses to empower students to critically engage with systemic inequalities and real-world challenges that affect marginalized communities. This framework is particularly relevant for addressing caste-based discrimination through the application of critical pedagogy in Nepal’s compulsory English curriculum as well, where similar pedagogical approaches can be proposed to foster critical awareness and advocacy for social equity.

Furthermore, scholars have also explored how English teachers in Nepal can implement alternative pedagogy to promote justice and combat caste discrimination. For example, Sharma and Phyak (2017) argue that critical pedagogy must strike a balance to achieve social transformation, which can be accomplished by developing appropriate teaching materials, workshops, and dialogues. They state that “Nepal continues to endure multiple layers of inequalities in terms of economy, ethnicity/caste,

class, and gender,” necessitating “teachers’ critical awareness” (p.215). Unfortunately, their case study concludes that both critical pedagogy and critical awareness are lacking in Nepal. Other research has highlighted the need for English classrooms in Nepal to integrate English language texts with local contexts. Tin’s (2014) ethnographic observations of English classrooms in Nepal reveal that curriculum innovation and improvement require an understanding of interactions both inside and outside the classroom. Tin argues: “until we know what really happens between people inside and outside the classroom, curriculum innovation and improvement cannot succeed” (p. 415). This suggests the need to engage compulsory English classrooms in Nepal with socio-cultural issues and exigencies. Therefore, our paper addresses the issue of caste-based inequality and discrimination within English classes, as outlined in the research question.

Theoretical Framework: Critical and Multiliteracy Pedagogy

This study draws on two key theoretical perspectives—critical pedagogy and multiliteracy pedagogy—as both are relevant approaches for fostering social justice and addressing caste discrimination in Nepal’s compulsory English classrooms.

Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a form of teaching that aims to liberate students by imparting critical consciousness against social injustices and discrimination. Reflecting on Paulo Freire’s (2014) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Cho (2012) notes that critical pedagogy can lead to a “transformation of consciousness from an acceptance of oppression/reality to a belief that reality can be changed” (p. 80). It advocates for directing education that challenges oppression and promotes social transformation. Freire contrasts the banking model of education, which reinforces passivity, with problem-posing education, which encourages active dialogue, critical reflection, and a transformative approach to reality. Moreover, the Freirean problem-posing pedagogy is a form of critical pedagogy that “affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming” (p. 84) in pursuit of ideals such as liberation, justice, peace, and progress. In this framework, education becomes a dialogic process in which teachers and students co-create knowledge, fostering liberation and justice. Our study applies Freirean critical pedagogy to explore how dialogic engagement and critical reflection can be integrated into compulsory English classrooms in Nepal to address caste-based discrimination and promote equity.

Freire’s problem-posing education emphasizes three essential preconditions for dialogue: “love for the world and for people” (p. 89), “humility” (p. 90), and “an

intense faith in humankind” (p. 91). This authentic education is driven by real-world challenges that engage both teachers and students, allowing them to critique and transform their surroundings collaboratively. Bhattacharya (2020) highlights that this model encourages students to reflect on their communities and beliefs, questioning the status quo (p. 404). Freire’s pedagogy is thus defined by an openness to rethinking, a rejection of passivity, and the promotion of critical reflection and dialogue (Darder, 2014). In this study, we examine how these principles of Freirean pedagogy can be integrated into Nepal’s compulsory English classrooms for grades XI and XII, to foster social justice and transformative learning experiences concerning the theme of casteism.

Pedagogy of Multiliteracy

The pedagogy of multiliteracy, as discussed by Cope and Kalantzis (2015), extends beyond traditional literacy approaches by integrating multimodal texts and considering diverse social, cultural, and technological contexts and concerns. This approach enhances teaching and learning by “bringing multimodal texts, particularly those typical of new digital media, into the curriculum and classroom” (p. 3). These authors outline four key pedagogical practices: situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. These practices are found to be effective tools for cultivating critical consciousness and reflexivity among students, with teachers acting as designers who incorporate multimodal and contextually relevant issues to engage students and foster critical agency.

Multiliteracy pedagogy incorporates various forms of literacies and multimodalities into teaching and learning practices. It aligns with reflexive pedagogy, emphasizing “regular returns to student lifeworld experiences” to facilitate the analysis of diverse perspectives and the purpose of knowledge (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 15). A central concept in this approach is ‘identification,’ or ‘Experiencing the Known,’ which involves “a conscious, introspective focus on social and environmental conditions of experience” (p. 24). This positions students as critical agents in their learning. In this model, teachers are seen as designers who “select a range of activities . . . to bring to the learning environment, plan their sequence, and reflect on learning outcomes during and after the learning” (p. 31). The goal is to create classroom activities that are purposefully aligned with educational objectives, with learning seen as a process of “using multimodal media to externalize [and refine] our thinking” (p. 32).

The concept of multiliteracy, introduced by The New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), broadens traditional representations of literacy to include “the visual, audio, gestural, and spatial semiotic systems”, which are “more dynamic and flexible” and extend beyond rigid language rules (p. 10). This multivocal approach enables students

to transcend the limitations of text-based language. It encompasses “multiple literacies and literate practices, as well as a growing variety of new texts and technologies” (Bull & Anstey, 2019, p. 7). Consequently, multiliteracy pedagogy accommodates new cultural and technological developments within the classroom. This study employs a multiliteracy pedagogy approach, combined with critical pedagogy, to propose a teaching method that addresses social justice through a critical and multimodal lens in Nepal’s compulsory English classrooms for Grades X and XI. This integrated framework informs our exploration of alternative pedagogies designed to disrupt caste-based discrimination.

Methods and Procedures

This study is based on the qualitative research method. The philosophical assumptions guiding this qualitative inquiry reflect the researcher’s perspective (Creswell, 2007) throughout the research process. Ontologically, this study aligns with constructivism (Bryman, 2012), asserting that caste is a socially constructed category. Epistemologically, the study adopts an interpretive stance grounded in the belief that qualitative researchers must “grasp the subjective meaning of social actions” within a given context (p. 26). These philosophical positions are particularly relevant to this study, as they help us challenge the socially constructed phenomena of caste and untouchability. In this study, the method of analysis and interpretation is content analysis. While analyzing the content, the study employs the triangulation method, reading selected texts from a comparative perspective. Then, this paper proposes a critical and multiliteracy pedagogy by interpreting and interrogating qualitative texts—legal provisions, curriculum, and prescribed textbooks. Regarding the study materials, the qualitative documents in our discussion are the official texts released by the government of Nepal. In this sense, our study confirms the quality criteria of reliability into account.

Results and Discussion

The analysis and interpretation of the selected documents reveal that there exists a gap between legal promises and educational delivery regarding issues of caste in the context of Nepal. Therefore, this section thematically reviews the findings in three headings: Anti-Discriminatory Policies and Provisions, Representation of Caste Issues in Compulsory English Textbooks, and Possibilities of Critical and Multiliteracy Pedagogy in Compulsory English Classrooms.

Anti-Discriminatory Policies and Provisions

Nepal's legal framework upholds equality and urges its citizens to maintain it in all aspects. *The Constitution of Nepal* (2015) enshrines the Right to Live with Dignity as a fundamental right: "Each person shall have the right to live with dignity" (Article 16, p.5); Article 50 (1) the Directive Principles, envisions "ending all forms of discrimination" by maintaining communal harmony, solidarity, and amity" (p.16). Article 51(a) also emphasizes "mutual understanding, tolerance, and solidarity among various castes" (p.17). These constitutional provisions clearly indicate that caste-based discrimination is illegal and punishable under the law. *The National Civil Code (Act)* (2017) further classifies caste discrimination as a crime, explicitly outlined in Chapter 3. Additionally, *The Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability, Offense and Punishment Act* (2011) prescribes penalties "the punishment of imprisonment for a term from three months to three years and a fine from fifty thousand rupees to two hundred thousand rupees" and "imprisonment for a term from two months to two years and a fine from twenty thousand rupees to one hundred thousand rupees" (p. 7). Despite these strong legal protections, caste-based discrimination remains a significant issue for the Dalit communities across the country.

Although constitutional and legal provisions promise equality, caste-based discrimination practices have persisted in Nepal, which can be seen through the frequent reports in the news media. Two incidents illustrate this ongoing issue. In one case, a Dalit boy and his friends were stoned to death for attempting to visit the boy's non-Dalit girlfriend (Mulmi, 2020). In another case, a Dalit girl was denied housing in Kathmandu due to her caste (Subedi, 2020). These incidents demonstrate the continued prevalence of caste-based discrimination, which has undermined social harmony. Given the persistence of caste-based discrimination, there is an urgent need to address these issues through education in every classroom practice. Conversely, educational institutions in Nepal have often reinforced the structural inequalities and caste discrimination practices (Poudel, 2007). We would argue that one of the reasons for persistent practice is the lack of well-planned and intentionally executed educational programs that would bridge the classrooms and the lived reality. Therefore, it is essential to adopt pedagogical approaches that can promote justice for the Dalits. Researchers argue that future education in Nepal should promote equity and social justice (Khanal & Charles, 2022). We argue that critical and multiliteracy pedagogy could be one measure of addressing these harmful practices and discontinuing them.

Representation of Caste Issues in Compulsory English Textbooks

Our study shows that the prescribed compulsory English textbooks, *English (Grade 11)* (2020) and *English Grade 12* (2021), are indifferent to caste discrimination.

These textbooks, divided into sections on Language Development and Literature, offer minimal and superficial references to caste-related issues. This raises serious concerns about the curriculum and textbook content, highlighting a significant gap in addressing such a critical social issue. The grade XI English textbook mentions the term “caste” five times, with only one instance loosely addressing caste discrimination: “Do you think there is racial/caste-related discrimination in our country? Discuss with your friend; write a five-minute speech” (p. 84). This phrasing is problematic as it suggests that caste discrimination may or may not exist, despite ample evidence to the contrary. Similarly, the grade XII English textbook references caste only once, in the context of debating quota reservations based on caste (p. 103). This minimal and insignificant space provided in the text shifts the focus away from the critical issue of caste-based discrimination. The textbooks’ silence on caste discrimination is a missed opportunity to engage students with the harsh realities faced by Dalit communities. It helps to relegate a significant social issue to the periphery. This underscores the need to explore critical and multiliteracy pedagogy to bring caste discrimination into sharper focus within the classroom.

Possibilities of Critical and Multiliteracy Pedagogy in Compulsory English Classrooms

Numerous opportunities can be achieved to integrate critical and multiliteracy pedagogy into the compulsory English curriculum for both grades XI and XII. The textbooks are divided into two themes: language and literature. While the primary goal of the language development sections is to enhance students’ language skills, the literature sections introduce them to various literary genres, both of which inherently aim to promote communicative skills and critical and creative thinking. These objectives can be further enriched by discussing the causes and effects of caste discrimination and encouraging students to explore potential strategies for addressing and combating these issues.

Several units in the language development section provide ideal spaces to apply critical and multiliteracy pedagogy. For instance, English Grade 12 (2021) includes units on “Critical Thinking,” “Human Rights,” and “Power and Politics,” while English (Grade 11) (2020) covers “Media and Society,” “Democracy and Human Rights,” and “Power and Politics.” These units, along with all others, offer ample opportunities for teachers to engage students in discussions about caste discrimination while developing their language proficiency. This approach aligns with the multiliteracy pedagogy outlined by Cope and Kalantzis (2015), which not only enhances students’ language abilities but also fosters what Freire (2014) describes as critical consciousness—an awareness that actively challenges caste discrimination against the Dalits in Nepal.

When implementing the aforementioned classroom practices, teachers can incorporate news broadcasts, articles, podcasts, and social media content that address caste discrimination into their lessons. Teachers can integrate language materials related to caste discrimination while guiding students in practicing the four fundamental language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In Nepal, cases of caste discrimination are often reported in English through national and international media channels, including Nepal Television, Radio Nepal, and various local Frequency Modulation (FM) stations. Additionally, students can listen to or watch news broadcasts from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which is highly regarded and considered one of the most credible sources of news among television-watching and radio-listening audiences nationwide.

To enhance reading skills, teachers can provide students with newspaper articles that critique caste-based discrimination, prompting them to develop arguments against such practices and deliver speeches in class. Teachers can also encourage students to create language content for podcasts, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, or TikTok, engaging them in critical discussions about caste discrimination. In writing activities, teachers can ask their students to compose anti-discriminatory social media posts, essays, speeches, or letters to the editor. Since these social media platforms are widely popular among the youth in Nepal, they can serve as practical classroom tools for learning objectives. By integrating these activities, teachers can develop students' language skills and cultivate their critical awareness. This critical consciousness, once developed, contributes to promoting justice against caste discrimination experienced by Dalits in Nepal.

Educators have numerous opportunities to implement critical and multiliteracy pedagogy when teaching the literature components. Teachers can incorporate discussions on Nepali literary texts that address caste discrimination while introducing students to the conventions of literary genres, such as poetry, drama, essays, and fiction. A critical and multiliteracy approach can be effectively implemented by thematizing, characterizing, interpreting, and assimilating literary texts in the context of Nepalese society. This does not imply detaching the texts from their historical contexts of production; instead, it involves understanding and interpreting them through processes of assimilation and identification. One effective strategy is to have students compare and contrast the themes and characters in literary works of foreign contexts concerning caste-based discrimination in Nepalese communities. In doing so, teachers can draw upon various examples, such as audiovisual materials, protest movements, graphics, and art created by Dalit communities to connect the historical contexts, themes, and characters discussed in class.

Several texts in the grade XI curriculum lend themselves to interpretations that address caste discrimination. For instance, Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait"

explores the theme of art versus life. The story depicts a husband who, while painting his wife, overlooks her suffering, leading to her death: “This is indeed Life itself!’ turned suddenly to regard his beloved: She was dead!” (p. 203). This theme of human indifference is parallel to the experiences of the Dalits in Nepal. In many localities where the Dalits are still treated as ‘untouchables,’ due to which they are forced to perform labor-intensive tasks, such as building houses and temples, crafting clothing, and working with metal. However, after completing these tasks, they are often excluded from the very spaces they helped create. In some communities, the Dalits are forbidden from entering the homes and temples they built. This reflects a societal contradiction where the art is revered, but the human lives behind it are marginalized and discriminated against.

Similarly, teachers can address the Dalit issues when teaching poetry in grade XI. Robert Burns’ poem “A Red, Red Rose” celebrates the theme of unconditional love, where it is portrayed, physical distance is insignificant in the face of deep affection: “And I will come again, our love/Tho’ it were ten thousand mile!” (p. 246). While discussing this theme, teachers can introduce the topic of social barriers that hinder love in Nepalese society, particularly caste-based discrimination. In Nepal, love and marriage between upper-caste non-Dalits and Dalits are often met with social stigma and strong disapproval from families and communities. Teachers can complement these discussions with YouTube videos, TikTok clips, and news reports that highlight the stigma surrounding inter-caste marriages. This approach encourages students to engage in critical conversations about caste-based discrimination in their own communities. In the grade XII, many literary texts can be analyzed through the lens of caste discrimination. For example, Lu Xun’s “My Old Home” narrates the poignant story of two childhood friends whose relationship is shattered by economic disparity in adulthood. The narrator’s childhood friend, now impoverished, perceives him as a superior ‘master’ and hesitates to approach him when they reunite years later: “addressed me in a loud clear voice: ‘Master!’” (p. 214). This narrative can be related to the context of caste differences in Nepal, where social hierarchies are deeply ingrained. Even when the Dalits achieve economic prosperity, they are often still regarded as inferior due to their caste. Engaging students in discussions about these issues can be productive in the investigation of social issues in classroom activities.

Additionally, teachers can promote justice against caste discrimination by teaching poetry as well. Ben Okri’s poem “The Awakening Age” reflects on the destructive consequences of ethnic, cultural, and political conflicts, specifically the North-South conflict in Nigeria that resulted in war, death, and bloodshed. The poem ultimately calls for reconciliation and harmony: “There’s more to a people than their poverty/There’s their work, wisdom, and creativity” (p. 240). While discussing this poem, teachers can explore potential socio-cultural conflicts in Nepal, with caste

discrimination as one possible underlying cause. Through such discussions, students can develop a critical awareness of the caste system and its potential to incite conflict, cultivating a commitment to social justice in students towards the issues they encounter. There are numerous instances, as discussed here, in which teachers can utilize the reading materials of other contexts to relate them to the context of caste discrimination in Nepal. By incorporating these approaches, teachers enhance students' literary analysis skills and nurture critical consciousness and a sense of justice regarding caste discrimination in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study underscores a pressing need to incorporate and integrate critical and multiliteracy pedagogies into the compulsory English classroom in grades XI and XII in Nepal. These anti-discriminatory approaches are essential for fostering critical thinking and equipping students to confront social injustice, particularly caste-based discrimination. By cultivating such anti-oppressive critical consciousness, English classrooms can become transformative spaces where students actively engage in challenging discriminatory practices that continue to marginalize the Dalit communities. The study advocates for a reimagined compulsory English curriculum, syllabus, and pedagogy that extends beyond language and literature instruction to include meaningful dialogues on social justice by connecting education with broader societal goals of equity. Hence, this work highlights the importance of future studies on curriculum and syllabus design, professional development, teacher preparedness, and a critical assessment of the performance of Dalit students, reinforcing the need for ongoing educational reforms to achieve a more just and equitable Nepali society.

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Voices on the Move: A Critical Analysis of Public Vehicle Literature in Nepal

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Abstract

Public texts written on vehicles are not merely cosmetic but powerful tools for communicating diverse identities and ideologies. This qualitative research investigates common themes or contents written on Nepali vehicles, and analyzes them at the textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels based on Fairclough's (1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA). Twenty eight photographs of vehicle texts were purposively selected as samples for the study. Among them, twenty four photographs were captured using my iPhone during my travels across various locations in Nepal, while four photographs were collected from social media. The study reveals the vehicle literature conveys messages about identity, life struggles, socioeconomic commentary, philosophy of life and reflections, humour and satire, politics and government, and romance and teasing. Textually, the vehicle literature comprises poetry, prose, slogans, verses, phrases, and sentences, enriched with literary devices like irony, metaphor, parallelism, hyperbole, satire, contrast, personification, and symbolism. These features discursively illustrate how literary features integrate into vehicle literature, positioning vehicles in Nepal as mobile platforms for creative linguistic and literary expressions, echoing societal discourses. The writings socioculturally expose cultural, political, economic, religious, and gender-based ideologies. The study concludes that public vehicles serve as linguistic spaces for public messaging, self-expression, emotional release, and critique, providing insights into lifestyles, values, and admiration, while promoting cultural and ideological narratives. Pedagogically, vehicle literature offers valuable resources for teaching linguistic and literary features while fostering cultural awareness, and creative and critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, identity, ideologies, power, public vehicles

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Introduction

Writing on the public transport vehicles is a common phenomenon in Nepal. People can see some images, slogans, songs, quotations, statements, stanzas, poetry, single words, and phrases on many public vehicles while travelling in Nepal. Some expressions are humorous, others ironical, and still others emotionally touching. Public transport vehicles serve as unique sites for artistic and literary expression in Nepal and much of South Asia (Kafle, 2024). As vehicles travel across various regions, their messages circulate widely. Writings on such vehicles are considered a form of popular literature since they are widely consumed and enjoyed by Nepali drivers and travellers, and thus regarded as a popular form of entertainment during long journeys (Adhikary, 2024). They reflect individual characters of truck proprietors and general public (Firdaus, 2021) and drivers' and in some cases the owners' struggles with notions of home, belonging, loneliness, travel, identity, faith, romance, and life in general (Kafle, 2024). In addition to education, patriotism, regionalism, religion, and longing for home, they reflect the ideas and ideologies of drivers, helpers, and owners (Kafle, 2021), their personalities, values, thoughts, sorrows, joys, love, separation, and frustrations. They showcase the hidden belief systems, ideologies, morals, dispositions, attitudes, convictions, qualities, and custom (Firdaus, 2021). Therefore, the study of vehicle literature offers valuable insights and academic significance.

Vehicle writings can be regarded as situated literary practices that reflect not only the dominant undisputed discourses but also the dynamic interplay of power relations, the relationship of cultural structures and individual customized versions of those structures (Hasrati et al., 2016). Although verses and poetry composed on trucks are short and simple, sometimes considered as low rated poetry, they mirror the mindsets of people who are reading and writing them and can change their ideas (Firdaus, 2021). They not only provide drivers with a unique platform to voice their perspectives in ways that mainstream media and traditional literary outlets do not offer but also challenge canonical genres of literature and inspire writers to deal with the issues of contemporary concern, including migration, identity, unemployment, and political economy (Kafle, 2024). Truck literature and vehicles verses perpetuate gender stereotypes that reinforce male domination and female submissiveness (Adhikary, 2024). They are the moving graffiti or mobile literary forms that may carry deep philosophical meanings. They provide the readers or audience knowledge about Nepali societies and cultures. However, there has been little qualitative analysis of vehicle literature through critical discourse analysis (CDA). This study, therefore, explores common themes or contents written on the vehicles in Nepal and analyzes them at the textual, discursive, and sociocultural levels based on Fairclough's (1995) CDA.

Literature Review

The practice of writing visual messages on public transport vehicles, often referred to as the culture of transport literature, is commonly found in South Asian countries, particularly Nepal, India, and Pakistan (Aondover & Akin-Odukoya, 2024). Formal study on truck art first began in early 1970s in Afghanistan (Madan, 2018). Studies on writing on the vehicles can be found in other countries, including Nepal. Most of the writings are found on the back of the vehicles since it is the most visible area. However, Elias (2005) argued that the front is one's face to the world and the back is the butt of jokes. The lower back typically features humorous verses, pithy sayings, and popular moral and ethical messages; the top section either is panoramic or reflects icons of popular culture; religious symbols are placed on the front; and formal and highly respected texts are written on the lower part of the front (Elias, 2005). Thus, the placement of writings on different parts of the vehicles carries distinct cultural significance.

A number of researchers have studied the contents of public vehicles in different countries. Alkurdi (2016) found that writing on vehicles in Jordan expresses envy, warning, pride, humour, desperation, religious beliefs, complaint, sacrifice, economic thoughts, advice, cynicism, love, wisdom, humiliation, and seriousness. The vehicle inscriptions serve as expressive outlets, conveying a range of messages. Hasrati et al. (2016) analyzed the contents of vehicles in an Iranian context and found six of the most frequent themes, namely humour, religion, didactic expressions, playing pessimism, ethno-geographic identification, and love. In their study on the texts written in Pakistani public vehicles, Bilal and Shehzad (2019) found that public vehicles included themes of love for religion, parents, opposite sex and country, socio-economic problems, morality, desire for upward mobility, and wisdom-based quotations. The linguistic analysis showed that the text employs lexicalization, overlexicalization, and lexical cohesion and there is extensive use of metaphors, euphemism and personification. Public vehicle literatures employ multimodality to convey messages. Kafle (2021) mentioned that North Indian truck literature consists of four recurring themes: popular aphorisms; society, beliefs, and identity; traffic rules and road safety; and romance. Similarly, Mensah and Nyong (2022) observed that transporters communicate various messages reflecting their local attitudes, beliefs, folk psychology, religious identities, and safety precautionary measures to recipients. Therefore, public vehicles are the platforms to express the views, thoughts, and emotions of the drivers, co-drivers, and owners on personal, religious, and social issues influencing the society.

Nepal is a South Asian country where road literature is flourishing (Ya'u, 2016, cited in Aondover & Akin-Odukoya, 2024). The journalist Subid Guragain collected truck literature and published a book, entitled *Truck sahitya: Sankalit Srijanaharu*

“Truck Literature: Collected Creations (2068)” (Annapurna Post, 2076, Poush, 27). In a similar vein, Baruwal (2022) syntactically analyzed the texts found on Nepali buses, trucks, jeeps, motorcycles, and taxis and explored the phenomenon behind the use of truck literature, such as love of the nation, upward mobility, faith over god, parental influence, life and death, success and failure, union and separation, tears and laughter, and ups and downs. In his study on truck literature from gender perspectives, Adhikary (2024) identified male chauvinism in truck literature in Nepal, which portrays women as being weak, emotional, and unintelligent and often objectifies and sexualizes them. Such gender-biased truck literature conveys negative stereotypes about women, which further marginalize them.

The studies reviewed above reveal growing research interests in vehicle graffiti and literature, particularly truck literature. However, few studies have analyzed vehicle literature using CDA even in foreign countries. In Nepal, this issue is not much more explored. Therefore, the proposed area offers a fertile ground for research that provides new insights in the field of CDA.

Methods and Procedures

This study employed a qualitative research design, particularly CDA as outlined by Fairclough (1995). His CDA includes three dimensional frameworks: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. Texts can be multi-semiotic, which includes language, images, music, and designs. At the textual level, the genres, literary devices, dictions, connotations, and themes present are analyzed. In this research, vehicle writings, such as slogans, poetry, quotes, humour, witty or sarcastic lines, and instructions were the texts. Discursive practices focus on how the texts are produced, consumed, and distributed (Alnaji, 2020). They are more interpretative which seeks the meanings of the description. Sociocultural practices include social relations, social identities, cultural values, consciousness, and semiosis. In this research, writings on the vehicles were explained to uncover connections between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 2012). CDA examines how discursive practices, events, and texts are ideologically shaped by and emerge from relations and struggles over power (Fairclough, 1995) and how social power, cruelty, domination, and discrimination are represented in texts and discourses (Van Dijk, 1998). CDA brings the critical tradition to social analysis to study discourse and its relations with other social elements, such as institutions, power relations, ideologies, and social identities (Fairclough, 2012).

The research site for this study included highways, rural roads, urban roads, and bus parks across Nepal, where public vehicles were directly observed and photographed. Furthermore, social media platforms served as secondary sites for collecting vehicle

literature. Twenty eight photographs of vehicle literature collected from trucks, buses, public vans, and social media were purposively selected as samples for analysis. Among them, twenty four photographs were captured using my iPhone during my journey across various locations in Nepal, while four photographs were collected from social media. The texts, originally written in the Nepali and other languages, were transliterated and translated into English, then categorized into thematic groups, and analyzed and interpreted through the framework of CDA.

Results and Discussion

The study identified different contents on the vehicle literature which were categorized into seven themes and analyzed and interpreted through CDA.

Philosophy of Life and Reflections

The vehicle literature expressed themes of philosophy of life and reflections that reflect how the drivers, co-drivers, and common Nepali people are living.

Figure 1

Importance of Money



(1) **FOR A HAPPY LIFE GIVE THE MONEY TO YOUR WIFE**

This vehicle literature textually uses humour and simplicity to convey a universally relatable idea, employing direct, prescriptive language “Give the money.” Discursively, it reflects societal narratives by portraying the wife as the manager of domestic affairs and husband as the source of income. Socioculturally, it mirrors Nepal’s patriarchal ideologies, reinforcing the stereotype of women handling household expenses while relying on men’s earnings. Such gendered vehicle literature and discourses reproduce traditional gender and role stereotypes (Rojo & Esteban, 2005). Moreover, the text conveys a collectivist ideology that prioritizes family harmony over individual autonomy. This finding supports Adhikary (2024) that truck literature portrays women in traditional roles, such as homemakers, and men as strong and powerful figures. It reveals how vehicles reinforce and disseminate gender stereotypes across different locations.

Figure 2

Life's Hardship and Courage



(2) *Nanggai ayeko duniyama, henus ta kati bhagdaud gardaichhan jabo euta katroko lagi*

[Born naked into this world, see how fiercely they struggle just for a shroud.]

(3) *Jitnu bhanda thulo kura himmat naharnu ho.*

[Greater than winning is not losing courage.]

The text (2) critiques the futility of life's struggle for material gains that ultimately hold limited significance in the face of mortality. The metaphor of "nakedness" and "shroud" reflect deep socio-economic realities, that is, hardships faced by marginalized people in acquiring the bare minimum. In terms of sociocultural practice, the text (3) highlights the value of resilience and courage over material victories or societal glorification of success. It urges individuals to focus on intangible virtues like courage rather than tangible possessions. The antithetical structure focuses on the difference between winning and courage. Therefore, discourse and sociocultural practices shape how texts, such as vehicle literature are produced and interpreted (Fairclough, 1995). In this sense, vehicles serve as dynamic linguistic landscape where societal values are not only expressed but also critically examined and challenged.

Figure 3

Value of Money in Life



(4) *Chatta herda jindagi dami chha
Sabai thik chha hajur paisakai kami chha.*

[At a glance, life appears beautiful,

Everything is just fine, sir, except for a lack of money]

This poetic Nepali song textually begins with a positive, optimistic language. The phrase *chatta herda* “at a glance” metaphorically suggests a superficial view of life which appears beautiful but hides deeper realities. Socioculturally, the use of *hajur* “sir” reveals hierarchical power relations and politeness, common in Nepali society. The second line reveals an ideology where money defines a “good” life. Discursively, the text reflects economic struggle in Nepali society and economic ideology, particularly desire for money and less financial resources (Firdaus, 2021). This vehicle literature highlights the societal emphasis on material wealth as a key to a better life.

Figure 4

Fate and Effort



(5) *bhagyale nidharma mutirako raichha
ma bhane pasina samjhera puchhirahe.*

[Fate has urinated on my forehead,
But I keep wiping it away, thinking it's only sweat.]

The first line of this poetic expression metaphorically conveys disempowerment by an external, uncontrollable force (“fate”), while the second line reflects the speaker’s determination and agency. The expression “Thinking it’s only sweat” reframes humiliation (fate’s urination) as the result of one’s own hard work (sweat). In Nepali culture, “urine on the forehead” symbolizes deep disrespect or helplessness, while “sweat” represents hard work and dignity. The language reflects the ideology that fate determines life’s outcomes. However, the speaker’s response challenges fatalism, promoting an alternative ideology of resilience and self-reliance. This finding supports Hasrati et al. (2016) that vehicle writings often express pessimism, characterized by feelings of hopelessness and dissatisfaction. It reveals how fatalistic beliefs shape their lives.

Figure 5

Responsibility in Life



(6) *jimmewariko bojhle thiche pachhi*
premko upanyas hoina sangharshako
kathaharu man parne rahechha mahodaya!
 [Once burdened with responsibilities,
 One comes to prefer stories of struggle
 over romantic novels, sir!]

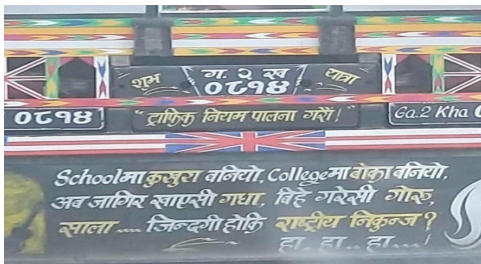
Textually, expressions like *jimmewari* “responsibility” and *bojh* “burden” emphasize the weight of obligations, while *premko upanyas* “romantic novels” and *sangharshako kathaharu* “stories of struggle” contrast fantasy with reality. The text uses a reflective tone, shifting from personal experience to a general observation. Socioculturally, the text critiques the irrelevance of romanticism amid heavy responsibilities. It aligns with a realist worldview that values resilience over idealism. Discursively, it reflects Nepali societal realities, especially in rural or disadvantaged areas, where struggle is central. In general, the text reflects male chauvinism that portrays men as bearing the bulk of familial and social responsibilities (Adhikary, 2024). Consequently, love and romance appear to be less significant than their responsibilities.

Humour and Satire

The finding of this study aligns with Alkurdi (2016), who found expressing humour as the most dominant function of graffiti in the transport of Jordan, and with Firdaus (2021) that “use of satire is a unique flavor of truck writings” (p. 123). Such humorous and satirical texts convey deep socio-cultural meanings.

Figure 6

Roles at Different Life Stages

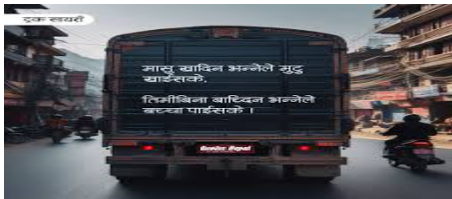


(7) *schoolma kukhura baniyo, college ma boka baniyo*
aba jagir khayesi gadha, bihe garesi goru
sala...jindagi hoki ratriya nikunja ?
Ha. Ha..ha...
 [I was made a chicken in school; a goat in college.
 Employment made me a donkey; and marriage turned me into an ox.
 Damn...is it a life or a national park?
 Ha. Ha..ha...]

This text presents code-mixing as a natural feature of everyday discourse (Dewan & Saud, 2022). It employs irony and animal metaphors to uncover life’s burden across different stages: a chicken in school suggests timidity, a goat in college suggests reckless youth, a donkey in job reflects burden and laborious work, and an ox in marriage signifies toil and responsibility. These transitions critique how society progressively constrains individuality and increases responsibilities. The rhetorical question “Is life a national park?” humorously critiques the loss of autonomy. The word ‘damn’ conveys frustration, while the closing laughter adds comic relief and resilience. Discursively, the text critiques Nepali social norms that burden individuals with societal roles. Socioculturally, it questions the dehumanization and loss of autonomy under systematic forces. Following Meyer (2000), such satirical humour targets misbehavior and unusual social norms and activities that need reform.

Figure 7

Women as Commodity



(8) *masu khadina bhannele mutu khaisake
timibina bachdina bhannele baccha paisake*

[The one who claimed to be a vegetarian has already consumed the heart;
The one who swore they couldn’t live without you has already had children]

The text employs irony and metaphor, notably “eating the heart” to suggest betrayal or hypocrisy. The phrase “having children” implies the fleeting nature of love and loyalties. Terms like “heart” and “children” carry deep emotional and cultural significance, enriching the text’s critique. Discursively, the text comments on trust and relationships, while socioculturally, it reflects disillusionment with insincerity and challenges untrustworthy authority figures. Notably, the text portrays women as sources of betrayal and objects of commodity. It also shows the degradation of trust in the Nepali societies.

Figure 8

Gendered Expectations



(9) *baru churot khane budhi paros tara facebook ma keta sanga
maski-maski bolne budhi dusmanlai ni naparos.*

[Better to have a wife who smokes cigarettes than one who flirts with boys on Facebook, even to the enemy.]

This vehicle literature textually uses comparison (a smoking wife and a flirting wife) and metaphor to highlight moral standards. The derogatory term *budhi* “wife” reinforces a hierarchy of acceptable behaviours, with flirting worse than smoking. Discursively, it reflects conservative gender roles and power dynamics in Nepali society. Socioculturally, it upholds patriarchal ideologies that regulate women’s behavior, especially their interactions with men and their use of social platforms like Facebook. Women are subject to moral surveillance and regulation, and are to be passive and loyal to men. The text also reflects how technology has enhanced women’s autonomy while disrupting men-centric authority since men perceive virtual flirting to be more threatening than smoking.

Figure 9

Domestication of Women



(10) *hatar nagar bhai
budhi gharmai chha.
poila ga chhaina.
[Don't rush, brother
Your wife is at home.
She hasn't eloped.]*

At the textual level, the expressions like *hatar nagar* “don’t rush,” *budhi* “wife,” and *poila ga chhaina* “hasn’t eloped” suggest reassurance laced with possessiveness. Moreover, the expression *poila ga chhaina* “she hasn’t eloped” reflects drivers’ cultural anxieties, while the term *buddi* “wife” emphasizes her domestic role, reinforcing gender stereotypes. The text discursively reinforces the patriarchal norm, portraying women as domesticated and men as breadwinners. Socioculturally, it highlights power imbalance that portrays women as possessions, or commodities. Such gender based ideology promoted through the vehicle writings reveals broader societal attitudes (Firdaus, 2021) that question the moral character of women.

Romance and Teasing

This study revealed that romantic poetry and verses are important parts of vehicle writings, which align with Firdaus (2021). The romance and teasing incorporate

the themes of love, such as success or failure in love, difficulties in being in love, the unfaithful beloved, the transient nature of love, being constant in love, and the melancholy of love (Hasrati et al., 2016).

Figure 10

Love Expression



(11) *ma mare pachhi mero lasama post-mortem garna nadinu hai priya mutuma timro nam bhetida anusandhanma phasauli*

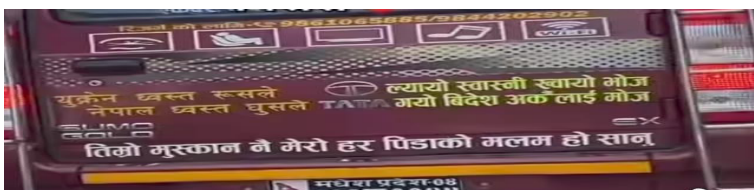
[My beloved, don't let them perform a post-mortem on my body after I pass away.

[If they find your name in my heart, they'll entangle you in the investigation.]

Textually, words like *mare pachhi* “after I pass away,” post-mortem, and *anusandhan* “investigation” evoke imagery of death, love, and consequences. Hyperbolic language dramatizes emotional attachment, with *mutu* “heart” symbolizing a deep bond between the writer and their beloved. Discursively, the text reflects a romanticized view of love as eternal, even beyond death. Socioculturally, it subtly places the beloved in a position of responsibility, asking them to protect the speaker’s legacy. It critiques societal interference in personal relationships. Such romantic expressions appear on trucks which, as Elias (2011) argued, are feminized –seen as romantic or sexual partners, even as wives.

Figure 11

Value of Smile



(12) *timro muskan nai mero har pidako malam ho sanu.*

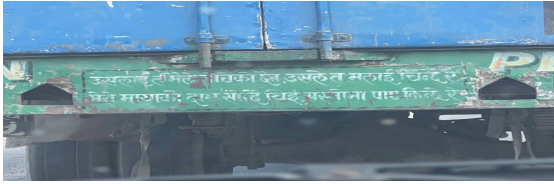
[My dearest, your smile is the soothing balm that heals all my pain.]

Textually, the phrases like *muskan* “smile” and *har pidako malam* “all my pain” metaphorically suggest the beloved’s smile as healing, while *sanu* “my dearest” softens the tone and adds intimacy. Discursively, this text romanticizes suffering and highlights emotional support as a remedy for pain, idealizing women’s care. Socioculturally, it

reflects Nepali cultural values of emotional interdependence in love and relationships. Such romantic expressions contribute to the feminization and romanticization of the vehicle (Elias, 2011). They reveal love and smile as therapeutic forces that offer comfort and healing in one's life.

Figure 12

Commoditization of Love



(13) *uslai ta maile socheko chhaina, usle ta malai chinchha re*
mero mayako dam sodhdai thiyi, sastoma paye kinchhe re
 [I scarcely know her, yet she claims to know me well.

She inquired the worth of my love - she'd buy it if it's cheap.]

This study endorses Al Karazoun and Hamdan (2021) that love is expressed via songs, romantic expressions, and poetry on vehicles. Textually, the text (13) uses a mixture of ambiguity, metaphor, and materialism. The term *mayako dam* “worth of my love” metaphorically commodifies love. Discursively, the text critiques how relationships are scrutinized through materialistic lenses. It shows how love or affection is being reduced to a transactional or commodified exchange. Socioculturally, it challenges power dynamics that devalue love, contrasting with Nepali cultural ideals of love as an emotional and spiritual bond.

Figure 13

Teasing



(14) *keti jiskaune ketaharuko bani ho.*

ramri chhu bhanera makkha napara hai nani ho.

[Teasing girls is a common behaviour among boys.

Don't be overly proud of your beauty, young lady.]

This couplet textually uses a condescending tone that reinforces gender stereotypes, presenting beauty as a girl's main attribute and phrases like *keti jiskaune* “teasing

girls” and *ketaharuko bani* “common behavior among boys” show teasing as a typical behavior of boys. The expression “Don’t be overly proud of your beauty” reflects societal control over female agency, discouraging self-confidence and reinforcing humility as a virtue for women. Discursively, the text emerges from a patriarchal setting that excuses problematic male behavior as routine. Socioculturally, it reflects patriarchal ideologies that regulate female behavior and appearance, positioning boys as active agents and girls as passive recipients, thus reinforcing gender-based power imbalances.

Figure 13

Expression of Purity



(14) *kuwako pani*

churotko thuto

taruniko oth

kahile hudaina jutho

[Water drawn from a well,

a cigarette stub,

the lips of a young girl –

none are ever impure.]

In Nepal, concepts of purity and impurity are deeply ingrained in caste systems, gender norms, and religious beliefs. The text juxtaposes “water,” “a cigarette stub,” and “young girl’s lips” to challenge traditional notions of purity. Declaring “none are ever impure” challenges caste-based, gender, and patriarchal ideologies (Adhikary, 2024). The idea resists societal attempts to sexualize or control young women through the imposition of purity standards.

Figure 14

Expression of Deep Love



(15) *ma pani mukhmai jawaph dina sakchhu*

but my heart always says

usko pani ta man dukhla ni.

[I can respond sharply

but my heart always reminds me –

she might be hurt, too.]

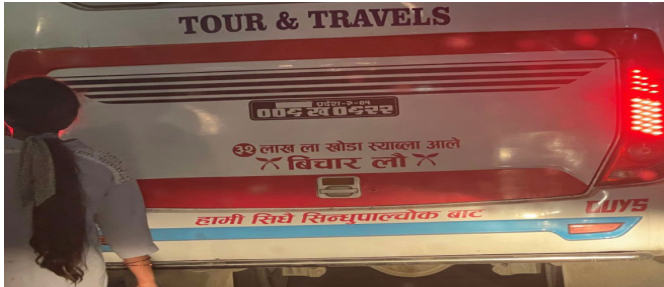
The text uses antithesis by contrasting external action “respond sharply” with internal feeling “she might be hurt, too,” highlighting the tension between external strength and internal emotional awareness. The heart is personified as a moral compass that suggests that emotions guide the speaker’s decisions rather than rational thought. Discursively, the text represents a societal preference for emotional sensitivity and harmony. Such lines produced from our daily routine lives have become a part of vehicle discourse (Firdaus, 2021). Socioculturally, the text underscores Nepali cultural values that prioritize empathy over individual expression.

Identity

Public vehicles, regarded as public places, are socially constructed spaces where producers of language showcase and enact their identities, ideologies, and language practices through their writings (Tupas, 2024). The drivers express their cultural and territorial identities through writings on the vehicles, which align with Al Karazoun and Hamdan (2021).

Figure 15

Tamang Identity and Territory



(16) *battish lakh la khoda syabla ale*
bichar lau

hami sidhai Sindhupalchok bata Guys

[You'll be punished with a khoda –a weapon worth thirty-two lakh. Think about it.]

We are directly from Sindhupalchok guys.]

The first line of the Tamang text reflects Nepal's multilingualism and uses a hyperbole to assert power through the weapon *khoda* (also called *katti* in Nepali). The second line uncovers Tamang's territorial identity. Discursively, the text incorporates the discourses of power (a direct threat) and identity, showing how "discourse can be 'internalized' in power, and vice versa" (Fairclough, 2013, p.4). Socioculturally, it reflects ethnic or cultural and territorial identity through language. Following Al Karazoun and Hamdan (2021), the writer expresses how they are deeply linked to and proud of their tribe and locality.

Figure 16

Love and Identity



(17) *purba jane rel auna kanchhi love garau bihe nauhjel*

[The train is heading east, dear Kanchhi, let's at least fall in love unless we get married]

(18) *Kathmanduma chineko chatta kamar chhineko
janebhaye au hai kanchhi ma ta bhojpur hideko
Bhojpur udan*

[A woman, acquainted in Kathmandu, so slender in appearance.

If you're coming, then join me, dear Kanchhi, I'm heading to Bhojpur.

The Bhojpur flight awaits.]

This study supports Aondover and Akin-Odukoya (2024) that public transport vehicles serve as tools of identity construction, cultural transmission, and social reflection. These two texts at the textual level use humour, imagery, and conversational language to convey a playful and affectionate tone. The Nepali kinship term *kanchhi* adds an affectionate and intimate tone, while references to *purba* “east,” Kathmandu, and Bhojpur signal identity and belonging. The texts discursively reflect urban-rural dynamics. By presenting love and marriage as mutually exclusive, the first text challenges conventional societal ideals where love naturally leads to marriage. The second text perpetuates patriarchal norms by emphasizing male agency and reducing the woman to her appearance (*chatta kamar*) and obedience. Both texts socioculturally reflect Nepali patriarchal society when men often have greater freedom of mobility and decision-making, while women are secondary participants. The discourse reflects traditional Nepali cultural norms where romance is publicly expressed in veiled, poetic language, maintaining modesty and societal expectations.

Figure 17

Budha Born in Nepal



(19) *waripari pahad bichama tal chha*

Buddha janmeko deshma buddikai anikal chha.

[Surrounded by hills lies a lake;

Yet in the land of Buddha, wisdom is rare.]

Textually, this text employs poetic imagery to critique societal and ideological conditions. Words like *pahad* “hills” and *tal* “lake” evoke Nepal’s natural beauty, while the phrase *Buddha janmeko deshma* “the land of Buddha” references Nepal’s cultural and historical significance, highlighting its association with peace and enlightenment. Juxtaposing Buddha with a scarcity of wisdom underscores the gap between the heritage and contemporary realities. The text discursively blends cultural

pride with self-criticism. The text socioculturally highlights the natural and historical pride, urging self-awareness and a commitment to the ideals of Nepal's cultural and historical legacy.

Figure 18

Power and Skill



(20) *gadi ho Tatako*

yodda kaccha nasamjha

driver ho purbeli

thito baccha nasamjha

[This vehicle's made by Tata.

Don't mistake it for something weak.

The driver is from the east.

Don't mistake him for a kid.]

This vehicle literature illustrates how lexical choices and discourses are shaped by power (Fairclough, 2013). It highlights themes of dominance and strength, showcasing both the vehicle's power and the driver's skill. Textually, the Tata brand metaphorically symbolizes strength and durability, while *purbeli* "from the east" evokes regional pride and identity. Both words convey resilience and capability. Discursively, the text likely emerges from road travel culture or informal dialogues among drivers, or passengers. It socioculturally challenges preconceived notions of human and machinery weaknesses, asserting the strength and maturity of both the vehicle and the driver. The last line of the text reinforces masculine ideals tied to strength, experience, and authority in the Nepali sociocultural setting.

Socioeconomic Commentary

The study revealed that economic ideologies are expressed through vehicle writings. The drivers in Nepal face a lot of challenges, such as family break up, discontinuation of their study, failure to fulfill basic needs of the family, and compulsion to go abroad because of poor socioeconomic conditions.

Figure 19

Consequence of Economic Crisis



(21) *ghar base arthik chap*

bidesh gaye swasni tap

[Staying home brings financial strain,

Going abroad invites a wife's disdain.]

The couplet textually juxtaposes economic and emotional struggles through colloquial language and irony, portraying both staying home and going abroad as equally burdensome. The text discursively highlights the economic pressures and structural inequalities in Nepali societies where local opportunities are insufficient, forcing individuals to go abroad for livelihood, but their absence disrupts family dynamics. Socioculturally, it reinforces traditional gender roles in the Nepali society where men are expected to be financially responsible, and women as emotionally dependent, a tension between societal and familial expectations. The text captures the realities that many Nepali people feel a sense of discontent both at home and abroad.

Figure 20

Family and Financial Needs



(22) *sano hunda gharbata paisa napauda man dukhne garthyo*

ahile gharma paisa dina nasakda man dukhdai chha.

[When I was young, I'd feel hurt when I didn't receive money from home.

Now, I feel hurt when I cannot send money back.]

At the textual level, the text contrasts the experiences of youth and adulthood through parallel structure and emotional language. It discursively draws on personal or collective experiences in Nepali society, where familial support is valued and financial

responsibility marks adulthood. As a child, the speaker felt powerless and dependent on family for financial needs, experiencing emotional pain when those needs were unmet. As an adult, the speaker now holds the power and responsibility, but feels the emotional burden when unable to fulfill this role. The pain expressed may also reflect broader socioeconomic realities, such as financial struggles or the societal pressure to meet familial obligations. Socioculturally, the text critiques the expectation that adults, particularly men, must support their families financially. As Zuo and Tang (2000) argued, men are expected to serve as breadwinners in the family, and ailing to do so can result in feelings of inadequacy and societal judgment.

Figure 21

Fragility of Trust



(23) *lyayo swasni khwayo bhoj*
gayo bidesh arkailai moj
 [Wed a wife with a feast grand.

Went abroad, pleasure in another's hand.]

This vehicle literature textually uses irony and colloquial language to critique infidelity. The contrast between celebrating marital union and indulging in infidelity creates a sense of irony. The rhyme enhances its memorability and emotional impact. The text discursively reflects societal frustrations with the erosion of marital and familial responsibilities. It suggests that while a man fulfills his public duty through marriage and by going abroad to earn money, the wife, left behind, engages in infidelity. Socioculturally, the text questions the wife's role in her husband's absence within a patriarchal society. It underscores the fragility of trust and commitment in a changing socio-economic landscape. I agree with Adhikary (2024) that women in vehicle literature are often objectified and sexualized that reinforce gender stereotypes.

Figure 22

Effect of Poverty in Study



(24) *padhai kina bichaima chhodis bhanera prashna nagaridinus*
mahodaya parikshama garib bhanne bishaya
lagyo kataunai sakina

[Don't ask why I left my studies, sir.

I failed the test in 'poverty,'

A subject I could never pass.]

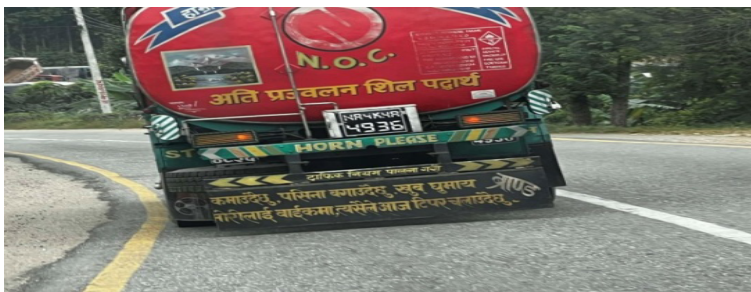
This vehicle literature at the textual level uses irony and metaphor to critique systemic barriers, highlighting how poverty itself makes education inaccessible. Discursively, it amplifies the voices of those affected by poverty, with the speaker's plea ("Don't ask why") expressing frustration, shame, or helplessness. This reflects how individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds face judgment for circumstances beyond their control, such as failing to complete their education or pass exams. The inability to "pass" symbolizes how poverty impedes one's progress and opportunities. The text socioculturally exposes the struggles of marginalized groups and calls for systemic changes to ensure educational access regardless of economic background. The speaker's address to *mahodaya* "sir" reflects the hierarchical relationship between those in power (e.g., educators, policymakers) and marginalized individuals.

Life Struggles

The study revealed that vehicle literature incorporated contents related to life struggles.

Figure 23

Driver's Life



(25) *kamaudaichhu, pasina bagaudaichhu,*
khub ghumaya morilai baikma,
tyasaile aja tipper chalaudaichhu

[Earning I am, sweating all day

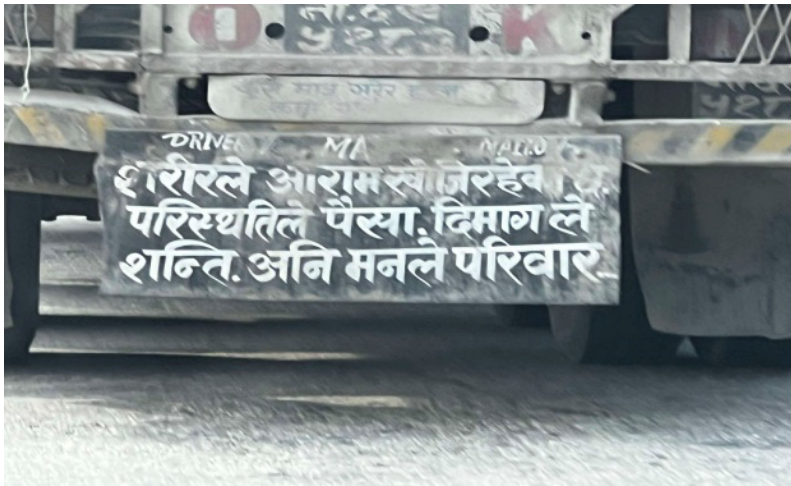
We roamed on a bike

Now a tipper I drive away.]

This poetic text vividly portrays the tension between youthful dreams and adult responsibilities in Nepali society. Textually, it uses contrast and symbolism to convey emotional depth. The bike symbolizes youthful dreams and freedom, while the tipper symbolizes heavy responsibilities. Discursively, it serves as a shared expression among working-class individuals, highlighting the drivers' hard work. The text socioculturally reveals the limited opportunities for upward mobility. It reinforces societal expectations that men must shoulder the burdens of economic survival.

Figure 24

Multiple Needs



(26) *sharirle aram khojiraheko chha*
paristhitile paisa, dimagle shanti
ani manale pariwar

[The body pleads for rest.

The circumstances demand money,

The mind seeks peace

And the heart yearns for family.]

This vehicle literature highlights different aspects of human life, such as *sharir* “physical needs,” *dimag* “mental needs,” and *man* “emotional needs.” Textually, words like *aram* “rest,” *paisa* “money,” *shanti* “peace,” and *pariwar* “family” represent fundamental human needs. Discursively, the text reflects the realities or narratives of Nepali working class people for whom physical labour, financial stress, and familial obligations are pervasive. Socioculturally, the emphasis on economic needs over emotional and mental well-beings reveals the capitalist and neoliberal ideologies. Dismantling needs into body, mind, and heart represents fragmented identities shaped by different social forces, underscoring societal failures to harmonize these aspects.

Figure 25

Travel and Liquor Consumption



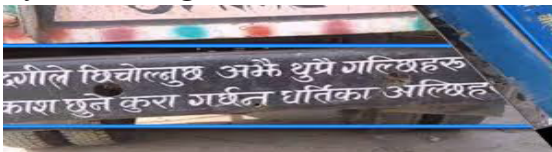
(27) *januchha tada batochha kachchi
bhulera pani nakhau jand raksi
“Lalitpure tiger”*

[The road is rough, the goal still far –
Never drink homemade liquor
'Lalitpure Tiger.']

This poetic expression textually uses simple, rhythmic language to convey a strong message. It uses a direction tone *nakhau* “don’t drink” and a metaphor, such as “Lalitpur Tiger” to convey fierce identity and pride. References to “far goal” and “rough path” symbolize life’s challenges. The text discursively serves as a cautionary message for the drivers, warning against homemade liquor (*jand raksi*) and promoting health, safety, and moral concerns. Socioculturally, it critiques the social pressures of alcohol consumption while promoting self-control, strength, and responsibility in Nepali society.

Figure 26

Life’s Challenges



(28) *jindagile chhicholnuchha ajhai thuprai galchhiharu
akash chhune kura garchhan dhartika alchhiharu.*

[Life has to journey through many bends
The earthbound idlers dream sky-reaching ends.]

This poetic expression textually uses vivid metaphors to describe life struggles. The expressions like *galchhiharu* “bends” implies life’s challenges, while *akash chhune* “sky-reaching” portrays lofty dreams and *alchhiharu* “idlers” grounds the critique in

social observation. The text discursively critiques inaction and misplaced priorities, resonating with Nepali cultural values of resilience and hard work. Socioculturally, it reflects disappointment, rigour, and uncertainties faced by the poor in Nepali society, emphasizing that hard work requires effort, not empty ambition.

Politics and Government

This study revealed that vehicle literature incorporate the contents related to politics and government. It displays some of the most specific socio-political statements and ideologies (Madan, 2018) and reflects the political aspects or issues of the Nepali society.

Figure 27

War and Bribery



(29) *Ukraine dhwasta Rusale*

Nepal dhwasta ghusale

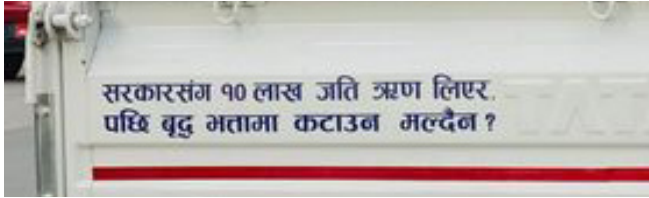
[Ukraine was destroyed by Russia.

Nepal was destroyed by bribe.]

This poetic vehicle literature textually uses critical, satirical, and accusatory tone, and the direct language to describe a deep frustration. It discursively engages with political discourse of war and bribery and critiques Nepal government's inability to combat bribery. It socioculturally draws a powerful comparison between destruction by external military force (Ukraine by Russia) and the internal corruption (bribery in Nepal), portraying bribery as so pervasive that has plagued Nepal and caused its downfall. This contrast highlights how nations can be vulnerable to both external and internal threats.

Figure 28

Concern with Government



(30) *sarkarsanga 10 lakh jati rin liyera
pachhi brida bhattama katauna mildaina?*

[Can't the government offer a loan of about 10 lakhs, with the amount later deducted from senior citizen allowance over time?]

This vehicle literature textually criticizes the inadequacy of government programs in meeting the financial needs of citizens, particularly the elderly by using irony and humour. It discursively questions how impractical the current welfare systems are. It socioculturally unmasks economic vulnerability and power dynamics between the state and its citizens. The reliance on government loans and allowances not only reflects a structural dependence on state systems but also reinforces the hegemonic role of the state in economic security. The text may critique the lack of sustainable financial policies for the elderly.

Conclusion

The present study targeted to analyze the contents of public vehicles in Nepal through the lens of CDA. The findings reveal that public vehicles are the dynamic linguistic landscapes, which incorporate a wide range of linguistic and literary expressions, including poetry, prose, verses, slogans, phrases, and sentences, enriched with rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, personification, symbolism, hyperbole, contrast, irony, rhetorical question, and satire. Vehicle literature can be considered as a form of mobile literature, as it moves across different geographical locations, carrying messages to diverse audiences. Therefore, vehicle literature has a great impact in the societies. As Firdaus (2021) suggests, vehicle arts and literature absorb and incorporate various aspects of the society in which they are created, interacting with sociocultural norms and ideologies. They unmask gender-based, economic, cultural, and political ideologies, positioning vehicles as spaces for self-expression, critique, emotional release, and public messaging, while conveying everyday experiences, pride, and cultural and ideological narratives.

Moreover, vehicle literature can be used as a significant pedagogical tool. Integrating vehicle literature into the curriculum can help students appreciate diverse forms of expression and critically analyze sociocultural themes in unconventional

texts. Such texts might increase student interests and engagement in teaching and learning activities. Gender-based, economic, cultural, and political ideologies and issues conveyed through vehicle literature can be used for awareness raising, critical thinking, and creative writings. Teachers and students can use such literature as resources to discuss its linguistic and literary features, power dynamics, identity, and grassroots problems prevalent in the society. Encouraging such creative expressions can promote innovative storytelling and meaningful social commentary.

This study confines itself to twenty eight photographs and thirty texts collected from different vehicles. Future research could explore truck graffiti, gender ideologies in vehicle literature, public perceptions of such texts, and cross-cultural comparison of vehicle literature in Nepal.

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English Language Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Textbook Use in Nepali Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Innovative pedagogical approaches to language teaching stress fostering communication abilities and contextual usage of language. This qualitative narrative study explores English language teachers' perceptions and practices of textbook use in Nepali secondary schools. Four secondary level English language teachers were purposively selected as the participants from public schools in Kanchanpur district, Nepal. I employed narrative interview protocols with open-ended questions and classroom observation as research tools for collecting necessary data, and the data were analysed and interpreted using thematic analysis. The findings of the study showed that English language teachers have been entirely dependent on texts and exercises of the prescribed textbooks in their classroom practices. The study also revealed that English teachers have positive perceptions and knowledge of curriculum objectives and textbook alignment, but in classroom pedagogy, they fail to teach language through the given content and tasks. The study further showed that English language teachers spent more time explaining the content rather than focusing on language learning activities. The study implies that English teachers at secondary level need to employ student-centred innovative approaches creating language learning environment in the classroom, and engage students in activities using textbook contents and tasks, and even going beyond the textbook tasks.

Keywords: ELT pedagogy, textbook-based, perception, observation, narrative

Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in the Nepali context has undergone significant shifts due to the influence of innovative pedagogical approaches. In

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recent decades, ELT pedagogy has evolved and moved worldwide towards more communicative, interactive and learner-centred teaching approaches from traditional teacher-centered approaches and methods like grammar-translation, which dominated classroom pedagogy for decades. As recent innovative teaching approaches aim to promote contextual and practical usage of language that emphasize communicative competence and performance, critical thinking and learner autonomy, the curriculum and textbooks for classroom pedagogy should be developed accordingly. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), which is responsible for designing and implementing school-level curriculum in Nepal, develops and prescribes curricula and textbooks for the school level. This centre is also involved in evaluating, reviewing and updating school-level curriculum and the whole teaching-learning process is guided by curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007). CDC has made efforts to develop curriculum and textbooks of English for the secondary level, aligning with the global evolution in language education that could meet the national curricular goals and global pedagogical trends. The present secondary-level English curriculum of Nepal aims to enable students to communicate their ideas in English and expose them to the vast treasure of knowledge available in both written and spoken English (CDC, 2021b, p. 39). On this basis, as Acharya (2024) discusses, English textbooks can be regarded as the most effective teaching and learning materials in the classroom to foster English as a foreign language in Nepali context (p. 142), the CDC has prescribed the textbooks as primary teaching resources to support modern classroom pedagogical practices and develop communicative language skills up on learners.

The advancement in Nepali ELT pedagogy has been marked by a gradual shift in teaching methodologies, i.e. traditional, teacher-centred teaching to modern, more innovative and communicative approaches. According to Bhatt (2024), English language teachers in secondary schools are increasingly adopting innovative, student-centred teaching strategies moving away from conventional, teacher-centred teaching methods (p. 128). In the same vein, Bhandari (2020) states, the traditional way of classroom teaching-learning has shifted to learner modes of learning, and these learner modes of learning create opportunities and provide students' autonomy for learning and change teachers' role from knowledge provider to facilitator in the classroom (p. 10). Similar to the context, Kadel (2020) states that, the curriculum of compulsory English at secondary level has been developed and prepared for learner-centred classrooms (p. 185). This indicates that textbooks and curricula are attempting to keep up with the growing significance of contemporary pedagogical strategies. Despite this advancement in pedagogy, several challenges persist in secondary-level ELT pedagogy. Though the curriculum and textbook of secondary-level English have been developed considering student-focused learning activities, the implementation part is weaker. In this context, Kadel (2020), further states that ELT classrooms always remain teacher-

directed, with textbooks and teaching strategies insufficiently addressing the needs of students in the classroom (p. 179). Similarly, Bhandari (2022) asserts, teachers often follow textbooks and provide structured content and exercises. In line with the same, Phyak (2016) states that in most public schools in Nepal, teaching English largely means teaching the textbook, and learning is often reduced to memorizing answers and reproducing them in exams. This suggests that classroom pedagogy becomes teacher-centred when textbooks are used exclusively. Textbook influence, in this sense, tends to coincide with teacher-centred approaches in which teachers deliver lectures from the book and students receive information passively (Bhatt, 2024). Therefore, prescribed textbooks should not be made the means of content delivery in the classroom. It should be utilised in classroom pedagogy as a primary teaching resource that could shape modern pedagogical practices and help learn students the language skills aligned to the national curriculum.

Furthermore, in the education system of Nepal, particularly in public secondary schools, prescribed textbooks by the CDC are more than just teaching resources; they become the sole source of curriculum implementation in the classroom pedagogy (Karki, 2014). This reveals that a textbook is a guide that leads to a proper direction through which teachers and students meet their goals. It serves as the primary source of content and structure for classroom teaching. Gautam (2022), in this context, states that most of the classroom activities are directed by the textbooks, and teachers feel confident if the textbook is in front of them (p. 102). Regarding EFL classrooms, textbooks work as a foundation to lead whole pedagogical practices, including the examination system and other activities. For many teachers, especially those with limited knowledge and experience and a lack of professional training, textbooks provide a ready-made curriculum and guide for planning the lesson (Timsina, 2021). However, this kind of centrality and dependency of textbooks regarding classroom pedagogy hinders innovative practices, learner autonomy and the development of communication skills. In line with this, Pokhrel (2021) emphasises that textbooks alone are insufficient for effective learning and advocates for integrating diverse learning materials and activities to promote learning achievements through student engagement (p.108). They are the only limited sources to meet the objectives of the curriculum. In this sense, textbooks can become ‘a tyrant to the teacher’, restricting flexibility and adaptability in teaching methods (Harmer, 2007). Although textbooks are essential resources in English language classes, their rigid structure and inadequacies demand a more dynamic, engaging and contextually appropriate pedagogical approach. It is possible to more effectively meet the needs of learners and facilitate more effective language learning by utilizing a variety of pedagogical techniques, including additional resources and materials, and modifying contents to the specific circumstances for which English language teachers require to be resourceful, equipped with professional skills of manipulating and even creating authentic materials on the other specific contexts (Baral, 2010).

There can be multiple alternative ways to achieve the requirements of the curriculum and contemporary pedagogical trends. English language teachers can employ student-centred pedagogical methods like task-based, project-based, content and language integrated learning, problem-solving, etc. and authentic materials like newspapers, magazines, podcasts, menus, blogs, YouTube videos, etc., in the classroom. They can make use of pedagogical techniques like role play, extensive reading, quizzes, group discussions, presentation, debate sessions, etc., with collaboration by integrating ICT during teaching in the classroom. Such approaches and techniques facilitate and engage students in active language learning and enhance communication, creativity, critical thinking and problem solving through real-world tasks (Bastola, 2021; Bhandari & Bhandari, 2024; Neupane, 2024; Paudel et al., 2024). In this context, sociocultural theory of language learning emphasises that social interaction promotes language development and that language development or learning occurs through communication and collaboration with others. It further states, learners/students remain in need of support and guidance, which can be provided from the teacher and more experienced peers in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978). However, textbooks seem to be the sole source and are taken as inevitable material for teaching-learning purposes in public schools in Nepal. They are regarded as essential and reliable materials to carry on classroom teaching and even plan the overall teaching process (Acharya, 2024). As textbooks are highly used teaching materials for classroom pedagogy in Nepalese public schools, they are supposed to provide students with the required knowledge and skills to match their level.

However, students at government schools may not have been provided a natural environment to learn English from native exposures (Bista, 2011). The present English textbooks for secondary level, particularly for grades nine and ten, contain a variety of authentic materials and tasks aiming to make students learn and practice language skills for real-life situations. These textbooks integrate language skills and aspects with balance along with ICT materials (CDC, 2078). This indicates that Nepali secondary EFL pedagogy focuses on teaching of language through content and tasks. As previous research studies indicated the inappropriate use of textbooks and the only source for classroom pedagogy becomes insufficient, failing to provide a language learning environment, achieve curricular objectives and adhere to modern pedagogical shifts. In this sense, it becomes a pertinent issue to explore how English teachers perceive, experience and make use of textbooks to teach language, as it aims to teach language through content and tasks. Thus, this study aims to explore English language teachers' perceptions and classroom practices regarding the use of textbooks for effective teaching and learning of English in Nepali secondary classrooms.

Methods and Procedures

This study adopts a qualitative narrative methodology based on primary information. To explore the perceptions and practices regarding using textbooks in classroom pedagogy, I selected four English language teachers who have been teaching English at the secondary level for more than ten years. I selected Kanchanpur district, Nepal, as a research site and four public secondary schools from different locations based on convenience in the data gathering process, as I belong to the same district. To select participants from the site, I employed a purposive sampling procedure. The rationality of purposive sampling of participants entirely depends on the researchers' subjective judgment, keeping in consideration the purpose of the study. Similarly, I selected two male and two female teachers to ensure gender equality among participants and to collect representative data from them, making the data collected from them more accurate and trustworthy. For the collection of data for my research topic, I developed an informal, flexible, in-depth narrative interview protocol with several open-ended questions. Likewise, after obtaining the consent from school administration and research participants and assuring them for privacy and secrecy of the audio and video recordings, I also gathered data by observing the research participants' teaching in real classrooms.

I met the research participants in person and conducted interviews with them. Taking permission from them, I recorded their voices on my cell phone. I interviewed them in Nepali medium so that research participants could share their perceptions and experiences freely. Further, I transcribed audio recordings into printed form and translated those transcriptions from Nepali to English. To develop themes, I examined the data several times. I organised the data into different themes based on the purpose of my study. Finally, I analyzed and interpreted themes by the guidelines of thematic process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) which includes familiarizing the data, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, naming themes and writing up aligning to the purpose of exploring teachers' perceptions and practices of utilizing textbooks for classroom pedagogy in Nepalese secondary English classrooms. Since ethical considerations are unavoidable in social science research, I committed to and followed all necessary moral and academic norms throughout the whole study process, from gathering data to analysis and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Data gathered employing in-depth narrative interviews and classroom observations were analysed and interpreted under the following three main themes.

Heavy Reliance on Textbook Teaching

Since the overarching objective of the English curriculum at the secondary level in Nepal is to foster students' ability to communicate effectively and explore the vast resources available in the English language, both spoken and written (CDC, 2021b, p. 39), the CDC develops the textbooks for this level based on objectives of the curriculum. It aims to make the students learn language for real-world contexts. However, the common understanding of teaching English in Nepali context is the teaching of prescribed textbooks. Most of the teachers often follow the texts and exercises given in the book while teaching, and on this basis, measure the students' learning achievements. Sapkota (2015), in this context, states that "a common understanding of teaching English in the Nepali context implies teaching the prescribed textbook lessons and learning means following the teachers' instructions" (p. 71). In this context, it is worth mentioning the perception of Deepak, one of my research participants, regarding the textbook. He stated that,

The textbooks undergo periodic revisions and changes. In my experience as a secondary-level English teacher, this is the third time I have changed English textbook for grade nine. And these textbooks are also supplied too delay in the schools, which hampers our daily teaching learning process and later creates difficulty in finishing the course in time.

This narration, shared by Deepak, very evidently demonstrated that classroom teaching is entirely dependent on the prescribed textbooks that the CDC develops and distributes in the public schools. Likewise, his narration indicated that, teachers do not use reference resources to prepare and plan lessons for classroom teaching in compliance with the curriculum. In the very situation of understanding the utilisation and influence of the textbook, another participant, Binita, narrated,

Textbooks are updated and changed regularly but the orientation programs for new courses and the supply of textbooks are never delivered on time. As a result, it becomes difficult for us to adjust to new textbooks and, it also hinders and slows down our teaching.

The story of Binita more evidently showed that English teachers' classroom instruction is solely dependent on the prescribed textbooks. Her story also highlighted the reality that teachers remain under pressure to complete the course in the allocated time with the limited available resources. Similar to the experiences of Deepak and Binita, my third research participant, Dikshya, stated that,

We are always remain in pressure to finish the course in time. The school administration, students, and even guardians blame us for inadequately conducting teaching if it is not completed within the scheduled time. Therefore, we typically follow the textbook's texts and exercises while teaching.

Dikshya's sharing demonstrated the fact that teachers usually adhere to the texts and

activities in the English classes. Her story also showed that due to the afraid of being accused of poor teaching by the parents and school authorities, teachers oblige to get through the textbook and finish in time. This indicates that teachers are not only responsible for textbook teaching but many other factors create a kind of pressure on teachers following textbook teaching. In a similar line, the fourth participant Krishna's shared his experience, and sated that,

By the assessment system applied in exams, and particularly in the SEE exam, we have to teach and complete the course. The preparation of the question paper almost follows the textbook passages and exercises. Therefore, our teaching rarely goes beyond the textbook passages and exercises.

Krishna's experience is more vivid when viewed in the context of teaching from a textbook. It accurately stated that teachers are compelled, for a number of reasons, to follow the typical teaching of textbook contents and exercises. His story also showed that the evaluation system in tests and examinations creates pressure to thoroughly follow the textbook sections and exercises. This further indicates that the evaluation system does not give equal priority in assessing all language skills and focuses more on learners' competence compared to performance. In this way, all my teacher participants' experiences regarding classroom pedagogy showed textbook-based classroom teaching practices. Their narratives are so intelligible that they have been completely dependent on texts and exercises of the prescribed textbooks provided by the concerned higher levels of the educational framework.

Positive Perceptions towards Curriculum and Textbook Alignment

Regarding the facilitation and alignment of the textbook with the curriculum, my research participants showed positive belief that the present secondary level English curriculum facilitates their teaching activities. In this context, Krishna posited that,

The current English curriculum for grades nine and ten of the secondary level is good and extremely helpful. Nothing is lacking there,; each textbook unit simultaneously covers both grammatical tasks and major language skills. If it is properly executed in the classroom, our teaching becomes effective and successful.

This narrative of Krishna demonstrates the fact that the present secondary level English curriculum has been designed as an excellent and supportive document for planning effective instructional practices in the classrooms. His sharing also showed that the textbooks have been developed by curricular aims that all language skills and aspects have been included in each chapter for practising in the classroom. His sharing further indicated the proper implementation to make teaching and learning productive and efficient. In line with the same, another research participant, Dikshya, narrated that,

Our teaching strategies are based on the curriculum. It provides us with guidelines regarding using the teaching methodology and offers suggestions to employ student-centred teaching in the classroom. Altogether, CDC has developed a textbook compatible with the objectives of the curriculum.

The narrative of Dikshya explored the curriculum as the foundation for carrying out teaching and learning activities. Her story also showed the significance of a curriculum that directs and suggests selecting student-centred pedagogy during classroom teaching. Likewise, the third research participant, Binita, narrated her positive perceptions towards the present curriculum. She stated that,

Our English curriculum for secondary level facilitates and directs the whole classroom teaching from the selection of teaching methods and techniques to the ways of taking assessments. If it can be followed properly throughout the academic session in the teaching-learning and evaluation system, it gives effective outputs.

This narration of Binita revealed that the curriculum is the basic document that controls, directs and suggests the entire pedagogical planning of the subject teacher regarding teaching methodology and assessment system. However, her story indicated towards lack of proper execution. Similar to the story of Binita, the fourth participant, Deepak stated that,

The present curriculum of grades nine and ten suggests implementing student-centered teaching. It emphasises students' learning through different activities. CDC has developed these textbooks in a very careful way so that they could fulfil set curricular aims. The contents and exercises are very interesting and beneficial for practising language learning.

This narrative assertion of Deepak explored that there is a very good compatibility between textbooks and the curriculum. It also revealed that the textbook exercises and materials are highly engaging and useful for improving language skills. In this sense, my teacher participants' narratives indicated that they keep the knowledge of the curriculum well and make an effort to plan their teaching according to the textbook designated based on it. However, as their narrative also indicated, there are problems with the proper execution of curricular objectives only through textbook teaching.

Teachers' Use of Textbooks in the Classroom

As the English curriculum for grades nine and ten is designed to empower students to express their ideas effectively and confidently in English, it gives stress on using a communicative method in classroom pedagogy. The updated version of English curriculum for grades nine-twelve also emphasises communicative approach to language teaching, focusing on all four language skills essential for students' real-life contexts, aligning with practical language use (CDC, 2022, as cited in Khadka,

2024, p. 47). The textbook for this level has also been designed in line with the same curriculum objectives. It indicates that if the curriculum's suggestions are implemented, it suggests teaching language through content and tasks given in the textbook. In this line, the argument made by Sapkota (2015) can be appropriate that Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is more appropriate in Nepali context. He states, "It is high time to shift our practices to a more productive approach to teaching, and CLIL meets the present needs" (p. 71). In line with the same, Paudel et al. (2024) state, CLIL is about learning two things simultaneously: a language and the content (p. 60). This indicates that secondary-level English pedagogy demands CLIL as an appropriate method of teaching. In this situation of ELT pedagogy of secondary English classes, to discover how my research participants are practising teaching, I observed their real classroom teaching. As I observed Binita's class, she initiated her teaching like this: first, she wrote the teaching topic, date, etc., on the whiteboard and instructed students to open the book to the page number. Then, she asked some questions related to title word meanings and delivered their meanings in both English and Nepali. Then after, she asked one of the students to read the first paragraph of the text. As the student finished reading, she again asked and gave the meanings of new words, and started explaining the concept of the paragraph. While explaining, she asked some related questions randomly in the class. Some students attempted to answer, and the majority of them remained silent. During the asking questions, the classroom seemed to some extent interactive. Similarly, she taught the remaining paragraphs, and towards the end of the class, she asked some questions related to the text. Finally, she gave the students, as a home assignment, the exercises given in the book.

As I minutely noticed, she went thoroughly through the textbook topic and attempted to make the class interactive, but she became more active in the class in comparison to her students. Because of the students' less participation, she made more use of the lecture method. She spent more time explaining the word meanings and concepts. In this way, though she attempted to involve students in teaching learning using interrogation with them, I found her not well prepared for engaging students in language learning activities. They were not provided with more opportunities for practising language learning. So, as Tiwari (2021) states, "the main focus of the teachers was to teach content primarily focusing on vocabulary items rather than having real interaction" (p. 384), Binita's classroom teaching also covered the given content in the book, but she couldn't engage students in language learning activities.

Similarly, I observed the classroom teaching of Krishna regarding textbook-based teaching. I noted that he also completely followed the text and exercises given in the book. His classroom teaching was like this: first, he asked the students to open the book, and page number and write the teaching topic on the whiteboard. They all opened the book and the topic. Then he asked the meaning of the title word randomly

in the class, and gave the meaning and concept of the title. Then, he taught difficult vocabulary from the given text and moved to have students read the paragraphs. After finishing reading, he explained the concept of the paragraph. He asked questions during teaching vocabulary and explaining the concept of the paragraph. He mostly used lecture method and students except replying yes sir/ no sir, replied some answers in Nepali, and remained most of the time unanswered and silent in the class. He used the strategy of asking questions to elicit the meanings and answers, and made them read aloud the text to engage in learning, as they got the opportunity to learn reading skills and pronunciation during reading. In this way, Krishna attempted to engage students in learning activities but with very limited techniques. He was also found spending much of his teaching time on content explanation rather than on creating language learning opportunities.

Furthermore, I observed the classroom teaching practices of Dikshya to confirm how she makes use of content and tasks to practice language learning in the classroom. I found her too, mostly using the lecture method and spending much of the time on content explanation. More or less, she also initiated the class in similar ways by asking questions. She asked vocabulary and text-related short questions like,

Have you heard the word ‘ecology’? What do you mean by this?
What is the meaning of environment?

And, students mostly replied like,

Yes, ma’am. Prayawaran/ watawaran ma’am.

Dikshya clarified the meaning of the title words both in English and Nepali. She taught sub-title words given in the text and tried to elicit the meaning from the students, they attempted to reply but mostly in Nepali. When she moved further, she asked students to read the text and facilitated them in pronunciation during reading. During clarifying the concept of the paragraph, sometimes, she went through line-by-line content explanation. She could not create interactive environment in the classroom to make students’ participation in language learning activities.

Likewise, I observed the real teaching of Deepak to see how he uses textbook to teach language in the classroom. I did not find much difference in his teaching, too. He started the class by writing the teaching topic on the whiteboard. The topic was ‘Surprising Customs’. He talked about the meaning of the title words. He asked the meaning of ‘surprising customs’ whether they had heard and known before. He asked like this:

T: Do you know the meaning of surprising? Can you say the meaning of customs?

Ss: Yes, sir. Aascharyajanak.....

The meaning of ‘customs’ they cannot reply. Deepak clarified the meaning

and the concept of the title both in English and Nepali. He moved ahead and asked the students to read aloud the paragraphs. During the reading, he facilitated them in pronunciation. As their reading finished, he taught paragraphs. While teaching paragraphs, he read aloud line by line and explained the concept. He taught meaning of difficult words of the paragraphs. While explaining the meaning, he used English and Nepali language both. And finally, as he finished the paragraphs, he gave homework, the exercises given in the book, and concluded the class. As noticed, Deepak could not create language learning atmosphere in the classroom. He also spent much of the class time on finishing the content given in the book.

In this way, all the participants were found practising similar ways of delivering the content in the classroom. They were found mainly focusing on teaching reading and writing rather than listening and speaking which may have been due to their lack of confidence in conducting learning activities or the fact that the textbook is filled with reading texts and writing exercises. However, the curriculum comprises all language skills and aspects to be taught in the classroom. They also stated that the curriculum and textbooks have been developed with good compatibility so that language learning activities can be conducted in the classroom. But from the class observation, they were found spending more time on content explaining rather than focusing on language learning activities. They may have to follow their teaching by the requirements of the exam, which primarily give emphasis on reading and writing skills. In this context, Shrestha and Gautam (2022) stated that “teachers may feel more confident in teaching reading and writing and those skills are prioritised in external assessment” (p. 30). The class observation also discovered that teachers often began their teaching and discussions in the class with brief textual questions, to which students responded simply in words or in phrases sometimes in English and largely in Nepali (Tiwari, 2021). Likewise, it showed that they have been spending their class time on completing the course rather than conducting the learning activities effectively. It further found that teachers’ seriousness regarding the type of content that has to be utilised to teach students certain things like language skills, grammar, etc., was insufficient.

Conclusion

This research study aimed at exploring English language teachers’ perceptions and experiences of textbook use in Nepali secondary schools. It also attempted to discover teachers’ classroom practices of utilising given content and tasks from the textbook for language learning activities. The study revealed that English language teachers have been entirely dependent on texts and exercises of the prescribed textbooks in their classroom pedagogical practices. The study also found that teachers of English retain complete knowledge of the curriculum, and attempt to plan their

teaching, aligning their objectives with textbook content and tasks. However, as it showed, there are challenges to the proper execution of curricular objectives only through textbook teaching. They were found conducting their teaching according to the requirements of the examination that prioritise reading and writing skills. The study further revealed that English language teachers spent more time explaining the content rather than focusing on language learning activities. It also showed the lack of seriousness of teachers in conducting effective language learning activities, as they often began their teaching and discussions through interrogation and spent their class time on completing the course. This study, in this way, uncovered the textbook-based content teaching in Nepalese secondary English classrooms.

As the study explored the predominance of teacher-centred, textbook-oriented, and limited student engagement in classroom teaching practices, it suggests that English teachers at the secondary level to employ student-centred teaching and focus on creating a more language learning environment in the classroom. They need to conduct student-engaging activities for promoting language learning utilising textbook contents and tasks, and even going beyond the textbook exercises. They should give more time to language practice than to content explanation. This research study has certain constraints, like; it is a small-scale study that only included four English teachers of Kanchanpur district, Far Western region of Nepal. The study utilises interview protocols and classroom observation only for gathering the data. As a result, the findings' generalisation may not be accurate in different circumstances throughout the country. However, teachers who teach English at secondary may find the study helpful. Likewise, this study could be insightful and informative for scholars who are interested in investigating textbook-based teaching and learning.

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Impact of Globalization on Intercultural Communicative Competence and English Language Teaching in Nepal

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Abstract

This article explores how globalization restructures Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) with the growing use of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nepal. With rapid globalization, the aim of language teaching has shifted from communicative competence to ICC. The objective of this study is to explore the impact of globalization on ICC and ELT by employing a qualitative literature review related to globalization utilizing secondary sources. With the rise of Westernization, it evaluates the inclusion of ICC in ELT curricula, suggesting strategies to balance local and global preserving their linguistic identity. It concludes that globalization has a long-term effect on Nepal's socio-cultural dynamics which stresses the students to be proficient in ICC and ELT because English has become a global lingua franca and a carrier of culture as well. It also analyses the challenges and opportunities that have been brought about by globalization in ELT in Nepal. As Nepal is interconnected globally, it is significant to analyze how globalization redefines the English language learning and teaching process and how it is connected with the ICC of the learners. It further analyzes how globalization offers a more inclusive approach to language teaching which integrates cultural awareness into the curriculum. It concludes with curriculum reformation and teacher training by equipping the skills to navigate cultural plurality. Finally, it emphasizes to integrate ICC into ELT in developing global communicative skills, and promoting local cultural and linguistic traditions despite the risk of westernization and cultural homogenization in ELT in Nepal.

Keywords: Communicative competence, linguistic competence, ELT, linguistic identity

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Introduction

Globalization is a process in which the world is interlinked and symbiotic driven by modern technology, transportation, and communication. It is the exchange of products, services, people, language and culture worldwide. According to Kumaravadivelu (2008), globalization is the process that describes increasing interdependence and interconnection of countries, cultures, and languages due to technological advancement, especially in communication and transportation. It is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that removes national boundaries and interlocks and interconnects numerous sides of society including economic, social, political, cultural, and religious aspects. It has affected various aspects of the world, including commerce, economy, communication, information, education, social media, health, language and literature, and so on. The advancement in digital technology and mass media has greatly flourished global culture and civilization.

Increasing global connectivity is evident in our daily routines, communication technologies, environment, food choices, income sources, and entertainment. Capital, labor market, culture, and trade are highly influenced by globalization. Speedy advancement and economic extension have triggered the global flow of ideas, thoughts, language, culture, and economy. Because of the widespread globalization, English has spread globally through multiple varieties. The spread of English as a global language has altered our ideas about the language and the best ways to teach it. Since there are now more non-native English speakers than native speakers, English ownership has changed, giving rise to new World Englishes (WE). Thus, it explores the influence of globalization on intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and also examines how globalization has had a lasting impact on English language teaching in the context of Nepal.

English as a Global Language

The central role of English as a global lingua franca, a major international language of business, diplomacy, science, and technology, was heavily influenced by historical, political, and economic factors. Many people speak English worldwide now, with more people speaking it as a second, foreign, or other language than native speakers (Jenkins, 2006; McKay, 2003). According to recent estimates, the number of non-native speakers is twice (Kachru, 1996) and even twice or thrice (Parker, 1999) the number of native speakers of English in the world. English language teachers should consider the implications for teaching and learning as this spread is expected to continue (Graddol, 1997; Jenkins, 2006; Yano, 2001).

The British Empire's colonization and the economic power of the United States have tremendously affected the global spread of English, making it the uncontested

world language (Graddol, 2021). However, some linguists argue that the supremacy of the English language may marginalize other languages and cultures to the extent of removing any legitimate form of bi/multilingualism, which certainly results in a new form of linguistic injustice, epistemicide (Santos, 2014). Similarly, Crystal (2021) also highlights that this can result in language homogenization, where marginal languages face elimination as societies move toward English for financial and social mobility. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in non-English-speaking countries, where educational systems often prioritize English proficiency, sometimes at the expense of local languages. In non-English speaking countries, where educational systems frequently prioritize English proficiency sometimes at the expense of regional local languages—this phenomenon is especially noticeable.

Although numerous research has been conducted on the effect of globalization in the educational sector and foreign language teaching (Jnawali, 2024; Sawalmeh & Dey, 2023), a little research has been done on globalization's impact on ICC and ELT in Nepal. A plethora of research studies have been conducted analyzing the role of globalization in guiding language education (Aryal, 2023; Marlina, 2013; Tochon, 2009). However, limited research has been done in the Nepalese context, a fertile situation with unique cultural diversity and the growing impact of global languages especially connecting globalization, ICC, and ELT in Nepal. In this scenario, this research article aims to address this gap by exploring the connection of globalization, ICC, and ELT in Nepal offering insights into the challenges and drawbacks brought about by globalization in Nepal. To address these issues, the following questions are answered:

1. How has globalization influenced the promotion of ICC among English language learners in Nepalese students?
2. What are the challenges in integrating ICC in ELT in Nepal?

Literature Review

Concept of Globalization

As globalization is a continuous process, it affects all aspects of society and even permeates all society (Garrett, 2010). Appadurai (1990) mentions five scapes - ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapas, financescapas, and ideoscapas- as presenting a dominant critical framework to comprehend the intricate, disjunctive, and fluid nature of globalization in relation to culture. Sometimes globalization becomes a debatable issue by posing a question such as, is globalization westernization or a more complex and multidirectional process? However, Appadurai (1990) takes it as a fluid and multifaceted process which interconnects global migration rather than unidirectional process. Globalization has been perceived differently by different people at different

times. One of the earliest proponents of globalization theory, Giddens (2000) introduces globalization as a broad notion, and other commentators have drawn on his views regarding how globalization might be conceptualized theoretically. Globalization is a collection of global social associations that have advanced and elevated to the point where local alteration is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social networks across time and space. This way, the global is connected with locals and local decisions are made based on the international framework. In the same way, American sociologist Steger (2003) defines globalization as “a multidimensional set of social processes that create, multiply, stretch, and intensify worldwide social interdependencies and exchanges while at the same time fostering in people a growing awareness of deepening connections between the local and the distant” (p.13). According to Australian historian Robertson (2003), globalization began roughly 500 years ago with the beginning of modern colonial period. He distinguishes three globalization “waves,” readily connected to three stages of contemporary imperialism and colonialism. Spain and Portugal led the first wave of regional trade explorations; Britain led the second wave of industrialization; and the United States led the third wave of the post-war world order. According to Tomlinson (1999), the mechanism at its core, however, is a process that he describes as accelerating “connectivity” since it is relatively easy to describe. By this, he means that globalization refers to a quickly growing and constantly expanding web of relationships and interdependence that define contemporary social life.

Globalization is the process of nations becoming more interdependent by exchanging information, goods, services, and cultures. It has produced a global village where cross-cultural contacts are more flexible and geographic barriers are less important. The role of English is indispensable for promoting ICC among people from various local cultures. Millions of people use it as a lingua franca in international communication between speakers (Baugh & Cable, 2002; Munezane, 2019; Ryan, 2012; Sevimeh-Sahin, 2020). Since people must negotiate many cultural norms and behaviors, this interconnection has major implications for intercultural communication.

Globalization’s Influence on ICC

The concept of competencies needed to communicate and interact with people from multiple backgrounds and cultures can be significant in foreign language teaching as the world grows gradually multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic. Countries like the United States and the United Kingdom have utilized ICC in their language teaching policies (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). According to John Corbett (2003), globalization is the main agent in transmitting language pedagogy through the framework for integrating ICC into ELT. Based on Byram’s (1997) model

of knowledge, attitude, interpreting skills, skills of discovering and interaction, and critical cultural awareness, Corbett supports learners to be prepared as intercultural mediator in international contexts by moving beyond native speakers' norms.

However, adequate attention is not given to ICC by language teachers who generally maintain a mindset of teaching language and culture separately. In this regard, the main goal of this article is to increase awareness of ICC in ELT contexts by revealing ICC and its connection to language, outlining the importance of ICC, and providing examples of specific recommendations in the material aimed at improving ICC in ELT classes in the globalized world. The capacity to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural interactions is called ICC which is developed through exposure to various cultures. Many research findings show that those frequently exposed to multiple cultural perspectives are thought to acquire the empathy, openness, and adaptability necessary to cross the challenges of intercultural communication (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Thus, it is central to recognize that ICC—that is, the knowledge, motivation, and abilities essential to interact efficiently and correctly with persons from varied cultural contexts—is currently the most favored form of competence, following the sequential dominance of communicative and grammatical (linguistic) competence (Wiseman, 2002). The role of linguistic, communicative, and intercultural ICC is significant since these concepts are interlinked in applied linguistics and communication.

Linguistic Competence

In the 1960s, the 20th-century linguist Noam Chomsky introduced the concept of linguistic competence (LC), which includes an in-depth comprehension of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Chomsky, 1965). While LC is essential for understanding a language's structure, it overlooks the ability to employ language in social contexts. Chomsky (1965) emphasized the distinction between LC, focusing on the speaker hearer's understanding of their language, and performance, which refers to the practical application of language in actual situations. Noam Chomsky notes that the ideal speaker-listener is the main focus of linguistic theory, in an entirely homogeneous speech community that is fully conversant in its language and unaffected by grammatically irrelevant factors like memory loss, distractions, changes in focus and interests, and mistakes in using their language knowledge in real-world contexts. In short, linguistic competence is the native speakers' ability to formulate "well-formed sentences" (Thornbury, 2006, p. 37). Thus, LC refers to the native speakers' unconscious knowledge of rule of, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of their language that they use it naturally.

Communicative Competence

Hymes (1972) initially noted that the Chomskyan concept of competence, which deals with the ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community, does not include competency for language usage. In other words, it does not consider the entire sociocultural dimension. Hymes focused on linguistic theory and the socio-cultural aspect of language. Hymes (1972) responded against Chomsky's definition of competence because he feels that Chomsky "omits almost everything of sociocultural significance" (p. 280). He argued that Chomsky's narrow concept of competence overlooks the actual use of language, leading to the creation of communicative competence (CC). CC involves knowing the rules of grammar (linguistic competence) and understanding when, why, and with whom to use particular forms of speech (pragmatics). This term encompasses linguistic knowledge and sociolinguistic codes and rules for using language. Hymes believed that competence depends on tacit knowledge and ability for use. Similarly, CC is categorized into six components by Canale and Swain (1990) which are linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, and social competence. Thus, Canale and Swain focus on more than just grammatical knowledge. Rather it incorporates multiple interconnected components that foster meaningful and natural communication in various contexts. They highlight the underlying skills and knowledge required for effective communication in second language. The basic knowledge and skills required for successful communication is crucial in CC.

Concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Language and culture are deeply interconnected and inseparable; thus, culture is an indispensable part of teaching language and influences each other since language is the carrier of culture. Effective intercultural communication depends on subjective encodings of emotions, feelings, attitudes, experiences, and knowledge of the language users. The concept of intercultural communicative competence combines both language and culture in the classroom.

Byram (1997, as cited in Hua, 2013, pp. 48-53) proposed a model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in which an 'intercultural speaker' mediates between different perspectives and cultures. It refers to the capability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Lazer (2003) believes that ICC is the extension of CC. ICC emerged when CC could not deal with cultural aspects. Thus, ICC refers to the speakers' competence to communicate efficiently to the interlocutors from diverse cultures. By highlighting abilities like cultural awareness, empathy, and the capacity to negotiate communication style variations, ICC expands communicative competence in an intercultural setting. This notion contains cognitive and emotional components, tending to include a set of

behaviors, attitudes, and knowledge needed for proper functioning in cross-cultural contexts (Deardorff, 2006). Byram revised the first three dimensions of competence he found in Van Ek's model: and added intercultural competence, which has the following six aspects (Byram 1997, as cited in Hua, 2013, p.152):

- Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
- Knowledge: knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
- Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own culture.
- Skills of discovering and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
- Critical cultural awareness/political education: ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria the perspectives, practices and products of one's own and other cultures and countries.

It is crucial to discuss Byram's distinction between intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence. The term "intercultural competence" (IC) refers to the capability to communicate with individuals from varied cultural backgrounds properly, appropriately, and productively. Negotiation of cultural variations in the diversity of social situations is required in IC. Attitudes, information, and abilities that help people recognize and value cultural diversity are included in IC. Thus, it refers to the ability to interact in one's language with people from another culture and does not necessarily require knowledge of the target language.

In ICC, Byram combined IC with CC. ICC stresses effective and appropriate communication in cross-cultural contexts and the ability to engage with individuals from other cultural backgrounds. This incorporates language proficiency and the capacity to manage interactions, understand and relate cultural allusions, and consider one's cultural identity and prejudices. ICC is about interacting with people from another culture in a foreign language. People need to be aware of various cultures and gain ICC to interact successfully with others (Baker, 2016) as a result of the globalized world and new communication technologies, both of which have erased the national borders and created a universal link (Mostafaei Alaei & Nosrati, 2018). Similarly, Chen and Starosta (1998, p.28) explained ICC as "the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors that negotiate each other's cultural identity or identities in a culturally diverse environment."

Interrelationship between LC, CC, and ICC

These three concepts are intertwined with each other. While CC focuses on how language works in actual social circumstances, LC offers the structural underpinnings of communication. One cannot communicate effectively without adequate language skills because these two concepts are tightly interrelated. But by considering social conventions, cultural quirks, and the environment in which communication occurs, CC transcends LC. Similarly, by combining a layer of cultural awareness, ICC expands on CC. People must recognize the diversity of communicative norms in several cultural standards for communication and modify their communication strategies accordingly. As a result, proficient language and communication skills and a thorough awareness of cultural differences are necessary for successful communication in cross-cultural settings. However, on the other hand, basic communication requires LC, however, ICC entails modifying language choices to be culturally relevant. ICC, for instance, may require understanding how to properly formulate a request across cultural boundaries, which may need modifications to linguistic structures that transcend grammatical conventions, such as indirectness or differing degrees of formality (Kramsch, 2009).

Methods and Procedures

For this article, I employed qualitative literature review methodology to analyze, synthesize, and critique the available research literature related to the impact of globalization on ICC and ELT in Nepal from secondary sources. Through the analysis, synthesis, and interpretation of articles books, book chapters and other policy documents from peer review journals from internet sources such as Google Scholar, Research Gate, JSTOR, ERIC, NELTA and Scopus, I generated concepts, trends, and themes related to globalization, ICC and the changing ELT contexts in Nepal. The themes were generated highlighting the overall impact of globalization on the teaching and learning of English in Nepal through the framework of intercultural communicative competence. Globalization has transformed the education system and impacted ICC and English language teaching. Thus, the methodology emphasizes a systematic and structured review of both qualitative and quantitative studies to derive meaningful insights and identify emerging trends and challenges in Nepal's ELT practices. The collected data were analyzed by categorizing thematically. However, non-academic sources were excluded.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the in-depth study, analysis, critique, and synthesis of different research articles which are concerned with the impact of globalization on ICC and ELT in Nepal.

ELT in Nepal

The English language has significantly affected Nepal's education system. It was formally imported into the education system of Nepal about two centuries ago by the then Rana Prime minister, Jung Bahadur Rana to use English in their daily lives. After his first visit to England in 1851 AD, English was formally implemented in the education system of Nepal because he was impressed by the British education system (Caddell, 2007; Giri, 2010). Durbar High School was opened to provide education only to Rana's family members and their elite supporters (Saud, 2025). The ruling classes were educated in English and made a strong diplomatic relations with the British to prolong their autocratic rule (Eagle, 2000). At that time, English was taught as a compulsory subject and medium of teaching. However, English has never been imposed politically, as in other colonized countries, in the context of Nepal as (Poudel, 2021) mentions Nepal has not been politically colonized by British people. After the collapse of the Rana regime in 1951, Nepal entered into a new democratic period which exhibited quite visible changes in politics and education. With a growing thirst for modernization and internationalization, the role of English in teaching Foreign Languages increased significantly. The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 also prioritized to reform curriculum in English. The restoration of democracy in Nepal in 1990 brought a turning point not only in politics but also in English language education. ELT then began to grow rapidly and develop greatly because of political reforms, foreign aid, and globalization.

After the People's Movement second 2062-63, Nepal became a democratic republic introducing certain educational reforms that would improve educational quality in general, including ELT. Yet some new policies were introduced. It is stipulated in the Constitution of Nepal that all the mother tongues that the nation possesses are recorded as national languages, thereby giving each community the right to an education in their mother tongue (Poudel & Costley, 2023).

Relationship between ICC and ELT in Nepal

This relationship can also be observed in the Nepalese ELT curriculum and pedagogy. Teachers are encouraged to identify cultural elements in their classes so that students can see beyond the walls that keep them from realizing a much wider and more respectful world concerning people's numerous cultures. This indeed coincides with the goal of ICC to instill in the people empathy that culture has, reduce an individual's cultural biases, and eventually enhance one's mutual understanding with others across cultures.

Importance of ICC in ELT in Nepal

In the Nepalese context of ELT which is full of cultural diversity, the role

of ICC cannot be ignored because of the worldwide impact of English as a global language. Although English is primarily used as second language globally, its expanding dominance in various international contexts requires the inclusion of ICC as a pedagogical imperative in ELT. Integrating ICC into ELT is essential for helping students to navigate global relationships in Nepal's linguistically diverse contexts while maintaining local cultural identities. ICC addresses the shortcomings of traditional methods, which focus on grammatical correctness rather than cultural understanding, by encompassing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective communication (Jiang, et al. 2022). Thus, ICC plays a significant role in Nepalese diverse cultural contexts because it helps people talk across cultures, break down cultural walls, and gain power in this connected world. This article explores how globalization affects the ICC and notes why ICC matters so much in how Nepal teaches and uses English.

Global Communication and Social Integration

The role of English as a worldwide common language helps people talk across cultures, and ICC plays a key part in making communications effective and respecting different cultures. ICC matters a lot for bringing people together in Nepal where many ethnic and language groups live together. This phenomenon is relevant in government, work, and school settings. Students are required to develop sociolinguistic competence to strategically use language across diverse communicative contexts because English as a dominant language is used as a medium of instruction in academia in Nepal. ICC allows learners to join in talks that mean something and respect cultural differences cutting down on the chances of getting things wrong, not understanding, and fighting. In today's interconnected world, ICC can change how they talk based on cultural norms, rules, values, and assumptions which helps bring people together and work as a team (Deardorff, 2006). ICC is crucial for social assimilation in Nepal since various ethnic and linguistic communities live together in harmony.

Enhances Cultural Awareness

With the help of intercultural communication, students learn about diverse cultural norms, beliefs, and practices by being familiar with ICC. Nepal has many languages, ethnic groups, and religions, and students come from diverse backgrounds. By understanding intercultural competence, learners value cultural differences and improve social harmony by decreasing prejudices. ELT now plays a vital part in Nepal's education system, and ICC helps students appreciate their culture and other cultures (Byram, 2000).

Integrating ICC in ELT in Nepal

Various techniques can be employed to integrate ICC in the teaching-learning process in the context of ELT classrooms in Nepal. Role plays, conversations, dialogues, and discussions regarding cultural issues and perspectives broaden students'

understanding. Teachers must be involved in ongoing training to incorporate ICC in language teaching. Finally, to develop learners' communicative proficiency, it is indispensable to integrate ICC into ELT which helps them to improve a wide range of appreciation for various cultures. It is indispensable in this global contexts because national barriers are lowering because of globalization. Integration of ICC in ELT in Nepal aids learners and enriches their learning proficiency by becoming familiar with cultural understanding for actual interaction in a global world. The increasing interactions of Nepal with the global world can play a vital role fostering ICC through ELT in the overall development of learners, equipping them for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

Challenges in Integrating ICC in ELT in Nepal

Nepal's multiethnic and multilingual landscape poses a unique challenge in integrating ICC in ELT since it is complex and diverse extending from the issues associated with curriculum, teacher training, and resources and attitudes of the students towards cultural diversity.

Linguistic and Cultural Diversity

Nepal is a multilingual and multicultural country with people speaking 124 languages (Saud, 2024). This diversity can be both an opportunity and a problem for teachers in the context of ELT. Addressing the varied origins of learners in the classroom poses a great challenge in integrating ICC. Thus, teachers face challenges in balancing the cultural distinctions of the local language with the presentation of English as a global lingua franca. Although teachers should be proficient at managing multilingual classrooms and promoting intercultural awareness, linguistic diversity can be a valuable language learning tool (Saud, 2019). Thus, cultural diversity and varied linguistic background of the learners may create some challenges in integrating ICC in ELT in Nepal.

Inadequate Teacher Training

Many English language teachers are not given specified training to integrate ICC in ELT in Nepal. Insufficient teacher training is one of the central problems in integrating ICC in ELT in the context of Nepal. Several teachers lack the abilities and knowledge to combine intercultural elements into their lesson plans (Heyes, 2018). Although they exhibit proficiency in teaching language skills, they lack adequate skills in integrating cultural awareness into their teaching process. Due to the lack of proper professional training, teachers face numerous challenges in teaching cultural characteristics of communication which are important to ICC. Additionally, English teachers prioritize grammar and vocabulary instead of promoting critical thinking and cultural awareness which are significant elements of ICC.

Limitations of Curriculum

Nepal's national curriculum focuses on exam-oriented language teaching. Instead of cultivating cultural awareness, it emphasizes grammar and vocabulary teaching. Thus, it hinders the opportunities for integrating ICC into ELT. Furthermore, it is very challenging for teachers to incorporate intercultural materials into their lessons due to the lack of adequate and proper teaching materials and resources (Jora, 2019). A timely curriculum reform is crucial including ICC as a significant component of ELT. Educators should address these challenges and be able to incorporate intercultural issues and better prepare their students to develop skills and be intercultural communicators by engaging effectively in culturally diverse contexts.

Conclusion

Globalization has had a deep and transformative effect on ICC and ELT in Nepal. Due to the worldwide interconnection, English has become a global language that connects several cultural backgrounds and promotes cross-border communication. English has been crucial which is increasingly used in diverse areas including business, diplomacy, education, science, and technology. Regarding intercultural communication, globalization offers opportunities and challenges for Nepal since it is a nation rich in religious and cultural diversity. Due to the impact of globalization, ICC and ELT in Nepal have undergone substantial change. On the one hand, ELT curricula increasingly implement Western instructional methods and on the other hand, it undervalues the sociocultural contexts of Nepal by creating a huge gap between the classroom materials and the learners' real world experiences. One of the important aspects is exposure to diverse cultures and languages that widens one's worldview and develops empathy, tolerance, and intercultural understanding. ICC is crucial for learners to pilot and interact in a globalized context. Nepalese learners should not only acquire language skills but also appreciate the distinctions of cultural diversity since it supports them to communicate effectively and appropriately in various global contexts.

Although globalization offers access to global opportunities, it creates social inequality and cultural loss by creating paradoxical situation of in Nepal. Thus, it highlights the urgency to reconcile global competencies with local cultural preservation. Rather than thinking ICC as westernization, this study promotes education as place for decolonial practice in which ICC is taken as a tool for reciprocal and mutual cultural sharing.

However, another effect of globalization is the risk of cultural homogenization since the increasing global use of English as a dominant language could lead to the loss of local languages and cultures. Although English proficiency is central, it

is indispensable to create a balance promoting global communication skills and preserving local cultural traditions. Thus, ICC is indispensable to second language teaching in fostering their identity and linking global to local traditions and vice versa. Globalization has had a profound impact on language teaching as well. The emergence of communicative and learner-centered approaches has replaced traditional language teaching methods. This study advocates teacher training by equipping them with skills to navigate cultural plurality. Furthermore, it promotes for policy reform for curricula that blend English proficiency with international citizenship. There are so many areas unexplored. Further research can be conducted in areas like the evolving relationship between culture, language, and education. How globalization affects preserving local cultures in the context of Nepal can be an area of further exploration. Globalization has restructured the domain of ELT and ICC in Nepal since it offers opportunities for development and challenges to be addressed carefully. By embracing globalization, the focus must be on understanding cultural diversity rather than only on linguistic proficiency.

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Analyzing Intercultural Communicative Competence in Grade Eleven English Textbook

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the cultural contents and activities in the English textbook of grade eleven to identify how the textbook can contribute to the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in secondary level students of Nepal. I selected this book purposefully for data collection to find the answers of my research questions about the cultural contents presented in the book and their potential to enhance ICC in English language learners from school level. Similarly, I analyzed the contents through the qualitative content analysis method collecting data from the book by following the framework of Byram's ICC Model, Kramsch's cultural perspective, and Cortazzi and Jin's sources of cultures. I found extensive inclusion of target and international cultural contents in the textbook which can ensure the open space to practise and foster the intercultural communicative activities. Additionally, the match of cultural contents with Byram's ICC model and Cortazzi & Jin's sources of culture indicate the potentiality of textbook to enhance ICC in students. This study can be useful for the English language teachers and learners guiding them how this textbook can contribute to develop intercultural communicative competence.

Keywords: Symbolic competence, cultural contents, critical thinking, intercultural awareness

Introduction

Alexandra's story portrays the significance of intercultural communicative competence in multicultural and multilingual society. As mentioned in the article "The link between linguistic subordination and linguistic inferiority complexes" (Tankosic



et al., 2021), Alexandra was a non-native speaker of English having doctorate qualification in sociology but she had to face challenges in social interactions due to the lack of ICC. When she migrated to Australia from Ukraine, she had to work in different companies being socially and economically marginalized. As a result, she was compelled to feel inferiority complexes towards her language and got into anxiety due to communication barriers in Australian context (Tankosic et al., 2021). Therefore, this story provoked me to explore how the textbooks and teachers are playing role to develop intercultural awareness in students from school level and then I planned to analyze English textbooks delving into how they have incorporated and addressed the cultural contents to develop intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in secondary level students of Nepal.

After reading the cultural perspective of Kramersch (2013), Byram's ICC model, and the article of Tankosic et al., I realized that the English language learners of Nepalese schools should also be able to communicate in English at functional level when they live in multicultural society at global context for which the secondary level English textbooks along with teachers can play significant role to develop fundamental skills of ICC in them from school level. Likewise, the secondary level English curriculum (2078 B.S.) and national curriculum framework (2076 B.S.) also aim to develop communicative competence in secondary level students for enabling them to live in global village successfully using English as a global lingua franca (Jenkins, 2009). Thus, it is essential to investigate the cultural aspects in the textbooks to make them useful course books for developing ICC in students from school level. In this study, I have immersed into the textbook of grade eleven to find out its potential for enhancing ICC in secondary level students and I have analyzed the book using the framework of Cortazzi and Jin (1999)'s sources of culture, ICC model of Byram (2021), and cultural perspectives of Kramersch (2013).

According to my experience, in the context of Nepal, English language teaching is highly focused on developing linguistic competence and English as a medium of instruction to learn both English as a subject and the contents of other subjects to get higher education in any discipline. Similar to this, Giri (2010) argues that Nepalese education policies promote English for linguistic competence and academic success but the globalized society needs the individuals with intercultural awareness in the process of social interaction. Therefore, the English textbooks are supposed to have the potential to develop competency as the demand of the global community (Byram, 2021; Cortazzi & Zin, 1999; Kramersch, 2013).

The Government of Nepal has determined national objectives of education related to global manpower. The seventh national objective of education aims to develop competent human resources who can compete at national and international level and are suitable for global context with required digital competency (National

Curriculum Framework, 2076 B.S.). Similarly, Secondary level curriculum of English (2077 B.S.) accepts English as a lingua franca and cultural diversity as a resource to be connected with global community and aims to create meaningful learning context for language learning through texts of language functions, fictions, and non-fictions to prepare students for university education and to work in national and international settings. Moreover, the English curriculum has set up sixteen themes to be included in the textbook of grade eleven and twelve where the themes related to globalization and cultural diversity are also given space. On the basis of these evidences, this study is required to explore how the English textbook of grade eleven has incorporated cultural perspectives and designed the activities to prepare global human resources equipped with ICC.

This qualitative content analysis aims to analyze the secondary level English textbook of grade eleven designed for Nepalese public schools. Additionally, this study intends to explore how the textbook can contribute to developing ICC in the students of grade eleven to make them ready for interaction in the global community. I have analyzed the textbook answering the research question: ‘What cultural contents and activities are there in the textbook and how can they contribute to developing ICC in secondary level students of Nepalese schools?’. This study will be useful for English teachers to be focused on developing ICC going beyond linguistic competence. Similarly, it can provide input as feedback to course designers to make the balance of cultural contents in English textbooks.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communicative Competence and Language Textbooks

ICC is a capability of an individual to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from other cultures, understanding and respecting cultural diversity (Byram, 1997). Byram further asserts that the individuals with ICC possess the five qualities, such as a positive attitude towards cultural diversity, knowledge of how intercultural interactions function, the skill of interpreting and relating cultural phenomena, the skill of discovering new culture and real-life communication, and critical cultural awareness. Byram emphasizes that the language teaching and learning should go beyond linguistic competence and include cultural understanding, critical thinking, and successful communication in intercultural settings. To develop this competence, the English textbooks play a vital role for which the balanced representation of cultural contents is necessary (Byram, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999).

Intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and effectiveness are the core aspects of ICC; intercultural awareness helps individuals to understand their own and others’ culture. Likewise, with the help of intercultural sensitivity, the interlocutors recognize,

appreciate, and respect behaviors, perceptions, and feelings of the people from different cultures. Similarly, intercultural effectiveness is useful for accomplishing the goal of communication in diverse cultural settings (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Furthermore, Ramanowski (2017) claims that when learners face problems in possessing language and use it in the context, ICC helps them to communicate according to the varied contexts. In my opinion, the ICC is required for all persons who live in a multicultural society whether they communicate in English or in another language.

Framework of Cultural Content Analysis in Language Textbook

The structured approach of textbook analysis is required to ensure the appropriate analysis of textbook and to look into the categories, sources, and perspectives of cultural contents in the textbook for which Byram (2021) provides eight cultural contents to be included in the language textbooks for the balanced analysis of textbook to see whether it can foster intercultural communicative competence and promote diverse cultural perspectives,. The criteria include social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities), social interaction (differing levels of formality), belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines), social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government), socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passages), national history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity), national geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members), and stereotypes and national identity (what is “typical,” symbols of national stereotypes).

Similarly, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) believe that if the textbooks make the balance of three sources of cultures in the textbooks, the language learners can develop intercultural communicative competence well. They denote that source culture helps learners to understand their own culture including a specific symbol or sign of national stereotypes, national identity, famous people, famous monuments, and famous folktales. Similarly, the target culture related to English language includes the countries United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, New-Zealand, and Ireland. Additionally, international sources of culture refer to the cultures of those countries where English is not used as a first language. Similar to this, Kachru (1990) presents three circles of English speaking countries. The first inner circle where English is used as first language, the second outer circle where English is widely used as second language, and the third expanding circle where English is used as foreign language or language of education, media, technology and beyond. Furthermore, there are other categories as well to look into the cultural contents in language textbooks. The textbook should cover the aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic aspects for successful language learning context (Adaskou et al., 1990).

Moreover, while analyzing any textbook, we need a lens to see the aspects of a book for which there are numerous perspectives developed by different scholars. Under the cultural perspective, Byram (2021) discusses how the textbook should promote intercultural communicative competence. Similarly, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) focus on making balance of three sources of cultures in the textbook, and Kramsch (2013) talks about big culture and small culture in relation with language teaching and textbook designing.

For the linguistic perspective to textbook analysis, Richard (2001) emphasizes the role of textbook in providing structured syllabus for language learning which covers grammar, vocabulary, phonetics, and syntax and aligns with language acquisition theories. Littlejohn (1998) provides a framework for textbook analysis based on pedagogical perspective which guides to identify whether the textbook is aligned with teaching methodologies and engages learners with supportive and effective activities. Mishra and Koehler (2006) talks about how the textbooks balance technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Here in this study, I have employed the framework of Cortazzi and Jin, Byram, and Kramsch to analyze the textbook in relation to ICC to look into the English textbook of grade eleven through the eyes of cultural perspective.

Different studies conducted in Nepal, China, Japan, Indonesia, United States, Bangladesh and beyond have focused on the analysis of cultural contents in the English textbooks and some of the studies have looked into the textbooks from the perspectives of World Englishes and intercultural competence perspectives. Subedi (2024) analyzed English textbook from a cultural perspective in Nepal. Similarly, Siddique (2011) studied English textbook in Bangladesh to identify intercultural exposure in ELT and Riadini and Cahyono (2021) explored cultural contents in English textbook in Indonesian context. Likewise, Kong and Kiwan (2020) studied cultural activities in different English textbooks and Dianhu Hu (2021) analyzed two English textbooks in Finland and China. Moreover, Soy and Syafrudin (2023) delved into the foreign culture in Cambodian English textbook and Yamada (2010) examined how the Japanese diversity and foreign culture have been balanced in the textbook of English. Furthermore, Yamanka (2006) studied English textbook in relation to World Englishes and cultural representation. Keles and Yazan (2020) investigated the World Englishes and the representation of cultures and communities in the English textbooks, and Bhandari (2019) explored the representation of World Englishes and cultural contents in relation to ICC in the textbook of grade five. However, I did not find the studies on analysis of grade eleven English textbook from the perspective of ICC.

Methods and Procedures

I employed qualitative content analysis research method to describe textual contents, identifying patterns, themes, and meanings within English textbook of grade eleven to see how it can contribute for the development of ICC in secondary level students (Chelimsky, 1989; Krippendorff, 2019; Schreier, 2012) by following the framework of Byram, and Cortazzi and Jin through the lens of cultural perspective to make fundamental inference about the book. The sources of qualitative content analysis are books, newspapers, journal articles, reports, interviews, speeches, videos, images, and field notes (Krippendorff, 2019; Schreier, 2012). Therefore, the primary source of data for my study is the secondary level English textbook of grade eleven developed by Curriculum Development Center (2077 B.S.), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Government of Nepal that follows the spirit of national curriculum framework (NCF) 2076 B.S. and secondary level English curriculum 2076 B.S. intending to develop language skills and aspects in two sections: language development and literature. I selected this book purposefully for analysis as it is a new secondary level textbook which is supposed to have potential to develop ICC. I focused on the cultural contents and related activities to find out to what extent they can contribute for ICC.

For data collection, I studied the book thoroughly, focused on Byrm, and Cortazzi and Jin's framework. Furthermore, I looked into the textbook closely again and identified and categorized the cultural contents. After the formation of a table of cultural contents and activities, I interpreted the data comparing the categories and themes within and across the framework. I not only analyzed the textbook in relation to predetermined categories and new themes but also interpreted other cultural aspects whether they contribute for ICC or something is missing there. Similarly, to maintain trustworthiness and credibility of the study, I studied the textbook multiple times and I got my comparison of cultural contents reviewed from English teachers. Along with this, I interpreted the textbook on the basis of my research questions through the eyes of neutral researcher (Krippendorff, 2004/2019; Schreier, 2012; Chelimsky, 1989), and from the cultural perspectives stepping on the theory of Byram (1993), Kramersch (2013), and Cortazzi and Jin (1999).

Results

Although the textbook is divided into two parts: language development and literature, both parts are useful for developing ICC as they contain a varied array of cultural contents. Likewise, I found an impressive beginning of the textbook initiated with quotations which represent the theme of the text and motivate students for

learning. The textbook provides rich contents of target and international culture which can develop the intercultural awareness if they are presented in the class being focused on ICC.

Source Culture Contents in the Textbook

Among forty chapters, I found four chapters; a story about family culture entitled *The Tattered Blanket* by Kamala Das, an interview with Mahabir Pun entitled *Mahabir Pun: A Visionary Social Entrepreneur*, a travelogue entitled *Discovering West Nepal-the Wild Frontier* by Philippine writer Megan Leung, and a story entitled *An Astrologer's Day* by Indian writer RK Narayan describes the selling of cosmic insights to gullible villagers as the cultural contents in the textbook which represents the Nepalese cultures. Although the contents are written by foreign writers and some contents in Indian context, they are similar to Nepalese culture. That's why, I included them in this category. Similarly, I found two chapters; an essay on *Free Writing* by Peter Elbow and a blog on *Social Media* by Aulia Maharani Karli that portray writing culture and social media culture which are more relevant for the Nepalese context. Now the question is how they can contribute to the ICC. Although there are limited chapters of source culture, they can develop a positive attitude, provide information about Nepalese culture, and help to interpret the contextual meaning of cultural events.

International Culture Contents in the Textbook

The cultural themes that I found under this category reflect not only the general culture that suit across the globe but also beyond the Nepalese context. In language development section, I found a speech by Malala given in UN youth assembly, an essay on *Qin Dynasty* in Chinese history and culture, a Russian story about dream entitled *The Looking Glass* by Anton Chekhov, an essay on health and exercise practices entitled *You may Scoff* by Emma Young, an autobiographical essay of Green belt champion Wangari Maathai in Kenya on *Foresters without Diplomas*, an article on superstition entitled *A Few Kind Words for Superstition* by Robertson Davies, an inaugural speech of Nelson Mandela (the first black president of South Africa), an article entitled *What Lost Identity, the Diaspora and Globalization* by Abdalhadi Alijla, and an article on *Power of Napoleon Bonaparte in Politics* by Milada Broukal.

Similarly, in literature section, I found a story entitled *God Sees the Truth but Waits* by Russian writer Leo Tolstoy shows false conviction, a story called *Civil Peace* by Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe describes effects of Nigerian civil war, a story entitled *Two Little Soldiers* by French writer Guy de Maupassant presents romantic and conflicted love, the poem on *Corona Says* by Nepali poet Vishnu S. Rai portrays corona pandemic, the poem on *A red, red rose* by Scottish poet Robert Burns describes deep love for the beloved one, the poem on the *Gift in Wartime* by Vietnamese poet Tran

Mong Tu shows bitter feeling of dead soldier's wife, the essay on *Sharing Tradition* by American essayist Frank LaPena describes the modes of sharing traditions, the essay on *What I Require from Life* by British-Indian writer J.B.S. Haldane reflects the essentials of human life, the essay on *Scientific Research is a Token of Human Kind's Survival* by Russian writer Vladimir Keilis Borok suggests for using scientific inventions for humankind not against nature, the one act play entitled *A sunny morning* by Spanish dramatist S. A. Quintero narrates the reunion of two lovers in their 70s, and the one act play entitled *Refund* by a Hungarian satirical writer shows the condition of unqualified human resources across the globe. Altogether, there are twenty chapters among forty which prominently represent international cultures. According to my understanding, these contents are useful for both intercultural and transcultural communicative competence.

Target Culture Contents in the Textbook

As target culture represents the culture where English is used as native language, I noticed, in the language development section; an article on *Why is the Renaissance Important?* by Broukal Milada, an extract from the novel Alice's adventures in wonderland entitled *Down the Rabbit Hole* by Lewis Carroll, an essay on *Shall there be peace about war in the hope of peace* by Hermann Hesse, an essay on *What is the soul* by Bertrand Russell representing scientific and philosophical perspectives on soul, a review of novel entitled *Half a life talks about identity crisis in migrants* published in Washington Post by Jonathan Yardley, an essay on *Taking my son to college, and where technology has replaced Serendipity* by Christina Baker Cline shows the effects of technology on education.

Similarly, in literature section, I found a story entitled *The selfish giant* by Irish writer Oscar Wilde which presents the garden and children, a story entitled *The oval portrait* by American writer Edgar Allan Poe depicts art and life, a story entitled *The wish* by British writer Roald Dahl portrays the imagination three types of snakes, the poem on *All the world's a stage* by English poet William Shakespeare explains stages of human life, the poem *Who are you, little i?* by American poet talks about childhood memories connected with nature, the transcript of speech of American businessman Steve Jobs shows his struggles for apple computer, the essay on *What is poverty* by American writer depicts the whole nine yards of poverty, and the one act play entitled *Trifles* by American novelist Susan Glaspell shows the contemporary status of women in American society. There are fifteen texts which centrally represent varied cultural practices of native speaking countries or the cultures of inner circle; United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Australia, New-Zealand, and Ireland (Kachru, 1990). Although

I placed these contents in this section, they are beyond the boundary of certain cultures and communities. They try to develop a broad concept of culture and neutral use of language which can contribute to guide English language learners to be open to all cultures.

Alignment of English Textbook with Byram's ICC Model

I pointed out that the themes mentioned in the textbook: education and humanity, communication, media and society, science and technology, and history and culture align with Byram's themes, such as, social identity and social groups (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities) and social interaction (differing levels of formality). Similarly, life and love, health and exercise, humor and satire, home life and family relationship match with the themes; belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines) and socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passages).

Additionally, the theme social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government) and national history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity) are touched with health and exercise, democracy and human rights, career and entrepreneurship, power and politics, and globalization and diaspora. Moreover, the textbook covers the themes; national geography (geographic factors seen as being significant by members) and stereotypes and national identity (typical symbols of national stereotypes) with travel and tourism, arts and creation, immigrants and identity but I could not find the texts related to culture of local governments and a typical stereotypes related to any country and ethnicity. The contents represent all as a whole although they are constructed in certain cultural contexts. Thus, the textbook has the potential to develop ICC in secondary level students if the teachers incorporate the activities of ICC.

Potential of Activities in the Textbook for Intercultural Communicative Competence

The style of activities in the textbook in both sections is almost the same in relation with cultural contents to enhance ICC but the activities in language development section are multi-purposive as they are focused on developing linguistic competence as well. As I have already mentioned, the textbook has sufficient cultural contents to develop ICC. The format of activities and exercises in the book are managed into the categories; ways with words, comprehension, critical thinking, writing segment, grammar, listening skill, speaking skill, and project work which are closely connected

with the text provided for the reading skill. Mainly, the activities are intended to teach core ideas of the texts relating them with local context, providing space for the critical and creative skills.

Similarly, in both sections, students can develop ICC by learning vocabularies for core concepts in pre-reading activities. Similarly, for while reading activities, there are scanning and skimming activities along with critical thinking, creative writing, and project work to explore more about certain cultural practices. Additionally, in the literature section, there are segments; before reading, literal comprehension, reference to the context, and reference beyond the text which can help students to be clear about the certain cultural practice. Table 1 presents the activities mentioned in unit one of the English textbook of grade eleven as a sample illustration.

Table 1

Language Development: Unit: One-Education and Humanity

Skills	Activities
Reading	<p>Pre-reading activities (before you read): Pictures and questions related to the text, for example, who are these people? What are they known for?</p> <p>While-reading Activities: ways with words; finding a similar single word based on given explanation, matching opposite words, and learning words by using a dictionary; literal comprehension question based on scanning and skimming, for instance, What is Malala calling upon all governments?</p> <p>Post-reading activities: critical thinking; contextualizing the text; that is, how can we ensure the right to education of every child?</p>
Writing	<p>Writing activities related to the text to elaborate the statement with personal experiences “Education empowers the person”.</p> <p>Contextualization of grammar; learning word classes by reading texts and newspapers.</p>
Listening	<p>Activities based on a conversation of two students talking about deciding about a major subject. Scanning, skimming and group discussion type of activities.</p>
Speaking	<p>Learning to express good wishes; the activities to develop speaking skill based on a dialogue composed in Nepalese context and different situations of Nepalese and international context. For example, your sister is taking an IELTS test; it’s your friend’s birthday etc.</p>
Project Work	<p>Inquiry based questions to enhance all language skills and aspects. The textbook provides a task to prepare a poster of a local famous woman including her success story of life.</p>

If we go through the activities of this textbook, there are pre-learning activities of the language skills and aspects and then while and post from which the textbook aims to elicit the ideas of the learners first, then getting them to be engaged in understanding the text, and then helping them to contextualize the core ideas of the text. It means the textbook has designed the activities from anticipation to consolidation process. In the aforementioned activities based on unit one, there is a speech of Malala from which the textbook exposed the education hazards of Pakistan but the issue raised in the speech is global. Therefore, the contents are beyond the fixed patterns of intercultural awareness and are able to create open space for intercultural communicative competence.

Discussion

The interesting thing about the cultural contents is that they are related to certain countries; the countries of inner, outer, and expanding circles (Kachru, 1990) but they are beyond the ethnocentrism and they represent global context. Although the textbook has included a few contents of source culture, the contents of target and international culture are neutral and embrace the value of transculturation. The speech and experiences of Steve Jobs, for example, represents the target culture but the vocabulary, theme, narrative style is suitable across the globe and the message that he wants to give is not only useful for the people of the US but also for the individuals of the global community.

Now, the question is how the contents can contribute to the enhancement of intercultural communicative competence. As I have comprehended, the cultural contents are somehow contributing for ICC and more for linguistic and communicative competence as they provide context for learning language in general cultural contexts. That is. The essay on taking my son to college where technology has replaced Serendipity by Christina Baker Cline shows the transitions and shifts of the educational system due to extensive use of technology. This cultural content definitely represents the educational culture of American society from past to present but more it shows the global representation of change in schooling and education due to technology.

Even though the vocabularies, illustrations, and contents do not touch any specific ethnic community, they represent the global ways of thoughts, social practices, and life styles from which the learners can develop communicative competence more but can have limited intercultural awareness of specific cultures. Here, I don't mean the textbook cannot develop the ICC, it has created a good environment for multicultural context for ICC but it depends on how effectively it is implemented at the learners' level. Similarly, as it is closely connected with the framework of Cortazzi and Jin and Byram's ICC model, there is more chance of enhancing ICC in learners with the help of this book. Let's see from different perspectives how this book can contribute to the ICC.

My findings contrast with previous studies in terms of the number of sources of culture because (Riadini & Cahyono (2021) found source, international, and target cultures fifty eight, thirty five, and seven percent respectively in Indonesian English textbook. Similarly, Siddiqie (2011) pointed out twenty six percent local, twenty two international, thirty six both local and international, and sixteen percent neutral cultural contents in the English language textbook of Bangladesh. But there are five, twenty, and fifteen out of forty source, international, and target cultural contents respectively in the textbook through which I went. Additionally, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) revealed that there is to be prime focus on source cultures too along with international and target language cultures. I believe that learning English is definitely enhanced with target and international cultures but the source culture of learners also plays a vital role to get the picture of others' culture based on the experience of their own culture. Therefore, while teaching English, similar cultural contents of learners can be integrated with target culture. Furthermore, after looking into this book I came to know that we should see the cultural contents from humanistic perspectives for learning underlying beliefs of global cultures rather than specific cultural contents.

As the cultural perspective guides researchers to analyze textbooks on the basis of how different cultural contents are presented and how they contribute for language learning, I also intend to see the English textbook from this lens to identify how it can enhance intercultural communicative competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Kramsch, 1993). Byram (2021) has provided five sub-components; knowledge, skill of interpretation and integration, skill of discovery and interaction, positive attitude, and critical cultural awareness as the abilities for ICC, the textbook attempts to create the context for this. The first capability is to have knowledge of local and others' cultures, for this, the textbook has provided a wide range of international and target cultural contents. Although the book has limited contents of source cultures, it has tried to develop knowledge of local cultures through activities, exercises, and project works encouraging students to contextualize the contents.

Similarly, the skill of interpreting, relating, and discovering cultures has been enhanced through the segment critical thinking and project work providing different types of questions to interpret, relate, and explore them in Nepalese context. Under the speaking skill, the textbook has mentioned language functions in limited international contexts and extensively Nepalese context which can hinder the skill of real-life communication and interaction in diversified cultural contexts but the book has provided required activities for ICC under reading and writing skills. Regarding positive attitude or openness to the cultural context, the textbook can work better as it has provided global cultural contents. To develop the critical awareness in students, the textbook has designed the segment entitled reference beyond the text where the attitude developing and critical thinking activities have been presented.

Language learning should emphasize on culture as discourse, intercultural reflection, critical awareness, symbolic competence, dynamic and hybrid cultural contents, and dialogism and then the textbook can contribute well for most of them Kramersch (2013). The story selfish giant, wish, and many other texts reflect the symbolic meanings and students can have a chance to discuss the story from multiple perspectives. Similarly, a wide array of target, international, and global contents create the context for learning with dynamic and diversified cultural contents. But the book lacks to create context for intercultural dialogues as it has limited context for target culture and limited contents from source culture. This textbook is related to ideas of Hall (1976) as he has talked about the surface and deep level of culture. The textbook prominently reflects less surface culture (visible aspects like food, festivals and clothing) and more deep cultures (invisible aspects like values, beliefs, and norms) which can help learners to develop ICC going beyond certain cultural beliefs.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to fill the gap in existing knowledge by exploring ICC in the English textbook of Nepalese secondary school education because there is no analysis of the English textbook of grade eleven in relation to ICC in Nepalese context. Likewise, as my purpose was to explore the cultural contents and activities in English textbooks in relation to ICC, I found varied sources of cultural contents extensively accompanied with international, target, and global cultural contents and balanced activities to enhance ICC. The textbook matches Byram's five abilities of ICC and Hall's deep culture model as it covers communication styles and rules; facial expression, gestures, eye contact, personal space, conversational patterns in different social situations, empathy, sympathy, and beyond. Therefore, it can contribute to ICC. In the one act play "Trifles", for example, the language and behavior of males show the hidden meaning of male dominated society and the story oval portrait shows the sacrifice of the true lovers, first towards husband and second towards painting. According to my experience of implementing this textbook in the class, I expect multicultural contexts too for practice under speaking skills.

The findings of this study can be useful, first of all, for the English language teachers of secondary level in Nepal who are teaching English in grade eleven and twelve guiding them to focus on developing intercultural communicative competence. Secondly, it can provide guidelines to use cultural contents making balance of diversified cultural contexts. At last but not least, this study can provide feedback to course designers to review the cultural contents, redesign the activities, and revise the course

in further editions. Although I have been teaching this course since its publication, I have not thought in this way what I have realized after this study. I believe that English language teachers including me can go beyond linguistic competence and embrace the value of ICC in language teaching and learning. Mainly, I could focus on analyzing this textbook from a cultural perspective although there are more aspects of research; linguistic and pedagogical aspects, teachers' practices of using these cultural contents, and students' perspectives towards this textbook which can be the guidelines for further researchers. Finally, this textbook provides varied contents of different cultures and has the potential to develop ICC in English language learners if the teachers focus on the aspects of ICC while conducting language learning activities.

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Promoting Freewriting Skills of English Language Learners: An Action Research on Grade 10 Students at Sudurpashchim Secondary School

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Abstract

Developing freewriting skills presents significant challenges for Nepalese English language learners. Students in Nepali medium schools often face various difficulties in acquiring freewriting skills which hinder their overall English language learning. This action research identifies the challenges encountered by Grade 10 students at Sudurpashchim Secondary School in developing freewriting skills and proposes effective strategies to address these issues. To achieve this, a qualitative action research approach was employed, involving classroom observations, students' writing samples, and focus group discussion with students. Data were collected over a six-week intervention period during which the researcher implemented a series of freewriting activities tailored to the students' needs. The analysis focused on identifying recurring difficulties, student perceptions, and observable changes in writing fluency and confidence. The findings reveal that the students struggle due to poor English language backgrounds, inadequate grammar knowledge, limited writing exposure, anxiety, and a lack of awareness of freewriting strategies. These factors lead to difficulties in constructing even grammatically correct sentences, writing cohesive paragraphs, and composing basic descriptive essays. The research highlights that employing translanguaging and personalization approaches significantly enhanced the students' freewriting abilities. These techniques proved effective for learners with limited English proficiency and difficulties in generating ideas. The study emphasizes the importance by analyzing classroom challenges before designing action plans to address students' specific needs effectively. The results suggest that teachers should integrate these strategies into their instruction to improve students' freewriting skills. Such approaches not only address linguistic gaps but also enhance confidence and creativity in students, contributing to their overall language development.

Keywords: Writing skills, challenges, translanguaging, personalized strategies

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Introduction

This action research focuses on improving the writing abilities of Grade 10 students at Sudurpaschim Secondary School in Attariya, Kailali. In this school, a cohort of 58 students, both male and female, has demonstrated ongoing challenges in producing grammatically correct and coherent sentences, constructing simple paragraphs, and writing basic descriptive essays in English. These struggles highlighted a need for effective pedagogical interventions to enhance students' proficiency in writing.

Despite learning English for several years, these learners continue to face difficulties that may stem from limited exposure to English outside the classroom, as well as the cognitive demands of writing in a foreign language. Recognizing this, the study implemented an intervention based on translanguaging and the personalization approach. Translanguaging involves strategically allowing students to use their first language to scaffold English learning, which can help lower cognitive barriers. Meanwhile, the personalization approach encourages students to relate writing tasks to their personal experiences, enhancing engagement and relevance.

By integrating these approaches, this action research aims to foster an environment that supports students' gradual mastery of written English, enabling them to express ideas more effectively and confidently in a second language. The study will track changes in students' writing abilities through various assessments, thereby providing insights into the effectiveness of these combined techniques in addressing the specific challenges faced by secondary-level English learners in a Nepali educational context.

Literature Review

Writing Skills in English

Language as a means of communication is used in terms of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Writing in English as a second language enables speakers to express their ideas verbally and in writing, as well as to share them with others (Bello, 1997). At first, Elbow (1973, 1998) revealed freewriting as writing without pausing and editing, which can be used as a powerful technique for developing student writing. Freewriting is a discipline-specific strategy for improving student learning and writing in the disciplines (Fishman, 1997; George & Young, 1991; Somerville & Crème, 2005).

Yule (2010) asserted that writing involves the use of visual symbols to convey meaning, and this skill can be acquired and improved through deliberate and continuous effort. Writing encompasses the cognitive processes of generating, expressing, and

organizing ideas into coherent statements and paragraphs (Nunan, 2003). Similarly, Harmer (2004) argued that effective writing necessitates attention to mechanical aspects like handwriting, spelling, punctuation, as well as the structuring of sentences, paragraphs, and entire texts. Writing can be defined as the creation of written content, resulting in a text that must be read and understood for communication (Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2002). McMahan et al. (2016) contended that the objectives of writing include expressing emotions, entertaining, informing, and persuading readers.

Moreover, Elbow and Belanoff (2000) explicate that through freewriting students are able to overcome from hesitation which they fell while writing in initial phase. This should focus on generating ideas rather than editing. The challenge is not only in developing and organizing ideas, but also in translating them into a language that is understandable. Therefore, students should give more time to writing. Freewriting can be used to enhance the writing abilities of the learners (Richards & Renandya, 2006). Although students acknowledged the existence of form variations, they acknowledged that their major writing challenges came from attempting to understand the deeper layers of variation in writing and how to use them (Street, 1998).

Furthermore, writing inspires children to concentrate on using appropriate language and stimulates language growth as writers work to overcome the issues that the writing causes them to think about (Harmer, 2004). Moreover, Brown (2010) explicates that writing includes more than just producing words and sentences. The students' written language communication skills are crucial in clearly communicating their knowledge and comprehension since writing includes more than just producing words and sentences.

Importance of Freewriting

Free writing helps learners to be more active and engaged in the classroom. Engaging in creative writing fosters students' interest and enhances their thinking abilities, ultimately improving both their creative and academic writing skills. When students develop a passion for creative writing, they can apply these skills effectively to their academic and other forms of writing (Pokharel, 2023). Similarly, Kew (2021) reveals that freewriting-focused writing class helps to develop students' confidence to write in English easily. It contributes to an improvement in the quality or complexity of the writing, and freewriting is very helpful in supporting students in overcoming their inhibitions in order to be able to write freely. However, some people consider this type of writing subjective, time-consuming, and complicated.

Similarly, Setiawan et al. (2014) contend that writing proficiency encompasses the application of grammar rules, vocabulary, and various principles of sentence construction. Effective writing requires individuals to tap into and organize their

existing knowledge. Writing serves as a transformative process, leading individuals from ignorance to the enlightenment of knowledge. This underscores the significance of literacy, as someone unable to read and write is often referred to as illiterate and lacking in knowledge (Khan & Khan, 2020).

Furthermore, Li (2007) argued that freewriting has the potential to have numerous applications in a variety of teaching and learning environments to improve student engagement in higher education and it is a helpful pedagogical tool in the context of developing academic skills, particularly in academic writing. Li (2007) further revealed that freewriting will empower students to think through issues, make discoveries, gain insights, and express themselves with confidence through spontaneous writing that focuses on a particular topic when it is fully utilized and adopted as a regular and essential part of the teaching and learning process.

Translanguaging in Developing Freewriting Skills

Translanguaging is a dynamic pedagogical practice that allows multilingual learners to utilize their full linguistic repertoire when engaging in language learning and literacy development (García, 2009). In the context of freewriting, translanguaging provides students with the freedom to draw from all their linguistic resources, facilitating idea generation, reducing anxiety, and fostering creativity. One of the key benefits of translanguaging in freewriting is its ability to enhance cognitive and linguistic flexibility. When students are permitted to alternate between languages, they can conceptualize and articulate ideas more effectively (García & Li, 2014). This process enables deeper cognitive engagement, as learners are not restricted by their proficiency in English but instead use all their linguistic knowledge to explore and develop their thoughts. Research suggests that when learners are allowed to use their first language (L1) alongside the target language (L2), they demonstrate improved problem-solving skills and conceptual understanding (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners experience anxiety when writing in English due to concerns about grammatical accuracy and vocabulary limitations (Horwitz, 2001). Translanguaging mitigates this anxiety by allowing students to begin their writing in the language they feel most comfortable with before transitioning to English. This strategy reduces cognitive overload, making the writing process more accessible and enjoyable (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Through translanguaging, students focus more on content and idea development rather than linguistic correctness, which aligns with the core principles of freewriting—unrestricted, continuous expression without the immediate concern for grammar and structure (Elbow, 1998).

Translanguaging serves as a bridge between students' inner thoughts and their written expression. Many learners struggle with articulating complex ideas in English because they think in their native language. By allowing students to draft ideas in their L1 and gradually refine them in English, translanguaging supports deeper engagement with the writing process (García & Sylvan, 2011). Additionally, this practice fosters metalinguistic awareness, as learners become more conscious of language structures and how ideas can be expressed differently across languages (García & Li, 2014).

Personalization Approach in Developing Freewriting Skills

The personalization approach in language learning emphasizes tailoring instruction to align with students' interests, needs, and backgrounds (Nunan, 1997). In freewriting, personalization plays a vital role in enhancing engagement, motivation, and linguistic development. By integrating topics that are personally meaningful to students, instructors can create a more dynamic and student-centered writing environment.

One of the most significant advantages of personalization in freewriting is its ability to increase motivation. According to Ushioda (2011), learners are more engaged and invested in language tasks when they see personal relevance in them. Freewriting topics that connect with students' experiences, emotions, and aspirations make writing more meaningful and encourage learners to express themselves more freely. When students write about topics they are passionate about, they demonstrate greater fluency and creativity in their work (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Personalization fosters a sense of ownership over the writing process, which is essential for building confidence in language learning (Benson, 2001). When students have the autonomy to choose their own topics or relate assignments to their personal lives, they are more likely to engage deeply with the writing task. This ownership leads to greater investment in refining their writing, experimenting with language, and expressing ideas in a more authentic manner (Ur, 1996). Furthermore, when students feel that their voices and experiences matter in the classroom, they become more confident in their ability to communicate in English (Lamb, 2017).

A personalized approach to freewriting also helps bridge the gap between academic writing and real-life communication. By allowing students to write about their experiences, cultural backgrounds, and aspirations, instructors create a learning environment that values students' identities and diverse linguistic resources (Dörnyei, 2005). This relevance encourages students to view writing as a tool for self-expression rather than just an academic requirement. Additionally, research suggests that when writing tasks are personally meaningful, students are more likely to retain vocabulary and develop a more natural writing style (Nation, 2009).

Combining translanguaging and personalization creates an inclusive and empowering approach to developing freewriting skills in English. Translanguaging allows students to access their full linguistic repertoire, facilitating idea generation and reducing writing anxiety, while personalization ensures that writing tasks are meaningful and engaging. This combination aligns with learner-centered pedagogies, fostering autonomy, creativity, and linguistic confidence (Canagarajah, 2011). In practical classroom applications, teachers can encourage students to draft their initial thoughts in their native language and later translate or adapt them into English. Additionally, teachers can design freewriting prompts that connect with students' personal experiences, aspirations, and cultural backgrounds. This integration of translanguaging and personalization ensures that freewriting becomes a fluid, meaningful, and enjoyable process, ultimately enhancing students' overall language proficiency and self-expression in English.

Challenges in Developing Freewriting Skills

Even though freewriting helps develop students' confidence to write English easily and contribute to improve students writing, students are having problems while developing such writing. Sarwat et al. (2021) reveal that the students are having difficulties while writing due to a lack of creative ideas, writing anxiety, weak structural organization, dependence on L1, poor command over English tenses, grammar, syntax, and insufficient vocabulary. Authors suggest that English teachers should provide creative writing exercises to their students, set up a variety of writing-related learning, and the differences between the learners should be considered continuously in the classroom to improve the writing skills of the learners. Similarly, Fhonna (2014) argued that the challenges of writing typically become apparent as soon as the first words are written. The process of identifying and coming up with ideas, then organizing them and choosing words and vocabulary to begin writing, is difficult. The issues persist when the student is required to write in the context of a particular discipline, such as politics, economics, education, and many others. One of the major challenges that students experienced in producing error-free free-writing was their awareness of grammatical rules, their lack of ideas/difficulties in organizing ideas as well as their problems with grammar (Fhonna, 2014).

In a similar vein, Suvin (2020) confirmed that students make various errors in composition and application writing, and students in the school exhibit varying levels of difficulty in their writing, with significant challenges observed in vocabulary, grammar, and academic style. The most common errors encompass spelling, sentence structure, accurate verb usage, tense, capitalization, punctuation, and vocabulary. Furthermore, Sarwat et al. (2021) mentioned that students face primary challenges in their English

writing due to limited proficiency in English tenses, grammar, syntax, and a limited vocabulary. Inadequate creative thinking, anxiety about writing, ineffective structural organization, and overreliance on their native language (L1) also significantly contribute to students' subpar English writing skills. Regarding teaching creativity, Suvin (2020) explicates that pedagogical challenges arise during creative writing instruction, mainly tied to student engagement, learning aptitudes, and collaboration issues. To improve students' creative writing skills, activities should be carefully selected to serve as writing development tasks.

Students achieve a good level of writing proficiency while practicing freewriting. However, Toba and Noor (2019) argues that some of the students encountered challenges in various aspects of writing, including content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, and mechanics. These difficulties were attributed not only to their limited knowledge of writing concepts and the specific essay format but also to personal factors such as a lack of writing practice, aversion to writing, anxiety about writing, negative perceptions of writing, low motivation to write, insufficient time during writing tests, and inadequate teaching of the writing process by their instructors. Furthermore, Toba and Noor (2019) explicates that to address these issues and enhance their writing skills, it is crucial to integrate improvements in writing instruction that involve both EFL students and their instructors. Moreover, students encounter a range of writing challenges across different educational levels, which can typically be grouped into cognitive, psychological, linguistic, and pedagogical difficulties (Andrew, 2019).

The Purpose

Writing is a fundamental skill in language learning, yet many students struggle with it and show little interest in engaging with writing tasks. Various factors, such as lack of confidence, insufficient practice, limited exposure to diverse writing tasks, and a focus on rote learning, may contribute to this issue (Bhandari, 2024). Understanding the specific challenges students face in writing is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance their skills and motivation. Thus, this action research aimed at identifying the reason of students less interest and lack of motivation in developing and improving freewriting skills.

Plan for Exploration

To gain a deeper understanding of students' writing challenges, it was essential to investigate their experiences, perceptions, and engagement with writing tasks.

Therefore, the study sought to explore the specific problems students encounter in writing, their attitudes toward different writing activities, and the conditions that influence their participation. For that, I planned to explore the following questions:

1. What problems are there with students' writing?
2. What do students say about different kinds of writing tasks?
3. When do students participate/do not participate in writing activities?

Methods and Procedures

At Sudurpashchim Secondary School, Grade 10 students face several challenges in freewriting. Many of them find it difficult to generate ideas and write fluently, often feeling anxious about grammatical correctness. To address this issue, this action research was conducted with the aim of promoting students' freewriting skills by encouraging creativity, reducing fear, and fostering self-expression. The study, following several phases of action research, incorporated a personalized approach to make writing more engaging and a translanguaging approach to help students bridge the gap between their first language and English.

Planning Phase

This action research was conducted to enhance the freewriting skills of Grade 10 students at Sudurpashchim Secondary School, Attariya, Kailali. 58 students, including both boys and girls, participated in the study. Before implementing the intervention, an initial assessment of students' freewriting abilities was conducted through informal writing tasks. Students were asked to write a short paragraph on familiar topics such as "My Daily Routine" or "A Memorable Day in My Life." Their responses revealed common challenges, including difficulty in generating ideas, hesitation due to fear of making mistakes, reliance on rote learning, and limited vocabulary. Some students wrote only a few sentences, while others left their work incomplete. Many expressed frustrations, stating that they did not know what to write or feared that their English was incorrect.

Based on these observations, a structured plan was developed to encourage fluency and creativity in writing. Two key instructional techniques were integrated: the personalized approach, which allowed students to choose their own topics and express their ideas freely, and the translanguaging approach, which permitted students to use their first language (Nepali or other local languages) for brainstorming and outlining before transitioning to English. These approaches aimed to increase engagement, reduce anxiety, and foster self-expression in writing.

Action Phase

The intervention lasted for one month and involved daily freewriting exercises. Activities were structured to gradually build students' confidence and fluency in English writing. The personalized approach played a key role in this phase by allowing students to write about topics of personal interest. Instead of assigning generic writing topics, students were encouraged to write about subjects that mattered to them, such as "The Funniest Thing That Happened to Me," "If I Had a Superpower," or "My Dream Journey." This method helped them feel more connected to their writing and motivated them to express themselves more freely. They were encouraged to write continuously for 10–15 minutes without worrying about grammar or spelling, focusing instead on fluency, creativity, and self-expression. For instance, one student who initially struggled with writing chose to describe his experience of visiting his grandmother's village. At first, he hesitated, but after being encouraged to write without the fear of mistakes, he produced a whole paragraph describing the trees, the river, and his feelings. Over time, he became more confident in sharing his experiences in English.

In addition to the personalized approach, the translanguaging approach was used to help students bridge the gap between their first language and English. Recognizing that students often struggle to think directly in English, they were encouraged to brainstorm ideas and outline their writing in Nepali before transitioning to English. For example, a student writing about "My Best Friend" might first list qualities and experiences in Nepali, such as मेरो सबैभन्दा मिल्ने साथी राम हो। (My best friend is Ram.) and हामी सँगै फुटबल खेल्छौं। (We play football together.) After brainstorming in their first language, they were guided to translate and expand their ideas into English. This process reduced writer's block and made writing less intimidating. A student who initially wrote only a short sentence like "My friend is good" later expanded it into "My best friend is Ram. He always makes me laugh. We play football together after school. He helps me with my studies and supports me when I feel sad." Through this process, students gained confidence in expressing their thoughts more fully in English.

Observation Phase

Throughout the intervention, student progress was closely monitored using various methods. Teacher observation focused on noting changes in students' attitudes toward writing, identifying those who became more confident and engaged. Student writing samples were collected and analyzed to track improvements in fluency, coherence, and expression. Peer and teacher feedback were incorporated to create a supportive learning environment. Students shared their writing in pairs or small groups, offering each other encouragement and constructive feedback. The emphasis remained on helping students develop confidence rather than correcting mistakes.

The observations indicated that students who had previously written only two or three lines in a writing session gradually progressed to writing complete paragraphs. Their hesitation decreased, and they became more willing to experiment with their ideas. The fear of making mistakes, which had initially prevented many from expressing themselves, diminished as they became more accustomed to writing freely.

Reflection and Evaluation Phase

At the end of the one-month intervention, students' writings were compared to assess improvements in fluency, coherence, and confidence. Their initial freewriting samples were analyzed alongside their final pieces to identify growth in the length, clarity, and organization of ideas. To gain deeper insights, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, where students shared their experiences with the personalized and translanguaging approaches. Many students expressed that having the freedom to choose their own topics made writing more enjoyable. Others mentioned that being allowed to think in Nepali first helped them organize their ideas before translating them into English, making the writing process feel less overwhelming.

Additionally, students participated in self-reflection exercises, where they assessed their own progress and confidence in writing. Many reported feeling less fearful of writing and more comfortable expressing their thoughts in English. Some students who had previously avoided writing tasks began to view writing as an enjoyable and meaningful activity rather than a challenging academic exercise.

Data Analysis

This action research utilized qualitative methods to analyze the collected data, drawing on student writing samples, classroom observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs). A thematic approach was employed to identify recurring patterns and trends in students' writing progress, engagement levels, and perceptions of the intervention strategies. Initial and final writing samples were compared to measure improvements in fluency, coherence, and confidence. Additionally, students' reflections and feedback provided insights into their experiences with personalized writing tasks, translanguaging, and peer collaboration.

Analysis of Writing Samples

The students' initial writing samples revealed several common challenges, including limited vocabulary, difficulty in organizing ideas, and hesitation due to fear of grammatical mistakes. Many students produced incomplete responses, with

some writing only a sentence or a few disjointed phrases. However, by the end of the intervention, a significant transformation was evident. Students who initially struggled to write coherent paragraphs were able to construct more structured and expressive compositions.

For example, an early writing sample from a student on the topic “My Best Friend” read: “*My best friend is Ram. He is good. We play.*” After engaging in continuous freewriting activities and peer feedback, the student revised the response to: “*My best friend is Ram. He always makes me laugh. We play football together after school. He helps me with my studies and supports me when I feel sad.*” This demonstrated notable progress in sentence expansion, idea organization, and descriptive details. The critical aspect of this improvement is not just the increased word count but the depth of expression and the ability to convey relationships and emotions more effectively. This supports the argument that students’ engagement in meaning-focused writing activities fosters both linguistic and cognitive growth (Nation, 2009).

Classroom Observations and Student Behaviour

Observational data collected over a six-week period at Sudurpashchim Secondary School in a Grade 10 English class indicated a gradual shift in students’ attitudes toward writing. Initially, during the first two weeks of classroom observations, many students hesitated to participate in freewriting exercises, expressing concerns about making mistakes and being judged. The classroom atmosphere was marked by minimal engagement, with only a few students volunteering to write or share their work.

By the third and fourth weeks, as students were regularly exposed to fluency-focused writing activities without the pressure of immediate correction, a noticeable change emerged. Students began to write more freely, taking risks in their language use and showing greater willingness to experiment with ideas. Observation notes from Week 4 recorded increased student confidence, with one student remarking during an informal discussion, “I feel better when I know the teacher won’t mark my mistakes right away.”

During Weeks 5 and 6, the implementation of structured peer feedback sessions led to increased student interaction and collaborative engagement. Initially, students were reluctant to share their writing with peers. However, by the end of the observation period, many were actively exchanging feedback, asking questions, and offering suggestions. The classroom environment evolved into a more supportive and communicative space. This progression aligns with Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), illustrating how peer interaction and guided support can facilitate both language acquisition and writing development. Through scaffolded learning in these peer discussions, students demonstrated improved writing fluency, increased motivation, and greater self-efficacy.

Focus Group Discussions and Student Reflections

The FGDs provided deeper insights into students' perceptions of the intervention. Many students expressed that having the freedom to choose their own topics made writing more enjoyable and meaningful. Others highlighted that brainstorming in Nepali before transitioning to English reduced anxiety and helped them structure their ideas more effectively. Several students who had previously struggled with writing reported feeling more confident and willing to write without fear of mistakes.

For instance, one student stated: *“Before, I was afraid to write because I thought my grammar was bad. But when I wrote about my own experiences, I felt more comfortable. Also, thinking in Nepali first helped me organize my ideas before writing in English.”* This suggests that allowing students to draw on their first language as a cognitive resource can significantly reduce writing apprehension and enhance clarity. Research by García and Wei (2014) supports this, arguing that translanguaging enables bilingual students to develop a deeper understanding and cognitive flexibility in writing.

Another student remarked that writing in a relaxed manner without immediate correction allowed for more creative expression. This aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that anxiety and fear of correction hinder language acquisition. By reducing these affective barriers, students were able to focus more on the meaning of their writing rather than mechanical accuracy, ultimately leading to greater fluency and confidence.

Results and Discussion

The findings from this action research highlight the significant role of personalized writing topics and translanguaging approaches in improving students' writing skills. The intervention led to increased student engagement, improved fluency, and greater confidence in expressing ideas. Several key themes emerged from analyzing student writing samples, classroom observations, and focus group discussions.

Personalized Writing Approach Increased Engagement

One of the most significant discoveries was the positive impact of allowing students to write about topics of personal interest. When students were given the autonomy to choose their own subjects, they demonstrated greater enthusiasm and investment in their work. For example, when asked to write about “A Special Memory,” students wrote extensively about family gatherings, festivals, and personal achievements, showcasing deeper emotional engagement. This finding aligns with Dornyei's (2001)

argument that motivation is a crucial factor in second language acquisition, as students perform better when personally invested in a task.

Further supporting this, Flower and Hayes (1981) suggest that writing is a cognitive process that requires idea generation, organization, and translation into text. When students wrote about topics of personal significance, they displayed increased cognitive engagement, generating more ideas and demonstrating better text organization. Similarly, Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) emphasize that meaningful writing experiences contribute to greater investment in the learning process and long-term skill retention.

Translanguaging Enhanced Idea Development and Reduced Writing Anxiety

Translanguaging enabled students to clarify their thoughts before transitioning to English. Many students reported that brainstorming in Nepali first made it easier for them to organize their writing. For example, a student who initially struggled with writing about a holiday first wrote, “मेरो बुबा मलाई पोखरा लएिँर जानुभयो। हामीले फेवा ताल घुम्छौं।” (My father took me to Pokhara. We visited Fewa Lake.) Later, they translated and expanded it into: “My father took me to Pokhara during the holidays. We visited Fewa Lake, and I saw a beautiful sunset. I also went boating with my family. It was an unforgettable experience.”

This finding aligns with Garcia and Wei’s (2014) research, which highlights the cognitive benefits of translanguaging in multilingual learners. They argue that allowing students to utilize their full linguistic repertoire fosters better comprehension, encourages deeper thinking, and ultimately improves the quality of writing. Creese and Blackledge (2010) also advocate for translanguaging, emphasizing its role in creating an inclusive learning environment where students feel more confident in expressing their thoughts.

Fluency First Approach Led to Greater Writing Confidence

Another crucial finding was the impact of prioritizing fluency over grammatical accuracy in the initial stages of writing. During the intervention, students were encouraged to write continuously for 10-15 minutes without focusing on correctness. Over time, this approach led to notable improvements in their writing fluency. Students who initially wrote only a few lines gradually expanded their responses into complete paragraphs.

This observation aligns with Nation’s (2009) argument that fluency development is an essential component of language learning. He emphasizes that allowing students to produce language without immediate correction fosters confidence and a willingness to take risks. Similarly, Harmer (2004) states that excessive focus on accuracy can

hinder fluency, particularly in early language development stages. Creating a low-stakes writing environment made students more comfortable generating ideas and experimenting with language.

Conclusion

The findings of this action research demonstrate that integrating personalized writing topics, translanguaging strategies, and a fluency-first approach significantly enhances students' writing abilities. The intervention led to improved engagement, reduced writing anxiety, and greater confidence in self-expression. Students who initially struggled with generating ideas and organizing their writing showed remarkable progress in their ability to construct coherent and meaningful texts.

This study has several implications for English language teaching in similar contexts. Firstly, providing students with opportunities to write about personally meaningful topics can significantly increase motivation and investment in writing tasks. Secondly, adopting a translanguaging approach allows students to leverage their first language as a cognitive resource, facilitating deeper understanding and idea development. Lastly, prioritizing fluency over accuracy in early writing stages encourages students to take risks and develop confidence, ultimately leading to long-term improvement in writing skills.

Future studies could explore the long-term effects of personalized writing and translanguaging on students' overall language proficiency. Additionally, further research could examine how peer feedback strategies can be refined to maximize their impact on student writing. Expanding the study to different grade levels and educational contexts would provide a broader perspective on the effectiveness of these instructional strategies.

While the findings of this action research are promising, the study is not without limitations. The research was conducted within a specific classroom setting with a limited number of students, which may affect the generalizability of the results to broader educational contexts. The short duration of the intervention also restricts insights into the long-term impact of personalized writing, translanguaging strategies, and the fluency-first approach on students' writing development. Additionally, the study relied primarily on qualitative observations and student writing samples, without incorporating more diverse data sources such as standardized assessments or longitudinal tracking. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted with caution and invite further investigation in more varied and larger-scale settings.

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Family Dispute and its Impact on Child Learning and Development: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

The early childhood development stage is highly critical in setting up cognitive and overall well-being. The purposes of the study were to explore how family disputes affect the learning and development of children and to assess the challenges and coping strategies of mothers at a time of family dispute. The study used phenomenological approach of qualitative research design among the mother of early childhood development (ECD) children in Rupandehi district of Nepal. Semi-structured interviews were taken. Thirteen mothers were selected using purposive sampling method from ECD centers and home creating comfortable environment. After permission, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis approach. The findings showed that the physical presence of father, a destructive home environment, children's imitation of family disputes, and parental alcohol consumption have negatively impacted child learning while maternal coping strategies in family disputes have had a positive effect on child learning and development. Family conflict, emotional distress of children, destructive home environment, fight between couple have negative effect

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on children's learning whereas positive family dynamics support their effective learning. Many mothers have been facing the challenge of domestic violence. The study concluded that the mothers possess a range of coping skills to manage family disputes. If both parents make a conscious effort to avoid conflict in front of their children, its negative influence can be significantly reduced as it directly or indirectly affects children's learning and development. Hence, a conscious and active cooperation with emotional regulation by both mother and father is essential for stable child development.

Keywords: Emotional distress, early childhood, family conflict, coping strategies

Introduction

Early childhood plays a dynamic role in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social growth, founding the basis for lifelong learning and complete well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A steady and nurturing family environment is crucial for nurturing this growth. Family disputes, conflicts, and emotional distress can meaningfully impact a child's initial learning practices, often leading to emotional insecurity, condensed cognitive engagement, and poor speculative performance (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Raver et al., 2015; Krahé, 2020). In many households, mainly in low-income and socially varied communities, children are regularly visible to parental conflicts, which may interrupt their sense of constancy and security.

Mothers, as principal caregivers, play a crucial role in determining a child's learning environment, particularly in conflict-affected households (Parke, 2004). Their perceptions, surviving mechanisms, and emotional well-being directly impact how they support their children's education and complete development (Parke et al., 2004). In the context of Nepal, where traditional gender roles often place childcare responsibilities on mothers, understanding their perceptions and experiences becomes decisive for designing effective involvements (Grusec & Davidov, 2010).

Family arguments are a common but often ignored factor distressing early childhood education. When parents engage in regular conflicts, children may adopt stress, anxiety, or emotional distress, which in turn hinders their attentiveness, social relations, and learning inspiration (Cummings & Davies, 2011). Despite the well-documented effects of family volatility on child development, limited research has been conducted on how mothers observe and respond to these challenges within their homes (Cabrera et al., 2014).

Previous studies have mostly compared disputes among diverse social groups, rather than inspecting how family conflicts often more forceful and emotionally charged and directly affect children's learning and development (Ceka & Murati, 2016). Similarly other studies explored the causes of family conflicts, such as sexual infidelity, negligence, alcohol consumption, miscommunication, and misuse of family property (Clarke et al., 2014). Moreover, modern families are gradually troubled by

further challenges such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and rapid population growth, which further exaggerate household pressures and potentially hamper children's educational standards (Ndayambaje et al., 2020). Likewise, conflict between parents has been found to significantly affect children, and its negative influence on child development is increasingly acknowledged in both research and practice (McIntosh, 2003).

In the context of Nepal, traditional child-rearing practices and chronic economic hardships further exacerbate the issues of families that are experiencing internal conflicts (Clarke et al., 2014). The majority of mothers lack emotional and financial support, which makes it even more difficult for them to shield their children from domestic conflicts' adverse effects and at the same time ensure a supportive and nurturing learning environment (Conger et al., 2010). The above conditions are further compounded by social pressures and low institutional support, and mothers have inadequate resources to cope with the dual roles of conflict resolution and care provision (Emmen et al., 2013). Despite growing global research on the impact of family processes on children's development, there is an urgent lack of research on how maternal stress, social norms, and a lack of effective support systems influence children's learning in poor and culturally diverse contexts like Nepal (Lansford et al., 2021). How these processes play out and intersect in conflict-affected families, particularly from mothers' perspectives, is most under researched (Betancourt et al., 2013; Panter-Brick et al., 2014).

While large bodies of work from across the globe have supported the negative impact on child development as a result of family conflict, much of that work is in Western contexts with relatively stable support systems (Wang et al., 2023; Wang, Li, & Wang, 2021). In Nepal, the crosscuts of traditional child-rearing roles, gender roles, and chronic economic insecurity combine to create a unique and under-researched context in which family conflict happens.

This study addresses an urgent research need by focusing the lived experience in Rupandehi District, Nepal, where cultural expectations, limited availability of mental health services, and socio-economic disadvantage shape the child development outcomes and child-rearing in particular terms (Clarke et al., 2014). Similarly, it provides a nuanced, context-specific understanding of how parental conflict affects early learning in a setting where public discourse on child development, parental stress, and emotional well-being remains emerging (Clarke et al., 2014), drawing on qualitative interviews with 13 mothers to explore both the perceived educational impacts on children and maternal coping strategies employed by mother in conflict-affected household. Thus, the study aimed to investigate how intra-household conflict affects the learning and development of children and then identify the mothers' problems and coping strategies during a period of family dispute.

Methods and Procedures

This study employed phenomenological design under the qualitative research approach. This design was allocated since it is concerned with lived experiences, which is paramount in understanding mothers' experiences of family conflicts' effects on children (Davilla & Pearson, 1994). The study was carried out in Rupandehi District, Nepal, which is known for cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity and hence a suitable place to witness the complexity of early childhood learning in conflict-affected families (Sharma et al., 2023).

Primary caregivers, i.e., mothers of children in the preschool age group, attending government-run Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers were focused in this study. Purposive sampling method was used. Thirteen mothers were selected to saturate the data. Recruitment took place between April 20th to May 2nd, 2021, by undertaking semi-structured and open-ended interviews at ECD centers and homes of the participants, thereby creating a good and comfortable environment for interview. Interview guide focused on critical domains such as mothers' views of their child's learning, the promotion of cognitive and emotional development as a result of conflicts within the family.

The interviews were audio-recorded by taking permission from the participants and transcribed verbatim to ensure fidelity. All the transcripts were carefully read and repeatedly reviewed to become familiar with the data. The initial codes were allocated based on emerging concepts and participant experiences. The codes were developed into basic, organizing and global theme manually. Inductive approach was used to generate the themes. The data were interpreted by thematic analysis to understand underlying behavioral factors. The trustworthiness was enhanced by member checking, where the transcripts were reviewed from the participants to ensure accuracy. The second researcher checked this process to enhance reliability and mitigate the subjective biases (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical permission was obtained from the ethical review board of the Nepal Health Research Council (ERB approval No. 2078-56/2021) prior to data collection. Informed consent was taken in written form before carrying out the interviews, and detailed information regarding the purpose of the study was explained to the participants. To provide anonymity, all identifying details were removed from the transcripts, and the participants were assured that their responses would only be used for research purposes. The participants were provided with a relaxed and private setting to be interviewed. They were free to stop or withdraw from the study at any time.

Results

The perception of mothers toward family disputes and its impact on learning and development of children based on their own experiences have been explored in this study. The challenges and coping strategies of mother at a time of family dispute, which shaped those mothers' experiences of family disputes have also been investigated. The findings of this study were physical presence of father, destructive home environment and learning, imitation of children from family disputes, father's role in child development, alcohol consumption of parent and child learning, maternal coping strategies and mitigation of family disputes, which are described here:

Father's Role in Child Development

The study showed that the mere physical presence of father does not guarantee a harmonious family environment. While some mothers lived with their husbands, others were in long-distance marriages due to employment abroad. Despite these differences, disputes were present in both scenarios, indicating that the quality of the relationship, rather than the father's presence, is a significant factor in family harmony. Several mothers reported stable relationship with minimal conflict, but others faced emotional distress due to communication gaps or disagreements, particularly in long-distance marriages. One mother of our study shared that although her husband was abroad, they maintained a good relationship, yet conflicts still arose from time to time, especially when discussing child-rearing:

My husband is in a foreign country. We have a good relationship, but if we argue, it is for the betterment of our baby (Mother 1).

Another mother, whose husband was a businessman, noted that her daughter's academic performance was suffered because her father, who doted on her, lacked the discipline needed to guide her studies effectively:

My husband was abroad, but now he is a businessman. My daughter does not perform well in studies because her father loves her too much and does not discipline her. We have good relation but sometime dispute. We do not fight. He does not drink. I do not care what the children do when we are quarrel at home (Mother 2).

In contrast, one mother disclosed that her husband's drinking habits led to frequent arguments, with their children visibly distressed during such moments:

My husband drinks and creates disputes. I hide somewhere when he starts to fight with me. My children start crying when they see our fights and ask us to stop (Mother 3).

This quotation has explored the significant role of parents in developing appropriate environment for children in learning and development.

Destructive Home Environment and Learning

The study indicated that children exposed to frequent family disputes exhibited various emotional and behavioral responses. Many mothers acknowledged that these conflicts deeply impacted their children's emotional well-being and academic performance. Some children cried, withdrew, or displayed signs of anxiety when exposed to arguments, while others reacted with aggression or anger. A few mothers observed that their children's ability to focus on schoolwork was compromised by the stress generated at home. One mother shared that her child became aggressive and had trouble engaging with peers, likely due to the destructive home environment. A participant added that

If the home environment is destructive, children become aggressive, and their behavior is not good even at school and with friends (Mother 4).

Another participant observed her child's sadness and emotional withdrawal during arguments, noting how the conflict affected the child emotionally and academically:

My child looks angry and hopeless when we argue. She supports me emotionally, but I know it affects her learning. we have disputes sometimes and quarrel. I think it gives negative effect to the child if we quarrel in front of the child but I'm not sure how my husband feels about it, I haven't asked him. It is good to have discussion between spouses in the absence of child (Mother 5).

Another mother reflected that her daughter, while emotionally supporting her during arguments, could sense the tension, which further contributed to her distress:

My daughter listens when I quarrel with my husband on the phone. She tells me not to talk with him because she knows he is a quarreling man (Mother 6).

From this quotation, it has been clear that destructive home environment has the critical for Learning and development of children. In this scenario, one mother noted that although her husband was physically present, his lack of emotional engagement left her child feeling insecure and distressed during family conflicts.

Family Disputes, Child Imitation and Behavior Change

Children's ability to observe and internalize family disputes emerged as a significant theme in the data. Some children, upon witnessing arguments, would advise their parents to stop fighting, showing an early sense of maturity. Others, however, began to exhibit behaviors associated with conflict, either becoming aggressive or avoiding confrontations. One mother noted that her son often advised other couples not to fight, a behavior she attributed to his own experiences at home:

My son advises other couples not to fight when he sees them arguing. I think it's because of what he saw at home (Mother 7).

Another mother shared that during arguments, her children would cry and beg for the fighting to stop, a clear indication of their emotional distress:

When we fight, my children cry and beg us to stop. I know it affects them emotionally (Mother 8).

These reactions suggested that children not only internalize the conflicts they witness but also adapt behaviors based on their observations, which may shape their future responses to conflict.

Father's Role in Child Development

The perception of fathers' roles in child development varied significantly among the mothers. Some mothers strongly believed that fathers played a crucial role in their children's learning and overall development. They noted that their husbands remained involved in their children's education, such as asking about homework and daily activities. In contrast, other mothers felt that a mother's involvement was sufficient for a child's growth and well-being. If a mother adequately cared for the child, the father's role became less significant. In this scenario, one mother of our participant expressed her view that,

I think there is no role of a father if a mother takes care of the child well. My husband is together at present. We have almost good relation between husband and wife. We have disputes sometimes but have not fought till now (Mother 9).

This perspective illustrated that various factors, including the maladaptive behaviors of spouses also have influence in learning of children. Regarding paternal involvement in children's growth and wellbeing in some cases, fathers were seen as essential figures in nurturing their children's educational and emotional development, while in others, the mother's dedication was considered enough. One mother shared how her husband, though busy with work, remained highly involved in their child's education, she portrayed that,

My husband calls our child every evening and asks about school and homework. He talks to her more than he talks to me (Mother 10).

This quotation showed that the emotional attachment of father with his children is a catalyst for learning in children. Therefore, we can say that the role of father and mother both have important to manage family disputes and child learning.

Alcohol Consumption of Parent and Child Learning

Alcohol consumption of father and social stresses created an environment of insecurity for children, with several mothers noting how the tension directly affected their children's emotional and cognitive well-being. Another mother of our participants shared how her husband's drinking led to frequent arguments, which left her children in tears, hiding from the confrontation, she spilled her grief that,

My husband also drinks and creates problems at home. Even though, when he starts fighting, I hid it from my child (Mother 11).

Another mother, grappling with emotional strain, reflected on how these challenges not only affected her family's stability but also had lasting effects on her children's development. She added that,

I think alcoholic father might be the cause of family disputes, which affects child learning and development. It may affect their minds too (Mother 12).

In this way, the consumption of alcohol emerged as a major factor contributing to family tensions, which, in turn, affected children's emotional security. Many family disputes stemmed from financial pressures, including unemployment and the inability to meet basic needs.

Maternal Coping Strategies and Mitigation of Family Disputes

Mothers employed a range of coping mechanisms to protect their children from the adverse effects of family disputes. Some mothers ensured that arguments occurred behind closed doors, away from their children's ears, while others faced the challenge of domestic violence or financial hardship, which made it difficult to shield their children. Several mothers expressed the belief that minimizing disputes in front of their children would reduce emotional harm, although some were unable to do so due to their living conditions. For example, one mother mentioned that, even minor disputes occurred, her husband's silence during disagreements scared their children. She said that,

We have minor disputes, but my husband tolerates everything and remains silent. If he is angry, he does not speak for days. My children get afraid and start crying when we fight (Mother 13).

Another participant living in a single-room rental could not hide her arguments from her children, recognizing that it inevitably impacted them. She expressed her sadness in her own voice,

I live in a single rented room. I cannot go outside to argue, so my children hear everything. I know this affects them, but I have no option (Mother 8).

However, another participated mother emphasized that she and her husband made a conscious effort to avoid arguing in front of their son, recognizing how such conflicts could affect his emotional state. Her quotation was that,

We never quarrel in front of our son. If we do, it will affect him. My husband also understands this (Mother 13).

This quotation advised us to avoid arguing, quarrel and conflict in front of our children which may affect the learning in children.

In nutshell, adoptive behavior, good relation between husband and wife, coping scope, emotional attachment and care from father and mother for children have crucial role rather than physical presence. Family quarrel creates major problem in learning and development of children.

Discussion

This study revealed that fathers' physical presence is not necessarily linked to a pleasant family environment. Both residing and long-distance spouses experienced frequent arguments, suggesting that relationship quality rather than physical proximity is a crucial component in preserving family stability. These findings challenge the conventional wisdom that paternity invariably stabilizes a child's development.

A study emphasizes that children thrive in emotionally supportive environments, regardless of physical proximity (Bornstein et al., 2010). Conversely, emotionally distant or conflict-prone fathers may contribute to children's distress, even when physically present, as seen in the experiences of mothers whose children exhibited anxiety and emotional withdrawal despite their father's presence at home (Amato, 2000). One mother reported that despite her husband's physical presence, her child felt uncomfortable and distressed during family disputes because of his lack of emotional involvement.

The importance of emotional availability is further supported by studies on transnational families, which indicate that long-distance parenting can still provide emotional security when fathers engage meaningfully, although emotional unavailability may increase stress and behavioral disruptions for children (Reimer, 2017; Parke, 2004).

Parental conflicts have been found to have a significant impact on children's academic performance, emotional stability, and cognitive development in relation to the destructive home environment (DHE) and learning. Children showed signs of hostility, disengagement, and a decline in focus in class, which is consistent with other research on the detrimental impacts of unstable households on children's wellbeing. (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Raver et al., 2015). This study's findings align with key psychological and educational theories, particularly Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, attachment theory, and social learning theory.

The Model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights the role of multiple environmental layers (family, community, and societal structures) in shaping children's development. In this study, children whose family environments were characterized by persistent conflict exhibited emotional distress and behavioral issues, illustrating the disruptive effects of a strained microsystem on early childhood development. The emotional security theory suggests that exposure to family disputes increases emotional reactivity, impairing cognitive processing and social skills (Cummings & Davies, 2011). The findings reinforce the idea that family stability and parental relationships significantly affect early childhood learning, supporting prior research that links household conflict with emotional distress and reduced academic motivation (Cummings & Davies, 2011).

The attachment theory of Bowlby, (1983) further clarifies the reasons behind emotional anguish, withdrawal, and hostility in children who see frequent parental arguments. According to the emotional security theory, children's psychological health depends on healthy parent-child connections; conflict undermines their sense of safety, which impairs cognitive and emotional development. Many mothers in this study reported seeing symptoms of emotional instability in their children, such as worry, avoidance, or heightened aggression. These results are consistent with earlier studies that demonstrate how household instability affects young children's capacity for self-regulation and emotional resilience (Raby et al., 2016). These findings not only align with previous research on household instability and child well-being but also reinforce the theoretical grounding in ecological systems, attachment, and social learning theories.

Children actively watch and absorb family conflicts, which can influence how they interact with others in the future. This is known as social imitation. Some children told their parents to stop fighting, while others started acting aggressively or avoiding situations. It is supported by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) that children imitate behaviors they see. Participants reported seeing their children mimic conflict behaviors or telling parents to stop fighting, which supports Bandura's (1977) claim that children learn by observation. In this study, some children tried to mediate disputes between their parents, while others showed signs of aggression or internalized stress from the conflict. According to research by Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2017), children who grow up in homes where there is a lot of conflict are more likely to exhibit maladaptive coping strategies, behavioral aggression, or emotional disengagement. Regarding the role of fathers in child development, mothers had divergent views on fathers' involvement in early childhood education, with some emphasizing the importance of paternal engagement while others believed maternal care was sufficient. This difference in perception aligns with cultural and socio-economic theories of parenting, where maternal and paternal roles are influenced by financial stability,

relationship dynamics, and societal expectations (Grusec & Davidov, 2010). Studies indicate that active involvement of parent in caring, teaching and learning, improves children's academic and social skills (Parke, 2004).

Similarly, alcohol consumption of father and social stresses have been problem of insecurity for children. In the same way, the tension, fighting and quarrel were found directly affected the children's emotional and cognitive well-being. While the study effectively explores the impact of family disputes, a broader examination of cultural influences on parenting in Nepal would enhance contextual understanding. Traditional gender roles often place primary caregiving responsibilities on mothers, with fathers playing a more distant role in daily child-rearing.

Previous studies on Nepalese parenting of Lansford et al. (2021) has highlighted that maternal stress, and limited external support systems contribute to parenting challenges in conflict-affected households. Integrating these cultural aspects more explicitly into the discussion would provide a richer interpretation of maternal coping strategies and children's emotional responses. Comparing these findings with prior research (Grych & Fincham, 1990; Raver et al., 2015).

However, it also highlights unique socio-economic and cultural factors shaping maternal responses and children's coping strategies in Nepal. While studies from Western contexts emphasize parental separation and legal custody disputes as primary stressors, this study revealed that domestic violence, and traditional gender roles play a more dominant role in shaping children's emotional and academic outcomes in Nepalese households. Parental stress, alcohol consumption, and increased domestic conflicts were linked with family dispute (Mistry et al., 2008), with research confirming that financial instability can reduce parental emotional availability and increase marital discord, ultimately affecting child behavior (Conger et al., 2010; Dearing, 2004). Family economic stress theory suggests that financial pressure exacerbates frustration among parents, heightening the likelihood of conflict and negatively affecting children's learning and emotional well-being (Lansford et al., 2021).

Therefore, to mitigate family disputes, mothers have employed various coping mechanisms to shield their children from family conflicts, such as avoiding disputes in front of children or engaging in discussions away from them. However domestic violence significantly constrained their ability to protect their children. Research supports the notion that mothers play a pivotal role in buffering children from stress, though their effectiveness is contingent upon external factors like social support (Conger et al., 2010). In cases of domestic violence or severe stress, maternal coping strategies are less effective, leaving children vulnerable to emotional distress (Evans & Kim, 2013). These findings underscore the importance of addressing not only conflict resolution but also the socio-economic conditions that limit maternal resilience, as suggested by family stress theory (Lansford et al., 2021). This study contributes to the

growing discourse on parenting in Nepal by highlighting how parental conflict, and limited paternal involvement uniquely shape maternal coping mechanisms and child outcomes.

Conclusion

This study concluded that family/parents have critical role in developing appropriate environment for children in learning and development. Family conflict and emotional distress of children, destructive home environment, fight within couple negatively affect the children's education, homework and daily activities. Family dynamics, parental counseling, emotional support that help children in learning and development effectively. If the mother and father both made a conscious effort to avoid arguing in front of their children, the family dispute can be disappeared even the husband is not with his family.

Author Contributions

Prakash Sharma: Conceptualization and collection of information, perform the analysis, project administration, software, validation, visualization, writing- original draft, writing- review and editing.

Chitra Bahadur Budhathoki: Conceptualization, formal analysis, project administration, resources, supervision, validation, visualization, writing - review and editing

Bishnu Kumar Adhikari: Conceptualization, formal analysis, project administration, resources, information validation, visualization, writing - review and editing.

Pramila Pudasaini Thapa: Conceptualization, formal analysis, project administration, resources, information validation, visualization, writing - review and editing.

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Influence of Parental Alcohol Consumption among Schooling Adolescent Students

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Abstract

Alcohol consumption among school students is a growing concern worldwide. Parental influence plays a crucial role in shaping the alcohol consumption behavior of adolescent students. This study aimed to explore the influence of parental alcohol consumption, monitoring, and communication among adolescents' alcohol consumption. This study followed a descriptive research design and employed a cross-sectional survey to collect quantitative data. The study population for this research included school students studying at the secondary level in the public secondary schools of Banke District. The researcher selected 422 students by using multistage sampling. The self-administered questionnaire was used as the tool for quantitative data collection. The collected quantitative data were entered into the computer and analyzed subsequently using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data, e.g., frequency and percentage analysis, and important study findings were presented. Binary logistic regression was used to analyze the effects of parents' monitoring, parent-student communication, parents' alcohol consumption, and alcohol consumption among school students. The results of the study showed that parental alcohol consumption (both mother and father) is significantly associated with lower adolescent alcohol consumption. Likewise, parental monitoring decreases adolescent alcohol consumption. Furthermore, parental communication with their children about alcohol is not significantly related to adolescent alcohol consumption. The findings suggest the necessity of anti-alcohol educational interventions for controlling alcohol consumption among school students as well as minimizing parental influence on adolescent alcohol consumption.

Keywords: Communication, parents drinking, monitoring, quantitative, school



Introduction

Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood characterized by teleological, psychosexual, social, and intellectual changes. These changes lead to identity searches, rebellion, sexual emergence, and a desire for love, understanding, independence, and health-risk behavior, including alcohol consumption (Bansal, 2022). Alcohol consumption among school-going adolescent students is a growing concern worldwide, with potential short-term and long-term effects on their physical, mental, and social well-being (Luecha et al., 2019; Oppong Asante & Kugbey, 2019). It is a leading cause of morbidity and mortality worldwide. Adolescent alcohol exposure can hinder brain development and cognitive abilities, leading to negative adult outcomes like alcohol dependence, academic struggles, and risky behaviors (Lees et al., 2021; Tapert & Ebersson-Shumate, 2022). Parents play crucial roles as educators, role models, and influencers in their children's lives (Kearney & Levine, 2020). Parental influence plays a vital role in shaping the alcohol and consumption behavior of adolescent students (Calonia, 2023). The alcohol consumption patterns of parents influence the likelihood of adolescents engaging in alcohol use (Berglund et al., 2022). Parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to alcohol use can significantly impact how their children perceive and engage with alcohol (Ennett et al., 2013). Binge drinking among adolescents is associated with their parents' parenting styles as well as parental alcohol-drinking behavior (Zuquette et al., 2019).

On the other hand, adolescents whose parents demonstrate a more restrictive and authoritative parenting style provide clear rules and expectations regarding alcohol use and actively discourage underage drinking. They are less likely to consume alcohol and engage in risky behaviors (Hurley et al., 2019; Sarwar, 2016). Likewise, parental (Frojd et al., 2007) alcohol consumption among adolescents (Bray et al., 2022; Carroll et al., 2016; Latendresse et al., 2017). Furthermore, Goswami and Thompson (2020) found that adolescents whose parents monitored their daily activities had lower alcohol consumption. In addition, Mehanovic et al. (2020) found that there was a strong relationship between parental alcohol use, low parental monitoring, and alcohol use among adolescents. The previous study results show that the relationship between non-drinking parents and youth remains a protective factor for young people. Relationships between parents and youth who drink alcohol increase the likelihood of youth alcohol use (Yang et al., 2023). Likewise, students' perceptions of their parents' support for their drinking were not related to parent-student communication about alcohol use (Messler & Emery, 2016). Furthermore, an important tactic for assisting young people in creating and maintaining a positive relationship with alcohol is excellent parental communication (Sawyer et al., 2021).

This article aims to explore the relationship between parental drinking behavior and alcohol consumption among school students. Likewise, it also analyzes the association between parents' monitoring and parent adolescents' communication regarding the alcohol use among school students. The various dimension of parental influence and its potential impacts on alcohol consumption among school-going adolescent students aimed to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, parents, and researchers in developing effective strategies to address this pressing issue. In these contexts, the present study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between parental alcohol consumption and adolescent student drinking behavior?
2. What is the relationship between parental monitoring and alcohol consumption among school-going adolescent students?
3. What is the association between parent–adolescent communication about the effects of alcohol use and adolescent students' alcohol consumption?

Methods and Procedures

This study uses quantitative data. The study employed a cross-sectional research design. The study population included secondary school students (class 9 to 12) in the public secondary schools of Banke Districts. The researcher was determined the sample size by using Cohran's sample size calculating formula, which is used for calculating sample size in a cross-sectional study (Singh & Masuku, 2014).

$$\begin{aligned}
 n_0 &= \frac{Z_{1-\alpha/2}^2 P(1-P)}{d^2} \\
 &= \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{0.05^2} \\
 &= 384.16 \cong 384
 \end{aligned}$$

Where, α = Significance Level = 5% = 0.05

$Z_{1-\alpha/2}^2$ = Critical Value of Z at level of significance = 1.96

P = estimated proportion = 50% = 0.50

d = desired error = 5% = 0.05

No previous studies have examined parental influence on alcohol consumption among adolescent students. It is common practice to use a 50% estimate proportion (p) (Singh & Masuku, 2014; Verma & Verma, 2020). So, the researcher used 50 = 0.50 as the estimated proportion.

Here, the population size is huge, and the ratio of $\frac{n}{N}$ is minimal, so n_0 is the final sample size. However, if there is a 10% non-response rate then we have to collect 10% more

samples from the (Suresh & Chandrashekara, 2012). The minimum sample size was:

$$\begin{aligned}n &= 384 + 10\% \text{ of } 384 \\ &= 384 + 38.4 \\ &= 422.43 \approx 422\end{aligned}$$

At first the researcher was randomly chosen one province from the seven province of Nepal. Then one district was randomly selected from the twelve districts in the Lumbini province. After that, four secondary schools were conveniently chosen from the lists of Banke Districts. Among those selected four secondary schools 106 students were chosen from per school. Classes were chosen randomly using a lottery method. Student roll numbers were drawn from a box to finalize the student selection.

The self-administered questionnaire was used as the tool for quantitative data collection. This questionnaire was pre-tested among a 10 percent representative sample population. After collecting pre-test data, the researcher entered the responses into a spreadsheet and cleaned the data. The researcher examined the data thoroughly and employed a technique known as principal components analysis to identify the key components or patterns by clustering related variables. The researcher calculated Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of the questionnaire. Before conducting this study, the researcher contacted with the head teachers and requested permission to visit the classroom and conducted the study. Then, the investigator explained the research objectives and provided instructions for completing the questionnaires. The researcher also obtained verbal and written consent from the students before distributing the questionnaires. After that, it was distributed. The researcher requested the students to fill out the questionnaire. The researcher then collected the completed questionnaires filled by the students.

The collected quantitative data were entered into the computer and analyzed subsequently using SPSS version 27. The descriptive statistics was used to analyze data, e.g., frequency and percentage analysis, and then essential findings of the study were presented. Bivariate analysis, including the chi-square test, assessed the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. Additionally, binary logistic regression analysis indicating the adjusted odds ratio was performed to examine the effects of parents monitoring, parent-adolescent students' communication about alcohol consumption, parents' drinking behavior (father and mother drinking behavior), and alcohol consumption among school students.

The researcher followed the ethical guidelines by obtaining verbal and written consent from the participating students. Students were assured that their information would be protected, that their beliefs would be respected, that the data would be used only for research purposes, and that their identities would be kept confidential.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

A total of 422 adolescent students were included in the study. Among them, 52.10 percent of the respondents were female, and 47.40 percent of them were male. More than two-thirds (69.7%) of the respondents were in the 15-19 age group. The mean age for the eligible participants was 15.59 ± 1.57 years. In terms of religion, 167 (39.60%) were Hindu, 96 (22.70%) were Buddhist, 83 (19.70%) were Muslim, and 76 (18%) were Christian. The demographic analysis of participants reveals a range of representation: the highest representation is found among the Terai caste at 33.9 percent. In comparison, the lowest representation is observed in Thukari at 6.6 percent. Regarding parental education, the highest level completed by fathers is secondary education at 37.2 percent, and the lowest is master's level at 15.2 percent. For mothers, the highest level is basic education at 41.7 percent, and the lowest is master's degree at 3.8 percent. The highest engagement for fathers is in business at 37.9 percent, while the lowest is in daily wage work at 15.2 percent. Mothers are primarily engaged in agriculture at 43.4 percent, with the lowest participation in government jobs at 5.7 percent (Table 1).

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Adolescent Students

Demographics		Number	Percentage
Age of the respondents	10-14	128	30.3
	15-19	294	69.7
Mean age		15.59 ± 1.57	
Sex of the respondents	Female	222	52.1
	Male	200	47.4
Religion of the Respondents	Hindu	167	39.6
	Buddhist	96	22.7
	Muslim	83	19.7
	Christian	76	18.0
	Brahmin	52	12.3
	Chhetri	47	11.1
Caste of the Respondents	Janajati	112	26.5
	Thukari	28	6.6
	Dalit	40	9.5
	Terai Caste	143	33.9

Respondents' Father education	Basic Level	116	27.5
	Secondary Level	157	37.2
	Bachelor Level	85	20.1
	Masters and above	64	15.2
Respondents Mother Education	Basic Level	176	41.7
	Secondary Level	150	35.5
	Bachelor Level	80	19.0
	Masters and above	16	3.8
Respondents Fathers' Occupation	Agriculture	76	18.0
	Business	160	37.9
	Government Job	122	28.9
	Daily Wages	64	15.2
Respondents Mothers' Occupation	Agriculture	183	43.4
	Business	116	27.5
	Government Job	24	5.7
	Daily Wages	99	23.5

Alcohol Consumption Pattern

This study examines the adolescent students' responses regarding alcohol consumption in the past 3 months. In the last 3 months, a large majority of the adolescents (78.43%) reported that they had not consumed alcohol. Likewise, a small minority of the adolescents (21.57%) reported that they consumed alcohol in the past three months. The average age for initiating alcohol consumption among adolescents was about 13.03 ± 0.941 years, indicating that adolescents experienced an early onset of alcohol consumption (Table 2).

Table 2

Alcohol Consumption Patterns among Adolescent Students

Characteristics	Responses	Number	Percentage
alcohol consumption past 3 months	No	331	78.43
	Yes	91	21.57
Mean age of starting alcohol consumption 13.03 ± 0.941			

Parental Influence on Alcohol Consumption among Adolescent Students

The researcher employed the chi-square test to analyze the associations between parental factors, including fathers' drinking behavior, mothers' drinking behavior, and communication with adolescents about alcohol effects, and parental monitoring and

alcohol consumption among adolescent students. Results indicated a strong relationship between these parental factors and teenage alcohol consumption ($P < 0.001$ for all factors aspect). The study revealed that adolescents with drinking fathers had a higher drinking rate (19.67%) compared to those with non-drinking fathers (1.9%). Similarly, those with drinking mothers drank more (19.19%) than those with abstaining mothers (2.37%). Discussing alcohol with parents was linked to lower rates (7.11% vs. 14.45%). Increased parental monitoring also reduced alcohol use (9.72% vs. 11.85%) (Table 3).

Table 3

Associations between Parental Drinking Behavior, Communication, and Monitoring the Drinking Behavior of Adolescents

Variables	Responses	Alcohol consumption past 3 months		Chi-square	P-value
		No	Yes		
Fathers drinking Behavior	No	265(62.8%)	8(1.9%)	158.72	0.001*
	Yes	66(15.64%)	83(19.67%)		
Mothers drinking Behaviors	No	291(68.96%)	10(2.37%)	206.52	0.001*
	Yes	40(9.48%)	81(19.19%)		
Parent-Adolescent communication about alcohol	No	77(18.25%)	61(14.45%)	63.13	0.001*
	Yes	254(60.19%)	30(7.11%)		
Parents Monitoring	No	94(22.27%)	50(11.85%)	22.37	0.001*
	Yes	237(56.16%)	41(9.72%)		

*Significant at $p < 0.05$.

The findings from the binary logistic regression analyses explored the relationships between adolescent students' alcohol consumption within the past three months and parental factors. The binary logistic regression revealed that father drinking behavior (AOR = 0.036, $P = 0.001$) and mother drinking behavior ($P = 0.001$) were found to be significant risk factors for alcohol use within the past three months by adolescents. This suggests that adolescents whose parents consume alcohol are significantly less likely to abstain from drinking, with adjusted odds ratios of 0.036 and 0.031, respectively, indicating a strong protective effect against adolescent drinking when parents do not consume alcohol. In contrast, parent monitoring turned out to be a significant (AOR = 4.594, $P = 0.001$) protective factor for alcohol consumption within the past three months among adolescents. This indicated that those parents who constantly monitor their children's daily activities were less likely to consume alcohol among those children than those parents who do not monitor their daily activities. Furthermore, no significant association (AOR = 1.712, $P = 0.204$) was found between parent-adolescent communication about the effects of alcohol consumption and alcohol

use within the past three months among adolescents. This means that communication about the impact of alcohol consumption between parents and adolescents does not have an apparent effect on adolescent drinking behavior in this sample (Table 4).

Table 4

Likelihood of Alcohol Consumption among Adolescent Students

Variables	Category	AOR	95% CI	P- Value
Father drinking behavior	No (Ref.)			
	Yes	0.036	0.014-0.095	0.001*
Mother drinking behavior	No (Ref.)			
	Yes	0..31	0.012-0.079	0.001*
Parent-Adolescent communication about alcohol	No (Ref.)			
	Yes	1.712	0.747-3.921	0.204
Parents Monitoring	No (Ref.)			
	Yes	4.594	1.927-10.95	0.001*
Constant		2.138		0.060

*Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Discussion

This study aims to examine the relationship between parents' drinking behavior, parental monitoring, and communication about alcohol effects on adolescents' alcohol consumption within the past three months. Findings from the present study revealed that 21.57 percent of the adolescents consumed alcohol in the previous 3 months. The average age of first alcohol consumption was around 13.03 ± 0.941 years, highlighting early drinking behavior among participants. These results are also strongly supported by the previous study conducted in Ghana by Oppong Asante and Kugbey (2019) who found that the prevalence of alcohol use among adolescents was reported to be 11.1 percent for lifetime instances of intoxication and 12.6 percent for current alcohol use. Likewise, these results are consistent with the previous study results by Luecha et al. (2019) not showing that 31.01 percent of the early adolescents had some experience with alcohol consumption. However, among these, only 10.94 percent of the early adolescents were currently indulging in drinking. Another similar study conducted in Dharan, Eastern Nepal, Chapagain et al. (2020) revealed that the proportion of adolescents who have consumed alcohol at some point in their lives was 37.58 percent. In comparison, 15.20 percent of those were identified as current users. In addition, a similar previous study conducted in Nawalpur District, Nepal, found that 16.3 percent

of the adolescent consumed alcohol (Sapkota & Paneru, 2021). The findings of the current study are consistent with those from previous studies conducted in Ghana and Nepal. The similarities in study population, research tools, data collection methods, and analytical techniques contribute to the alignment of results across these different contexts.

The present study found that fathers drinking behavior ($\chi^2=158.72$, $P= 0.001$) and mothers' drinking behavior ($\chi^2=206.52$, $P= 0.001$) are significantly associated with adolescent students' alcohol consumption within the past three months. Likewise, findings from the binary logistic regression also reveal that the father's drinking behavior (AOR = 0.036, $P = 0.001$) and the mother's drinking behavior ($P=0.001$) significantly influenced adolescent alcohol use over the past three months. Adolescents whose parents consumed alcohol are much less likely to abstain alcohol consumption, reflecting strong odds ratios of 0.036 and 0.031. These results are consistent with the results of the previous study, by Murphy et al. (2016) indicating a correlation between a father's engagement in risky drinking habits and a higher likelihood of hazardous alcohol consumption among adolescents. Likewise, the previous study conducted by Mahedy et al. (2018) showed a significant relationship between maternal alcohol use and increased alcohol intake in young adults, predicting both moderate and high-risk drinking. Similarly, another previous study conducted by Mehanovic et al. (2020) showed that parental alcohol consumption had a more substantial impact on the alcohol use of adolescents in schools located in middle and low socioeconomic status (SES) areas. In the same way, another previous study revealed that parental alcohol consumption impacts adolescent alcohol use. Higher parental drinking increases the likelihood of alcohol use among adolescents, with maternal intake strongly linked to inebriation rates (Berglund et al., 2022). Likewise, a similar study conducted Bohm and Esser (2023) confirmed that approximately 6.6 percent of adolescents consumed alcohol, with a higher likelihood of alcohol use among those whose parents frequently drank or engaged in binge drinking. Furthermore, another similar study, by Ksinan et al. (2023), revealed that there was a statistically significant association between parental drinking and adolescent alcohol consumption.

The results from the chi-square test in this study indicated a statistically significant ($\chi^2=63.13$, $P= 0.001$) relationship between parent-adolescent communication about the effects of alcohol consumption and alcohol consumption among adolescents within the past three months. However, multivariate analysis shows no significant association (AOR = 1.712, $P= 0.204$), indicating that such communication does not significantly impact adolescent drinking in this sample. The result is inconsistent with the previous study results, which Reimuller et al. (2011) found that parental communication about alcohol consumption may influence

adolescent drinking behavior independently of the broader parenting approach and the drinking habits of the parents. Messler and Emery (2016) have shown that the extent of communication between parents and students about alcohol consumption does not correlate with the perception of parental approval towards drinking. In the same way, a similar study found that a higher frequency of discussions specifically about alcohol was linked to more positive perceptions of alcohol consumption among adolescents. This association was especially pronounced among those adolescents who had previously consumed alcohol (Brittner et al., 2017). Likewise, another study by Jones et al. (2020) demonstrated that there are primarily negative correlations between young individuals' risk behaviors and various discussions between parents and children. Furthermore, the prior research conducted Saukuma and Rungule (2023) indicates that communication between parents and adolescents regarding alcohol use does not have a statistically significant impact on the likelihood of alcohol use among adolescents. The present study results shows that parental alcohol consumption greatly influences adolescent alcohol consumption, aligning with past studies. However, communication between parents and children about alcohol lack significant impact, suggesting home environment behaviors are more crucial in reducing underage drinking.

The present study presents that parent monitoring their children's daily activity is significantly associated ($\chi^2=22.37$, $P= 0.001$) with adolescent students' alcohol consumption within the past three months. Likewise, multivariate analysis also confirms this association. Parent monitoring emerged as a significant protective factor (AOR = 4.594, $P =0.001$); adolescents with monitored activities were less likely to consume alcohol. These results are also strongly supported by Carroll et al. (2016) those who found that parental monitoring significantly reduces alcohol consumption among adolescents. In the same way, a similar previous study revealed that parental monitoring significantly influenced adolescents' perception regarding alcohol use. Higher parental monitoring correlated with increased perceptions of binge drinking as dangerous and reduced perceptions of drinking as incredible (Brittner et al., 2017). Similarly, these findings are by previous research showing that lack of parental monitoring was significantly associated with a higher likelihood of alcohol consumption (Mehanovic et al., 2020). Likewise, these results are consistent with the results of the previous study conducted, which Bray et al. (2022) revealed that adolescents with little maternal monitoring were more likely to consume alcohol moderately. Furthermore, a similar study in the United States found that most students (86.4%) reported their parents knew their whereabouts most of the time. High parental monitoring protects against risk behaviors, considering factors like sex, race, and grade (Dittus et al., 2023). The different contextual studies show the same results. The reason may be the similarity in the study population, universal psychological, biological, and

social factors, and similarity in research methodology. The above discussion points out that adolescent students' drinking behavior is shaped by parental drinking behavior, parental monitoring, and parental communication about alcohol consumption.

Conclusion

Alcohol consumption among adolescent students serves as a public health concern. This study's main aim was to examine parental factors' influence on alcohol consumption among adolescent students. The study indicates that alcohol consumption is a significant problem among school-going adolescents. The study found a significant relationship between parental (Father and mother) drinking behavior and alcohol consumption among school adolescents. Even though parent-adolescent communication regarding the effects of alcohol use had limited influence. Parental monitoring was linked to lower consumption and served as a protective factor. This study was constrained by its cross-sectional research design, which involved a restricted sample size and a small geographical area, focusing exclusively on adolescent students as respondents. This limitation affects the capacity to demonstrate the impact of parental influence on alcohol consumption among adolescents. Consequently, it is essential to conduct experimental research to establish a cause-and-effect relationship. This study highlights the effects of parental behaviors on adolescents' drinking habits, stressing the need for prevention through parental engagement and education. Further exploration of the link is suggested.

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Education Policies and Dalit Inclusion in Nepal: Uncovering Inequality, Exclusion and Structural Barriers

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Abstract

The Dalits have historically been considered untouchable in the traditional caste system of Nepal, excluding them from mainstream education. In this context, this study critically analyses Nepal's education policies and approaches to the Dalits' inclusion and access to education. Drawing information from the recorded documents as policy document analysis, this qualitative study discusses the provisions regarding exclusive and inclusive educational policies and practices in Nepal's education system. After the establishment of democracy in Nepal in 1951, schools were opened to the general public, including the Dalits. Since the 1980s, there have been efforts to bring the Dalits into the mainstream education system. However, reproduction of caste-based discrimination in policymaking has challenged the complete inclusion of the Dalits in education. Although the policies encouraging the oppressed people in the field of education have helped them in schooling, they are still inadequate. The education policy of Nepal has evolved in rhetoric but continues to fall short in practice. The persistence of caste-based discrimination and neglecting cultural capital in schooling indicates that without principled, structural changes, Dalit exclusion in education will persist. Bridging this gap requires critical engagement with both policy and practice through inclusive, justice-oriented frameworks informed by structural and cultural theories. Both policies and practices are necessary to reduce caste-based discrimination and poverty, change social and school practices, modify curricula and work collaboratively. Developing effective policy and practice for inclusion is a valuable commitment. Therefore, this suggests restructuring the education system changing the mindset of the policy makers, planners and teachers.

Keywords: Caste-system, restructuring, untouchability, mainstream education

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Introduction

The Dalits constitute about 13.4 percent of Nepal's total population of 29.2 million (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2021). Nepali society is characterized by a hierarchical and authoritarian structure system. In a caste-based society, the Dalits are a group suffering from inhuman behaviour like caste discrimination and untouchability. Untouchability refers to the Hindu religious belief that the so-called upper castes are unclean when they have physical contact with the so-called lower castes. The belief of untouchability is related to human pollution (Bhattachan et al., 2009). However, the impact of such situations on the educational, social, economic, and psychological aspects of the Dalits in Nepal has been the least studied area.

The most important factor in the caste structure is the treatment of the Dalits as untouchables, which has historically deprived them of education in traditional Hindu society (Chalaune, 2020). The Dalits are such a community that has for centuries been economically exploited, politically excluded, socially oppressed, religiously/culturally untouchable, and educationally deprived. The oppression and discrimination of the Dalits in the education system is a widespread problem in Nepal. Inhuman and discriminatory practices such as segregation, social exclusion and physical abuse persist in different forms of education from primary to university level (International Dalit Solidarity Network [IDSN], 2009). There are low literacy and enrollment rates, and high dropout, repetition, and failure rate among the Dalits, due to some social and physical factors. In addition, a large number of school-age Dalit children are out of school. The majority of school enrolled children drop out of school within the first three years (Poudel, 2007). Only 20% of Dalit children of primary school age appear to be enrolled in basic education, and 6% of them are enrolled in high school level (UNESCO, 2011). In Nepal, the enrollment rate of the Dalits is also less than their size of the population. National enrollment in higher education is 17.6%, but the Dalits average is 3.8%. Only 15% of the total Dalit population attain education, which is about half of the national average (Bhattachan et al., 2009). It is clear that social inequality is widespread in society. Untouchability and discriminatory practices do not help in creating an appropriate educational environment for schooling of Dalit children.

The trend of untouchability and inequality still exists in the Nepali society. The culture of the upper classes or castes has been dominant. Curriculum developers, planners, managers, and teachers are all influenced by social culture and norms. Therefore, the education system continues to reproduce the discriminatory culture prevailing in society (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1990). Consequently, schooling has been reproducing structural inequality and discrimination. As Nepali schools are reproducing the discriminatory attitudes and practices prevailing in the society, marginalized groups and the Dalits are being deprived in every aspect of life. Therefore, they do not

get much benefit from schooling education (Koirala, 1996; Poudel, 2007). This has directly or indirectly affected the education of Dalit children. As a result, Dalit children do not come to school, even if they do, they drop out. Nevertheless, something has changed compared to the past.

This study focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of education policy in bringing the Dalits into the mainstream of society. In this context, the purpose of this study is to critically analyze how Nepali education policy and its approaches have failed to provide the necessary support to bring the Dalits into the mainstream of education. In addition, the purpose of this study is to analyze the inclusion and exclusion of the Dalits in the policies and plans from the past to the present.

Despite various policy reforms, the Dalits in Nepal continue to face systemic exclusion in education. There is limited critical analysis of how education policies have addressed and failed to address Dalit inclusion. This article is needed to analyse the gaps in government policy implementation and support inclusive educational reform. It aims to highlight the structural inequalities reproduced through educational planning and practice.

Methods and Procedures

This study is based on the policy document analysis method of qualitative study. To achieve the purpose of the study, I first of all searched the relevant policy documents (e.g. *First five year plan 1956-1961; Report of High Level Education Commission 1998; National Education System Plan 1971-1975; Education in Nepal 1956; Fifth Plan 1970-1975; Sixth Five Years Plan 1980-85; Seventh Plan 1985-1990; The Eighth Plan 1992; Ninth Plan 1997-2002; Tenth plan 2002-2007; The Tenth Plan Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper 2002-2007; Three year (interim) Eleventh plan 2007-2010; Three Year Twelfth Plan 2010-2013; Three Year Thirteenth Plan 2013-2016; Fifteenth Plan 2020-2025*) from archives including some papers about Nepal's education policy. Then, using inductive thematic analysis, documents were read and re-read to identify the provisions in relation to the issues concerning the Dalits in mainstream education. Thus, this study depends on the secondary sources such as the report of the Commission, government policy and planning, articles, books, etc., regarding the issues of the Dalits in education. In this review, I followed a qualitative descriptive approach to the various provisions regarding exclusive and inclusive education policy and practice. Using analytical and evaluation methods, this study also extends to understanding policy approaches.

Trustworthiness was ensured by cross-referencing multiple sources and verifying consistency across periods. The study focuses on understanding how educational policy frameworks have shaped Dalit inclusion or exclusion.

Results and Discussion

In this section, I have discussed the findings drawn from the policy documents concerning the Dalits in mainstream education in Nepal. These findings are presented thematically and analysed critically.

Education Policy Concerning the Dalits

Nepal has never been a colony of any nation in history and has remained an independent nation. However, the history of formal education in Nepal is relatively short. The formal school started in the Rana period. The Rana period began in 1846 and ended in 1951. During this period, Nepal's education system was influenced by the British education system. The first formal school in Nepal was established in 1854 when the then ruler, Jung Bahadur Rana, returned from a visit to England. Unfortunately, this school was established only to provide education in English to the children of the Rana family, especially the children of Jung Bahadur Rana, who was the ruler of the upper castes (Bista, 1991). During the Rana period, the Dalits were legally untouchable and it was impossible for them to get an education. Therefore, neither the common people of other castes were educated, nor were the Dalits allowed to get an education during the Rana regime.

The oppressors do not want the development of the whole society. They only want to be the rulers of the oppressed people. Any activities they work are to marginalise and divide people to maintain their power and supremacy (Freire, 1970). The Ranas were the oppressors and autocratic rulers. They never wanted the development of the entire country because they always wanted to be the rulers to rule the common people. Thus, the Ranas merely persecuted the common people in their favour without providing any opportunity to maintain power and domination. As a result, only 2% of people were literate during the entire Rana period (Bista, 1991). In addition, in 1950, there were less than 330 schools across the country (Sharma, 2006). Therefore, the Rana period is known as the dark age of education in the history of Nepal.

After the end of the autocratic Rana rule in 1951, the democratic system was introduced in Nepal. Since then, educational institutions have started to open for the common people in Nepal. Since the mid-1950s, Nepal has initiated a planned approach to development in various fields, including education. New political changes took place in the country, but the British model of education system was followed. The schools that have developed since then have followed the structure and pattern of education in this area, especially in the Indian subcontinent (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2000). The Ministry of Education was established in 1952, especially for the development of school education in the country. Although some special schools and training centers

already exist, the current structure is directly related to the political changes of 1951 and the 1954 Commission.

The report prepared by the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC-1954) was the first effort to prepare an extensive education policy in Nepal; the education policies in the First Five Year Plan (1956–1960) were also based on the report of NNEPC (Government of Nepal, 1956). However, the Commission's report and the first five-year plan did not address the issue of education for the Dalit communities, which was lagging behind in the mainstream of education. Reviewing the progress of the 8th Plan, the 9th Five-Year Plan (1997-2002) noted that the weaker groups, scheduled castes, backward class children and the people living in remote areas were deprived of access to primary education (National Planning Commission [NPC], 1997). For the first time, the issue of Dalit education was explicitly included in Nepal's policy document. The 9th Plan emphasized providing educational opportunities to the children of backward caste groups and oppressed classes (ibid.). During the period of the 5th Five Year Plan (1970-1975), it was made free of cost to students studying in government elementary schools. In addition, with the launch of the 6th Five-Year Plan (1980-1985), the government has provided free textbooks to students studying in government elementary schools and raised scholarship quotas for Dalit students. However, due to the low amount of scholarships, it was not possible for Dalit students coming from poor communities to cover the need for stationery, school uniform, lunch, etc. The 10th Plan (2002-2007) announced a similar amount of scholarships for all primary Dalit children and an extension of the scholarships to secondary schools on the basis of the quota.

With the changed political situation, a three-year interim plan (2007-2010) was formulated. The Interim Plan embodied the spirit of political change and the Interim Constitution (2007). The plan specifically emphasized the spirit of inclusive democracy, social justice, social inclusion, rights-based, independent and universal basic and primary education, and ensuring primary education in the mother tongue. Emphasis was also placed on free education up to secondary level and meeting the educational needs of the weaker sections. The Interim Plan also continued the key relevant strategies and key aspects of the 10th Plan (MOE, 2007). National policies and plans are implemented through a system of schools, campuses, universities, and education of non-formal provisions. However, Dalit Scholarship is an important program to increase the access of Dalit children to education. Although the implementation is not effective as per its purpose, there are public complaints that the target group has not been able to get the scholarship. The scholarship has been misused by teachers and School Management Committees. Targeted students do not usually get scholarships easily (Bhattachan et al., 2009). Similarly, policies are not clear on who needs scholarships. There is also an economic class within the Dalits. Due to the provision of keeping the economically

well-off children in the scope of scholarship in the name of Dalit, the real poor children seem to be deprived of the necessary opportunities.

The 11th three-year plan (2007-2010) announced the following provisions for Dalit students:

- Dalit students enrolled in schools will be provided stipends and other incentive schemes from the primary to secondary level.
- The Dalit Civil Society and School Management Committee will sign a formal prospectus for 100 schools in densely populated Dalit areas to ensure that the allocated funds and grants to Dalit school children are properly utilized. In addition, caste discrimination will be stopped within the school.
- Necessary seats will be reserved for Dalit students to study in higher education scholarships in the country and abroad.
- Hostels for low-income Dalit students in the development region will be started and existing hostels will be strengthened.
- Proportional accommodation will be provided for Dalit students in the existing hostels.
- Measures will be taken to gradually provide education in their mother tongue for non-Nepali-speaking Dalit children. (NPC, 2007).

The main program run by the government to support the education of the Dalits is free education including Dalit scholarships. The government has some provisions from school-level scholarships to higher education scholarships. Although the provisions made for Dalits are inadequate, there seems to be some progress in the education of Dalit children. Currently, Dalit children's participation in school is on the rise, but these reforms are still limited and the Dalit situation is still weak (Bhattachan et al., 2009). Updated information on the Dalit is also still lacking. Poverty, prevailing narrow social values and norms, low access to education, lack of inclusive and equitable approach in plan formulation and implementation process, are prevailing problems (NPC, 2010, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). The facts and evidence show that the level of Dalit enrolment in schools is increasing but there is still a big challenge of retention in and stop dropouts of Dalit children from schools.

The government is waiving the fees for students from the Dalits and other underprivileged communities up to the tenth grade, in addition to the scholarship program for Dalit students at public primary and secondary schools. The government policy encompassed various measures, such as offering scholarships to students from underprivileged communities, including the Dalits, in private schools, regulating the fees of private schools, utilizing a proposed levy from private schools for education to marginalized communities, and handing over school management to the community (NPC, 2002, 2013). The government believes that by implementing these new programs,

the Dalits and other underprivileged groups will be more likely to attend school (NPC, 2002, MOE, 2016). However, quota scholarships in higher education, other suggested programs and changes, and offering a small number of scholarships to Dalit students enrolled in primary and secondary levels as well as waiving fees for Dalit children up to grade ten have not produced the anticipated outcomes (Department of Education) [DOE], 2006, NPC, 2013; UNESCO, 2015).

In such a situation, it is not possible to bring the Dalits into the mainstream of education without a radical change in the exclusionary value system and discriminatory mentality. There was a policy provision that the Dalits will be given priority in appointing school teachers, but this does not seem to have come into practice. The 10th Plan mentioned that the participation of Dalits in educational institutions is very low or nominal. Therefore, to increase the participation of the Dalits in the teaching profession, especially Dalit women will be given priority. If women teachers are not available, then Dalit men will be appointed (NPC, 2002). In practice, it is difficult to find such cases giving preferences to recruiting the Dalit teachers. However, after the change in 2007, some quotas in the appointment of permanent teachers have been set aside for the Dalits.

In addition, the Ninth and Tenth Plans included special programs for the Dalits. With the formation of the National Dalit Commission in 2002, it opened the door for Dalit educators and activists to participate in some aspects of the government's policy process. However, the meaningful involvement of the Dalits in the state's policy-making and decision-making process is still questionable, as the mindset of policymakers is based on old schooling. Reviewing the progress of the 10th Plan, the three-year Interim Plan (2007-2010) stated that the annual expenditure of the state for primary and secondary education of the Dalits was Rs.150 million. Overall, the level of education has improved in the national average years of schooling with a relatively 3.62 years, while that of the Dalits is 2.1 years (NPC, 2007).

Compared to the various education commissions, after the 1990s democratic changes, the education commissions suggested some positive measures about the poor and marginalized communities, including the Dalits. At the same time, these reports suggested Education for All (EFA), which was an important step towards the development of universal basic education. HLNEC (1998) stated that the responsibility of the government for education on the basis of social justice should be concentrated in the Dalit, marginalized, disabled, and remote areas (HLNEC, 1998). On the other hand, discriminatory practices have been influenced by conventional hierarchical and exclusionary mindset.

However, despite the widespread access to education since 1990, Nepal's approach to education policy has been influenced by neoliberalism, which has not been able to bring the weaker sections of society into the mainstream education. As in

Sowton's findings (Sowton, 2004, as cited in Poudel, 2007), the Nepalese education system does not seem to be able to help marginalized sections including the Dalits, those who are already deprived from education and other facilities for various reasons. Instead, economically prosperous, urbanized communities, educated and conscious about educational rights and needs have gained more opportunities.

Efforts for the Inclusion of the Dalits

After the political changes of 1990, the impact of liberalization and globalization in Nepal's education policy, as well as the expansion of education, accelerated. As a result, Nepal's education policy and direction have been changed. Issues such as rights-based education, education for all, and inclusion became the subject of debate. Along with this, the private sector in education expanded rapidly beginning the foreign aid in education.

With this, the international movement on EFA is an influential force on inclusive education thereby developing the concept of policies. The World Conference on Education for 1990, international concern and cooperation, as well as the national focus of many countries, has been directed towards Universal Primary Education (UNESCO, 2015; Kamanda & Sankoh, 2015). One of the mainstays of the EFA movement was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which ratifies the right of education to children. The guiding principles of 'Salamanca's statements' A Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994) incorporated the concept of inclusive schools and education.

The Dakar Conference (2000) clearly incorporated important aspects of inclusive education as education for all (UNESCO, 2000). It acknowledged the need for inclusive education in the Dakar Framework for Action. Booth (2003, 2003) noted that the EFA is an ethical and political movement that develops a global education system based on equality, rights, participation, and respect for diversity. In this sense, EFA's policies are based on the essence of inclusive education.

Adopting six EFA goals passed by the Dakar Conference, another goal in the Nepali context was also included. The added goal was to ensure the rights of indigenous and linguistic minorities in basic and primary education through their mother tongue (MOE, 2003). The following three EFA goals are directly associated with the educational inclusion of Dalit children:

- Early childhood care and education will be expanded and improved, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- To ensure free access and good quality compulsory primary education for all children, especially girls, children with disabilities, difficult circumstances, ethnic minority and Dalits by 2015.

- By 2015, adult literacy will improve by 100 percent and equal access to basic and continuing education will be provided for all adults. (MOES, 2003)

The Government of Nepal has introduced some policies to help the Dalits in the mainstream education. The 7th Amendment to the Education Act 2001 stipulates that primary school education in community schools will be free for all, textbooks will be provided free of charge. It was also mentioned that free education will be provided to Dalit, Janjati, girls and very poor students studying in community schools and private schools should provide scholarships to 10% poor students (MOE, 2001). Similarly, an inclusive provision within the Annual Strategic Implementation Plan (ASIP, 2006) made clear the need for system of inclusive education. It is assumed that all children have the ability to learn whether a conducive environment is ensured. It suggested that excluded children should be recognized at risk of dropping out in a particular context, and the process needed to be facilitated that is sensitive to social, cultural, and educational needs. The plan mentioned that the existing economic, social, and geographical obstruction against inclusion in education of backward and weaker sections including the Dalits will be addressed through various measures. It also includes policy reforms to increase and enhance the inclusion of teachers from traditional marginalized communities. Likewise, the School Sector Reforms Project (SSRP, 2009-2015) aimed at equal participation in basic education similarly as ensuring equal access to quality education through a rights-based approach and promotion of a child-friendly environment in schools Target adopted (DOE, 2014). School Sector Development Plan (2016-2023) focuses on increasing access for those with the lowest access to education on the basis of inclusion and equity (MOE, 2016).

Similarly, the Constitutions of Nepal (2015) reflects the spirit of the interim constitution, ensuring special safeguards for the proportional inclusion and educational uplift of the Dalits and enable the state to make a special arrangement for their educational progress. The special provisions as given in by Article 40 (1 and 2) are follows:

- Dalits will have the right to fully participate within the state-supported agencies on the principle of proportional inclusion. There'll be special legal provisions for empowerment, representation, and participation of the Dalit community for employment in other fields including general public service.
- Provision of free education with scholarships for Dalit students from first to higher-level education are going to be provided for the law. Special provisions within the law are going to be made for education in technical and vocational subjects for Dalits.

National Education Policy (2019) emphasizes the policy of zero-tolerance against untouchability to extend the access of Dalit children to education. The strategies adopted by the government is to encourage students to get access and acquire equity, to give priority to women, Dalits, indigenous and underprivileged communities in teacher recruitment, optimize for inclusive education, and for parents to provide income generating literacy program, optimize for inclusive education, and for parents to provide income generating literacy program (NPC, 2007). However, Dalit children have less access to education than children from other caste groups. Madhesi Dalits in particular seem to have very little access. Furthermore, the ratio of Dalit teachers is very low in comparison to the percentage of their population (DOE, 2014). In this sense, ineffective plans and programs were insusceptible to the Dalits and other marginalized groups. Therefore, it has not achieved this target within the expected time.

Although Nepal has revised its laws and rules according to several matters, many such provisions remain to be developed to address issues associated with equity, social justice, and social inclusion. For example, there is still no regulation or act to ensure rights-based education or compulsory education. There is no act or regulation with respect to minimum teaching conditions or quality standards of institutions. Obstruction-free is a commitment to education. However, there is no legislative measure to translate this commitment into actual practice at school.

Despite constitutional provisions and targeted programs, the education system continues to reflect the structural and symbolic domination of upper-caste culture. According to Bourdieu, education systems reinforce inequality by rewarding students who already possess the dominant cultural capital. In Nepal, this means that the language, content, norms, and expectations of schools often alienate Dalit students, contributing to low retention and achievement.

Insufficient Education Policy for the Dalits

With the democratic change in 1951, public education began in Nepal. The NNEPC, formed by the government, suggested what Nepal's future education system would look like. (NNEPC, 1954). Nepal's 1st Five Year Plan (1956-61) set out an education policy with the objective of universal primary education, national education, and education based on individual needs (Government of Nepal, 1956). However, the objectives set out by the commission and the plan were contradictory, and the policies were vague. Just as the national nature of education, and education based on individual needs, were not only contradictory but also unclear. Similarly, policies such as single curriculum and language policy, uniformity in teaching methods, cannot address social diversity and individual differences. Although it was a milestone in the history of educational development in Nepal, it was only useful for certain sections of society

and communities. At the same time, schools began to open, expand, enroll students, and increase public interest in education. But for the Dalits, it was not possible to easily enter schools due to the practice of caste based untouchability.

The All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) report recommended the purpose of education, with emphasis on traditional culture and the preparation of citizens who remain loyal to the panchayat system and the king (ARNEC, 1962). The 3rd Five Year Plan stated that every citizen would be provided equal opportunities and facilities for their personality and economic progress. The plan mentioned that the government would adopt a policy providing primary school facilities to all children by 1980, and that priority would be given to those schools that provided free and compulsory education. However, the plan did not mention anything about the education of marginalized groups including the Dalits. On the other hand, it referred to the contradictory program of reducing government grants in primary schools (National Planning Council, 1965).

Documents in the 4th Five Year Plan (1970–75) showed that only 18% of primary school students were enrolled in secondary education in primary education. In relation to the opening of secondary schools in the plan, it was said that during the plan period necessary restrictions would be imposed on the opening of schools and emphasis would be given on strengthening and improving the existing ones (NPC, 1970). Public education initiated in Nepal indicates that the education policy did not attempt to educate all citizens but limited some. At the same time, under the NESP 1971, the school system was completely controlled by the bureaucracy.

During the 5th Plan period, the education system was governmentized and nationalized, and the management of schools came under bureaucratic control. Primary schools continued to expand during the 5th (1975-1980) and 6th (1980-1985) Five Year Plans. During this period, the government introduced free primary education as well as free textbooks. It clarified the state's accountability to the education of its citizens, but the government's intentions were unclear, and the centralized system did not increase public participation in school education. As a result, the quality of education was poor and not everyone had access to education. Similarly, when the school could not be untouchable, Dalit children did not come to school and those who came, started dropping out.

The NESP focused on the legitimacy of Panchayat rule. This represented a more aggressive attempt to mold the Nepalese nation into a particular image that served the interests of Panchayat rulers (Cadell, 2002). The interests of the rulers were stated in the NESP document as the goals of education, to strengthen devotion to the crown, the country, national unity and the Panchayet system; developing similar traditions in education by bringing different paradigms together under one national policy; to limit the tradition of ethnic and regional diversity of languages; to encourage financial and social mobility, and to supply the manpower requirements necessary for national development (MOE, 1971)

Privatization in schools began during the Sixth Plan period. During the Seventh Plan period, the expansion of private schools was believed to create a competitive environment in education. This encouraged only private schools but did not encourage public schools to compete with others. Regarding private schooling, the 7th Plan allowed for the establishment of secondary schools in the private sector on the basis of public participation. The plan believed that the establishment of private schools would create a sense of competitiveness and enhance the quality of education (NPC, 1985). The neoliberal policy agenda in education was intensified during this 7th Plan period, which continued in private and competitive schools in the successive 8th, 9th, 10th five-year plans and 11th (interim), 12th, 13th and 14th (three-year plans) and recently 15th five-year plans. Education for private and competitive schools and human capital were policy approaches in the Nepalese educational plan. However, centralized, national and single curricula for schooling, bureaucratic control centralized planning, single and government-produced textbooks for public schools, a traditional form of teaching practice, and centralized testing and grading in educational policy and practice continues. Furthermore, after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Nepal, decentralization has been constitutionally accepted. However, due to traditional thinking, there are problems in its practical implementation. Lewis states that the decentralization process is an important foundation for increased access to education for all and for real inclusion. However, there is a need for greater clarity in Nepal on how the goals of inclusive education can be adopted in local level planning processes (Lewis & Little, 2007). These issues are to the neoliberal and neo-conservative paradox in educational policymaking. In addition, with the opening of private schools, the educational quality of community schools has deteriorated and government schools have become places of study for socially backward and economically poor children. This has created a huge gap between the haves and have-nots. As a result, Dalit children living with conditions of social discrimination and poverty do not seem to be attracted to schooling.

Since the first plan, most of the planning documents of the Nepalese government have mentioned piloting or the preparation of free and compulsory primary education. Such vague statements have also been seen in the recent 15th Plan document. For example, without mentioning any time frame or programs, it referred to the gradual implementation of the program for compulsory and free basic primary education (NPC, 2020). Again, primary education was said to be free but in reality education was not free. Free textbooks and tuition fees alone did not meet the basic needs of poor children including the Dalits. It does not cover the cost of school uniforms, food, and stationery. In addition, 44% of public-school primary level teachers are working on low pay based on private resources. Tuition fees are charged from the students for their salary (Chalaune, 2015).

With a policy-making history of over seven decades, education policies have not been able to contribute significantly to bring the Dalits into the mainstream education. Due to caste based untouchability and exclusion, hierarchical social practices and economic tightness, the Dalits do not seem to be able to participate in education as expected. Similarly, the privatization of school education and the traditional thinking of policy makers have a negative impact on inclusive and equitable education. Private schools are out of reach of excluded groups due to high costs. At the same time, education policymakers, bureaucrats and teachers in public educational institutions are promoting private education and discouraging public education. It has created a narrative that public school education is not useful. Such practices are weakening public schools. Private education, which is only accessible to a certain class, reinforces exclusionary practices rather than inclusion. Similarly, the education policy has not made the expected contribution to include the Dalits in education. However, with Nepal's international commitment to education for all and inclusive education, discussions have begun since the 1990s on policy measures to bring the Dalits into the mainstream education and reduce exclusion. As a result, some targeted programs for the Dalits have been included in subsequent policies. However, the education policy has not contributed enough to include the Dalits in education, as the policy and practice have not contributed to the change in exclusionary values, cultural capital and hegemony. In addition, there is confusion about how to define inclusive education and how it relates to the concept of quality education in Nepal (Lewis & Little, 2007).

The current education system is unable to address many of the challenges that children from underprivileged education bring to schools. Most Dalits do not find current education relevant and inclusive in the sense to them that there is no provision for children below the poverty line in school. No social discrimination issues are discussed in school. Similarly, there is no educational practice to boost the morale of children in social exclusion. There is no provision to include the traditional technology of the Dalits in the curriculum and contribute to its development. Such an environment in schools is creating a sense of inferiority in them. Likewise, they do not see the difference between school activities and discrimination in society. As a result, many Dalit children drop out from school, and even graduates find it difficult to find work. Moreover, the lack of modernization of their traditional skills has led to difficulties in making a living.

Policy Approaches in Nepalese Education

By the 1980s, educational policies and plans in Nepal were completely controlled and centralized. The curriculum was centralized aiming to reproduce traditional values and practices. As a result, the education system has failed to reduce social inequality

and caste hierarchy. Similarly, educational opportunities were mainly focused on the so-called rich, noble and upper castes. The main intention of education was to recognize a language, Hindu values including the domination of the king, culture and values of the ruling and elite classes. There was no agenda to include the Dalits in any policy. However, despite tolerating many discriminations and barriers, a small number of the Dalits living in and around urban areas had the opportunity to attend school. But overall Education was more beneficial especially for a certain section of the society.

After the political changes of the 1990s, the Nepalese state bureaucrats and policymakers were still influenced by neo-conservatism with its centralized curriculum, national examination, and bureaucratic control. At the same time, the neo-liberal approach of the World Bank, which only supported competitive privatization, was put forward. With Nepal's entry into the liberal democratic system, the policy makers were greatly influenced by liberalism. The state's neo-liberal policy led to quantitative changes in education but there is a clear distinction between the rich and the poor in education. Consequently, the education policy developed on the basis of neo-liberalism as well as neo-conservatism was contradictory in itself from the point of view of social justice.

After the political changes in 2006, the new constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (2015) was promulgated. The new constitution emphasizes the principles of social justice, inclusion, and decentralization. As per the guidelines of the constitution, educational policies and plans seem to emphasize the approach of human resource development based on justice. For example, the Education Policy (2020) emphasizes ensuring adequate, equitable, and return-oriented educational investment based on national priorities to fulfill the constitutional and legal obligation to obtain education (MOE, 2020). Likewise, the 15th five-year plan (2019 /20 - 2023/24) underlines the goal of making education equitable, inclusive, quality, life-skilled, and technology-friendly by ensuring free and compulsory basic education with experience in early childhood education and free access to education up to secondary level (NPC, 2020). Therefore, the constitution of Nepal created an important opportunity for the development of an inclusive environment in education. School level education is within the jurisdiction of the local level government. This has created an environment of collaborative participation of local government and community in school management. Positive results can be expected from this. In a diverse society like Nepal, when local governments exercise their authority, including the autonomy of school management, they can contribute significantly to making education more effective according to local needs and priorities (Faguet, 2013, as cited in Neupane, 2019). However, lack of necessary experience and resources can pose a challenge to the effective exercise of delegated rights. Similarly, there are various policies and plans at the national level to support the right to education and inclusive

education of marginalized groups including the Dalits, but lack of proper knowledge and manpower can lead to problems in planning and implementation. There is still some confusion among policymakers and implementers about the nature of inclusive education. Legally the responsibility for conducting school level education is vested in the local government. But due to the centralized mentality of the bureaucracy, there does not seem to be a clear policy arrangement for delegation of power. It is not yet clear how planning processes at the local level can embrace inclusive education goals.

The current educational policy has provided constitutional guidance to establish the role and participation of the private sector in education as a basis for socialist-oriented socio-economic transformation by making public education quality, equitable and inclusive by regulating it as per the needs of the state. However, despite the quantitative expansion in education in Nepal, the expected target in terms of quality has not been achieved. As a result, the gap between the rich and the poor in education is widening and a large number of children from marginalised communities, including the Dalits, are out of reach of basic education. The dropout rate is also relatively high among those who go to school.

Conclusion

Various democratic movements in Nepal have attempted the Dalits provide educational opportunities. However, it does not appear to have yielded the desired results. The main reason for this is the reproduction of discriminatory culture in the educational system. Additionally, the domination and hegemony of caste have been affecting education policymaking. According to Gramsci, the state and social hegemony are a process of maintaining the status quo, within which the ruling class controls the general public using intellectuals and moral leadership (Harinath, 2013).

To bring the Dalits into mainstream and inclusive education, there needs to be an integrated approach to respond to multiple discriminatory and exclusionary pressures on them. Policies and practices need to reduce discrimination, eradicate poverty, change social and school practices, change curricula, and create opportunities to work together. It seems necessary to integrate the traditional skills and technology of the Dalits, in particular, into the school curriculum. Formulating an effective policy for the inclusion of the Dalits in education is a human value commitment. However, policymakers and practitioners lacking a value commitment to inclusion are still a major obstacle to mainstreaming the Dalits in education.

Educational activities need to be directed towards the development and implementation of inclusive values and these values need to be incorporated into practice. It is necessary to create an environment based on justice for the active participation of the Dalits in the educational process. Priorities in teacher appointments and school

management committees, increasing scholarships for economically disadvantaged Dalit children, providing financial aid to parents and respecting the occupation of the Dalits in schools, and legal assistance can help Dalit children with meaningful access to schools. In addition, for the inclusion of Dalit children in education, teachers must change their attitude towards the Dalits as well as their teaching strategy. Traditional caste attitudes towards the Dalits and structural changes, as well as participation of the Dalits in the decision-making process and economic incentives to the poor Dalits can facilitate the educational inclusion of the Dalits.

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Exploring the English Language Education MPhil Scholars' Adaptation to Blended Learning Modality

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Abstract

The blended modality of instruction integrates both traditional and digital online platforms. This study aims to explore the adaptability of English Language Education (ELE) scholars to the blended learning-based MPhil programme under the School of Education at a university in Nepal. The study employed a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm, utilizing phenomenology as a research design. Four participants were purposefully selected from the MPhil programme in the ELE second semester of 2024. To uphold the quality and ethical standards of the study, the participants were assigned pseudonyms. A semi-structured interview guideline served as the tool for the study. The interviews were recorded during formally organized Zoom meetings. I recorded and transcribed each interview individually and conducted a thematic analysis. The study results indicate that learners encounter challenges and issues in managing digital tools for e-learning platforms and rely on peer support and inquiries regarding portfolio creation and assessment systems. As the results reveal, blended learning proves beneficial for the diverse, heterogeneous, and dispersed learners at Mofussil, as it enhances their capabilities.

Keywords: Virtual learning, traditional learning, module, digitalization

Introduction

Blended modality of instruction has become the demand and compulsion in Nepal since COVID-19. Likewise, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, we have been compelled to restrict our educational efforts to an exclusively online format (Dahal et al., 2022). The modality continued because it was established as an approach to educating learners. The approach became accessible to learners in diverse settings,

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contexts, and geographies. Still, learning continued unabated in the homes of students and faculty members everywhere through synchronous and asynchronous digital learning platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and others (Karakose et al., 2021). The blended modality of instruction is an educational approach that combines traditional face-to-face classroom instruction with online or digital learning activities. This model integrates the strengths of both onsite and online environments to create a more flexible and effective learning experience. My journey to MPhil is also connected with the modality of instruction. I joined Kathmandu University due to the blended modality of instruction because it was feasible for me. It could be difficult for me if it were a face-to-face modality.

Blended modality follows the integration of physical and virtual learning modalities. Learners are dominant in using virtual learning modes. In virtual modes of learning, learners may face multiple adaptability issues. Learners may not be familiar with the devices and their operation. There can be the issue of modules and related applications in modules. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, most educational institutions either adopted the virtual mode of teaching or a blended teaching and learning environment (Ali, 2020). As mentioned earlier, being an MPhil scholar in a blended modality, I, too, have some problems regarding the operation of modules and meetings.

Dimensions of blended learning include digital platforms and integration of ICT tools for learning, which vary from traditional face-to-face classes, where in-person classroom activities and interactions are held. Blended learning can be considered an efficient approach to distance learning in terms of students' learning experience, student-student interaction as well as student-instructor interaction, and is likely to emerge as the predominant education model in the future (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2013). The contents are presented and discussed with the balanced use of digital and physical materials. The discussion goes along with the multimedia presentations and ICT integrations in the classroom. The use of videos, recordings, and documentaries, along with physical materials, enhances constructivism among the learners. Assessment and evaluation are perceived as the process of forming results. Assignments, project work, reflective practices, e-portfolios, peer review and observation, and feedback qualify the learners. In contrast, formal and traditional paper-and-pencil tests are used in traditional evaluation methods. In the blended modality of instruction, dimensions are interconnected, and successful blended learning designs carefully consider them to balance flexibility, engagement, and effectiveness. Blended learning needs rigorous efforts, the right attitude, a handsome budget, and highly motivated teachers and students for its successful implementation (Dangwal, 2017).

This study aimed to explore ELE MPhil scholars' adaptability to blended learning. To accomplish this research objective, I formulated the research questions:

What experiences do students have in blended learning? How do learners successfully adapt to blended learning?

Literature Review

Blended Learning

Blending means combining different elements or mixing various types. Blended learning is a pedagogic approach or phenomenon that combines traditionally practiced face-to-face classroom instruction with the recently adopted modality of online learning activities and resources. It combines both modalities of delivery to create a more diversified and flexible learning experience for students. Online learning first appeared during the 1990s (Schaber et al., 2010). In contrast to traditional learning, online learning refers to those courses that take place completely online no physical classroom present, and teachers and students can participate in the course asynchronously (Nortvig et al., 2018). Likewise, due to the COVID-19 epidemic, we have been compelled to restrict our educational efforts to an exclusively online format (Dahal et al., 2022; Karakose et al., 2022). Schools and universities were closed nationwide due to the lockdown policy of the government of Nepal. After some months, the government of Nepal announced that it would run virtual or online classes for students in schools and universities.

Higher Education and Blended Modality

The government of Nepal established the Nepal Open University (NOU) with the Act of 2073 BS. The major objective was to contribute more to Nepalese higher education with online and distance learning. In the 21st century, phenomenon-based education has become essential and indispensable. The adoption of open and online education has steadily increased, reflecting its significance in the fast-evolving digital age. In Nepal, Nepal Open University (NOU) stands as a pioneer in advancing open and online learning (message from the registrar of NOU, webpage). Similarly, Tribhuvan University has a separate open and distance learning wing. The Open and Distance Education Centre (ODEC, TU), established in 2015 by a decision of the Executive Council of Tribhuvan University, is an independent academic entity under Tribhuvan University. Its primary goal is to make quality higher education accessible to the wider population in Nepal through the open and distance learning approach (webpage of ODCE-TU, Nepal). Similarly, Kathmandu University, School of Education, has offered courses in blended modality. The MPhil programme under KUSOED, ELE is also an example of blended modality. We have embraced the challenges and opportunities

brought about by the pandemic and continue to excel in blended pedagogy through the flipped classroom approach, community-driven teaching methods, and multimodal strategies (Message from Dean, KUSOED, KU).

UGC Guidelines/Framework in the Context of Nepal

For digitalization and techno-friendly learning practices, the University Grant Commission of Nepal has a project on nurturing excellence in higher education programs (NEHEP) 2021/22 – 2025/26. After the disruption of higher education caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous universities and colleges in Nepal swiftly adopted online learning beginning in April 2020 (University Grants Commission, 2022). A blended mode of instruction became the essence of Nepal's diverse background. Learners scattered over the nations can access higher education through digitalization and blended modality. The UGC-initiated support to universities/HEIs to respond to COVID-19 contributed to a foundational shift towards expanding higher education through blended and online modes (University Grants Commission, 2022).

Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) has developed over time, encompassing various types or approaches that highlight different dimensions of transformation. Its foundational principles, such as critical reflection, transformation, and adaptation concepts, are practiced differently in diverse and innovative ways. Transformation of learning occurs when our existing frames of reference prove inadequate or ineffective in addressing a significant life situation. This process may involve examining the origins of these ineffective perspectives in our personal and social experiences, seeking alternative assumptions that are more effective, and ultimately adopting and acting upon these newly formed and freely chosen assumptions (Mezirow, 1991a, p.167).

As per pedagogical instruction, facilitators have successfully adopted the design to instruct in courses like PGD, MPhil, and PhD at Kathmandu University (Luitel et al., 2024). Still, my concern is about learners' adaptability and experiential reflection in the blended modality of instruction. Learners' observations and experiences also contribute further to enhancing teaching and learning. So, learners' explorations may be useful to minimize the huddles and plan for better learning in the blended modality. The non-English major learners' adaptability to the blended learning mode in College English was low, with a mean (Yangs & Pu, 2022). With the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities offered blended courses of instruction because scattered learners in the country were ready to enroll in such programs. After all, it was feasible and convenient for them. In the new normal education, learners' adaptations utilized

coping mechanisms such as flexibility and initiative, specifically, effective time management and embracing change and adaptation (Laingo & Miralles, 2023). Learning is associated with teachers' preparation, too. Sometimes, students at a higher level may have reservations about teachers' preparation and adaptation to digital technologies, so students may have indifferent observations on classroom instruction, too. It is essential to focus on the capacity building of faculty so they become more familiar with online learning approaches, e-learning tools, and innovative technology to facilitate teaching and learning (Singh et al., 2021).

The resources made me rethink the agenda of experiential reflection of the learners who have completed about one year of blended practice. Learners had ample experience in the blended modality of instruction.

Methods and Procedures

This study was conducted with a qualitative approach. The study followed the interpretivist paradigm and phenomenology as a research design. Central to interpretive phenomenology is understanding and interpreting participants' lived experiences. Interpretive phenomenology has many influences, e.g., Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur, and Heidegger (McCance & McIlpatrick, 2008). For this study, the site was the virtual class of Kathmandu University. The study participants were MPhil Scholars in ELE second semester 2024. The participants were selected through the purposive sampling procedure. Four participants were selected with an intentional selection of samples with certain characteristics or qualities by the research objectives (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). The selection criteria were scholars who had completed the first semester in the blended modality of instruction. I selected two male and two female participants to ensure inclusiveness. The semi-structured interview was the basic tool for data collection. Before the commencement of the interview, all participants signed a consent letter indicating voluntary participation and the confidentiality of the data collected. To maintain the quality and ethical concern of the study, the participants were pseudonymously named Dinesh, Nabin, Sapana, and Gauri in the analysis and interpretation of the results.

The semi-structured interview questions were developed based on the study's objectives and revolved around students' experiences regarding the adaptations of the blended modality of instruction. The interviews were recorded by organizing a Zoom meeting. The researcher individually recorded and transcribed the interview sessions. A qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) model to develop themes, analysis, and interpretation, i.e., familiarization with the data transcription of verbal data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing a report.

Results and Discussion

Five themes have been generated from the analysis of the data. Firstly, learners have issues with digital literacy, then with the assessment system, support from the tutors, opportunities, and challenges in the students' learning mechanism in the blended modality of instruction to adopt the modality.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy stands for the effective use of technological devices. The users critically navigate and create information on the utility of technologies. Blending demands shift into the modern digitalization era. It gives a basic understanding and handling of digital devices. Technology plays a vital role in blended modality, Sapana shared as:

I was not able to join the module for the first time because I was not familiar with computer and e-learning platforms. I asked the teacher to send a link to my mobile and directly joined through the link on the mobile. I was not using Google Meet before. Even I could not change my KUSOD email ID on my mobile, and I was from outside of the Kathmandu University e-learning platform. I could not find the place to submit my assignments because I was unaware of the portal where to submit my assignments. Then I requested one of my friends, and she suggested finding the spot with a pink color in the module and clicking on that then I found the place to submit it. (Interview, 7 Jan. 2025)

Sapana had an issue with utilizing the module; she was using the module for the first time. She was not familiar with computers and Google Meet. She cannot shift to another Gmail account on her device. It was an issue for her to find the assignment portal and submit her work. Incorporating computer technology into higher education in emerging nations like Nepal and India presents an opportunity for transformation still learners have issues navigating digital devices (Gyawali & Mehndroo, 2024).

Dinesh, the next participant, was moderate in handling the digital tools. He can follow the instructions and participate in the activities. He asserted that

I can follow the instructions given by the instructors and apply accordingly. If I get confused, then I used to watch YouTube videos and settle the issue. I did not face many problems operating the module, but I expected some preliminary literacy in the digital tool before starting the session. (Interview, 5 Jan. 2025).

Directly, it was not a great issue for Dinesh, but he would benefit if he could have preliminary digital literacy sessions. Ensuring all students have access to technology and the Internet is essential, creating conditions for equal access to educational resources (Zubtsova et al., 2024).

Gauri did not face great issues regarding utilizing digital devices. She was ICT-friendly. She asserted that

I did not have any issues handling ICT-related devices; I used them properly. I presented my assignments at once, but sometimes, because of the KU domain issue, I could not get access to the materials at the right time. (Interview, 8 Jan. 2025).

Gauri did not have issues regarding handling the digital devices. She perfectly participated in virtual classroom interactions and discussions.

Next, participant Nabin's experience was different than Sapana's. He was friendly with the digital devices. He shared as

I handled the module so easily because I was already familiar with e-learning platforms. I directly enrolled in the module on the first day, and I easily reacted and responded to my course facilitators. I posted my reflection on the day on the first day. I was using Google Meet before joining KU during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate my students. (Interview, 4 Jan. 2025).

Nabin easily utilized the module, and with simple instructions provided by the University, he could enroll in the e-learning platform and participate in the classroom discussion.

As participants shared the information, they faced the module with some challenges. They settled those challenges with dedication and consultation. Technology became a part of learning for them. There was no choice for the learner either to survive in the situation of dropping out of the course. They were dedicated to e-learning platforms and digital devices, so it was adopted within a short period. Despite initial challenges, such as poor internet connectivity and limited familiarity with technology, the majority of respondents adapted quickly to online learning platforms (Diyal & Pandey, 2024).

Supporting Agency

For the adaptation in blended modality, supporting agencies played a cooperative and crucial role. With the guidance of the teachers, peers, and institution, learners became able to utilize the resources in the module. Learners experienced that they did not directly shift into blended modality, they got assistance from multiple inputs. Sapana shared as:

I received help from peers first, and with my request, one of my peers directed me to the spot in the module where to put my assignments. She helped me to make PowerPoint presentation slides. She helped by describing the procedure of sharing the screen in an online presentation. I also received support from my facilitator. He directed me when I was presenting in an online presentation and

directed me to use the D-space of Kathmandu University library. I also received guidelines from him about how to search for articles in Google Scholar using keywords in related fields. I received help from the University admin staff on how to change my password in the module and use the module for academic discussion. (Interview, 7 Jan. 2025).

Sapana explored that the supporting agencies, like peers, teachers, and admin staff's cooperation made her well-equipped in the blended modality of instruction. Support for novice learners is equally important in the blended mode. In contrast to Sapana, Gauri had a different experience, she said "I did not need supporting agencies. I could easily assimilate in mode. However, some teachers provided delayed feedback on my assessment, so teachers could be more punctual in responding to the students' assignments" (interview, 8 Jan. 2025). So, she claimed that support is not confined to only digitalization rather immediate feedback is a must. Nabin is also in line with Gauri, he explored "I was techno-friendly, so I didn't have issues with supporting agencies. However, some teachers skipped the classes due to their busy schedules" (interview, 4 Jan. 2025). Nabin intended his teacher's schedule to make class disturbed and unsupported.

Dinesh explored as "I took help from my peers, and sometimes, I telephoned the KU administration and solved the issue on the module's passcode. I reset my password with the help of the administration." (Interview, 5 Jan. 2025).

He shared that adaptation may have very simple issues, which can be easily solved with a single telephone call. Novice practitioners in blended mode were assisted by multiple agencies. They had solved the issues with multiple consultations. Students' needs include engaging learning experiences, the flexibility of access, and support for effectively utilizing learning technologies (Roberts et al., 2024).

Assessment System

The assessment system in blended modality was based on the organizational framework. The assessment system differs from one institution to another. This particular assessment system, followed by the institute, was observed differently by the participants. Gauri asserted as

I was disappointed when the first-semester result was published. It was beyond my expectations; I wish it could be the written test examination. She explored that some teachers were biased, and the students who copied and produced articles with AI-generated were awarded higher grades. The real evaluation was lacking in the first semester. Let's wait for the second semester. The assessment modality needs to be reviewed. The existing model is not grading students fairly. (Interview, 8 Jan. 2025).

Gauri's statement was in disagreement with the current practice of the assessment system. She disagreed with some of the teachers who graded the students biasedly. She argued that the assessment system should be reviewed and justice must be.

Another participant, Nabin, also had a similar experience as Gauri. According to Nabin

I am not satisfied with the grading system of KU. Simply, writing papers and evaluating the papers did not do justice to the learners. Learners will have multiple potentialities to be assessed, so the current assessment system is to be reviewed. I know some of our friends got good grades because they were close to the teachers. I agree some professors graded fairly and some did unfairly. (Interview, 4 Jan. 2025).

Nabin was not satisfied with the current grading and assessment system. He explored that the adopted system of assessment may offer a biased evaluation system. Dinesh had painful experiences like Nabin. He added, "I am not satisfied with KU's current evaluation system" (interview, 5 Jan. 2025). The participant badly criticized the assessment system in blended modality. They felt biased in assessment and grading by some of the facilitators. The inappropriate assessment system, higher education quality has been deteriorating day by day compared to developed countries, and it is mainly due to lack of accountability (examiner, examinee, and exam authority), time allocation, lack of digital technology to assess student progress, lack of item analysis, and lack of the alternative use of the paper-pencil test (Acharya, 2022).

Opportunities and Challenges

In the blended modality of instruction, learners get access to higher education while staying at their workplace. It is obvious that if there were no provision of blended modality at KU, then this may not be the population for MPhil studies. However, some challenges are encountered related to technical issues and their operation. Participants argued that they had faced problems regarding handling Google Meet, and they had not previously directly used the app for learning. In this regard, Dinesh argued,

My MPhil journey would not have come true if there was no blended modality because am a permanent teacher in a remote area of Nepal. I can manage to leave for my physical classes because it goes only for 7 days each semester. I am balancing it as per my request to the head teacher and school management. However, I have issues like internet connection, frequent power cuts, and sometimes less interaction with teachers in person. I felt learning emotions and liveliness are lost in the blended modality of interactions. (Interview, 5 Jan. 2025).

Dinesh explored a blended modality, which made his dream come true for higher studies, but it is like something is better than nothing. The spirit of learning is destroyed in virtual classes. Gauri shared that

I am partially happy with the approach. I have no choice because I am a

permanent teacher in a remote area of Nepal. No doubt, the virtual learning platform assisted me a lot. However, I found virtual classes can be used to cheat the teacher because we may log in to the module, do attendance, and disappear. If we are not well prepared, then we may pretend as we have. Network issue or power cuts issue. (Interview, 8 Jan. 2025).

She asserted that she got an opportunity to higher studies, but there were plenty of chances to escape from the discussion and interactions in virtual classes. Similarly, Sapana shared that

I feel blended learning as blessing to me which enabled me to higher education. I request authorities to organize physical classes at the beginning which can be fruitful to handle digital tools and devices. (Interview, 7 Jan. 2025)

Sapana declared that preliminary digital issues must be settled then the approach becomes a blessing to the scattered learners around. Nabin asserted that

I found this approach is conducive to the day workers like me. Higher education at home, and even in the evening time was fortunate to me. I feel distracted when my friends do not participate in breakout room assignments. I feel as if they are logged in to the module and busy somewhere. Sometimes friends unmute and let the class go on and surrounding noises make the whole class disturbed. (interview, 4 Jan. 2025)

Nabin's sharing was so clear: though the approach is a golden opportunity, friends are not utilizing it with protocols and are made disoriented in the classroom.

The blended learning approach became a blessing to the learners who are scattered around different regions and workplaces. For learners who were busy during the day and could manage the time in the evening, it became a piece of cake. The approach contributes a lot to higher studies and teacher professional development. However, it has issues like emotional learning and digital ethics in using ICT tools. If participants misuse applications like Google Docs, recordings, and unmuting, it causes trouble for other participants in the group, too. Blended learning must be supplemented by integrating technology for diverse instructional purposes and utilizing it (Istenič, 2024). Digitalization in pedagogy addresses the issue of diverse learners; they are engaged in multiple virtual learning modules and practicing recent trends and practices in academia. Digital development and diversification in methodology, where higher education is also shifting as a compelled switch over in methodological approaches, needs an assessment for the decision criteria with a proper process and justification (Nermend et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The findings of this study have significant implications for the practices of the blended approach in higher education. The exploration and experiences of learners provide valuable insights into adaptability and challenges in virtual and blended learning. First, the study highlights the essence of digital literacy in a paradigm shift in the blended approach. The mixed ability to handle digital tools and the participants' reflection made the learning approach partially questionable. Second, the study reveals the necessity of addressing supporting agencies to familiarize the module and its application inside. Third, the assessment system was questioned by the participants; they were often unsatisfied with the first-semester results. They argue that it needs to be reviewed with standard rubrics, which could satisfy all. Finally, the study emphasizes the essence of a blended approach with some technological challenges. The perfect infrastructure assists more with a blended approach to teaching and learning. It is crucial for course-offering institutions, policymakers, teacher educators, and learners to actively utilize the e-learning platforms and blended learning phenomena. The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the paradigm shift in pedagogical approaches in this technological world. Such a small-scale qualitative study may not be applicable and generalized to the rest of the settings. It may only work as a reference for further study.

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Serving Soup with Perforated Spoon: Leadership Opportunities for Secondary Schools Female Leaders in Nepal

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Abstract

While the number of women leading schools has increased, they are more likely to achieve headship in small and basic schools rather than large and secondary schools. The asymmetrical representation of women in secondary school leadership is a pervasive phenomenon in the entire world. Despite having strong yearnings with required credentials, women are sidelined from the opportunity because of marginalizing policies and climate within schools. This study is undertaken to unveil the perception of female secondary school heads regarding the limited leadership opportunities for females in secondary schools in terms of policies, organizational culture, and socio-cultural aspects. Since the inquiry in such content remains less explored in the context of Nepal, this study is expected to fill the gap. This study employed an interpretive paradigm along with a qualitative approach. Key Informant Interview (KII) guidelines were used as tools for the collection of in-depth information. Fifteen female secondary school heads, having in-depth knowledge pertaining to the subject under investigation, from Chitwan district were selected purposively. The result displays that women school leaders have to grapple with impractical policies like maternity leave, head teacher selection, and secondary teacher selection; organizational culture such as extended and unscheduled work, lack of respect, and biased evaluation systems; and socio-cultural aspects as unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities, double burden, and cultural taboos. The study warrants gender sensitive policies and culture of the organization for the development of women school leaders. This exploration could provide insightful avenues for policy makers, educationists, educational institutions, and to all those who wish gender parity in school leadership.

Keywords: Case study, female leadership, leadership opportunities, schools

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Introduction

The under-representation of women in secondary school leadership is a universal phenomenon. Nearly 94 million teachers work worldwide, amongst which about 70% in primary and 50% in secondary level schools are women (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2023). In Nepal, around 285,000 teachers work in the school system. Among the teaching workforce, women constitute 54.1% at the primary and 19% at the secondary level. Yet only 17% of the female teachers hold headship in schools on average (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MoEST], 2023). Furthermore, in the secondary school leadership roles, the proportion additionally diminishes. As the level of educational institutions increases, the dearth of female leadership surges in the same ratio. On the contrary, the evolving academic situation in Nepal is characterized by women and girls surpassing men and boys in educational attainment. In the workforce too, women constituted about 1.6 million more than men (Danish Trade Union Development Agency [DTUDA], 2022). This entails women workforce participation must exceed men. Juxtaposing this notion, just a little over a quarter (27.6%) of women participated in the workforce (World Bank [WB], 2022) and few in leadership. The gulf in gender leadership in secondary schools overtly shows there exist opportunity gaps among the genders, and innumerable drivers are contributing to it. This begs the question, “What barred women from taking on the leadership opportunities?” despite their involvement in teaching being on par men on average. Of note, we lack exact data on women leading secondary schools in Nepal. This shows the gravity of the issue is not only undermined by the state but also indifferent to it.

American Association of University Women (AAUW) (2016) claimed the leadership opportunities bring about additional financial compensations that could enhance women’s influence in her personal as well as public life. In the same way, Devicienti et al. (2016) mentioned women leaders are more committed to the need of the employees managing part-time schedules to those who are in need of it and award full-time jobs who aspire to it. Hence, the authors in the Italian case claimed women leaders are susceptible to curtailing unemployment issues. In the same way, merely the working status of a mother has a tremendous effect on the lives of children within a family. McGinn et al. (2019) revealed daughters of working mothers are likely to be employed, and if employed, achieve higher status and payment than unemployed mothers’ girl children. The authors further established that the sons of working mothers are more likely to spend time on domestic responsibilities than the daughters. In this sense, mothers’ employment could be linked with rupturing the stereotypically ingrained culture of gendered division of work. Sandberg (2013) claimed the established concept of males as ‘breadwinners’ compels men to work longer hours to meet the growing expenses of the family. Consequently, the fathers get less time to indulge with children and social activities that finally hamper their emotional life.

Aslam (2023) asserted that female school leaders foster inclusive and collaborative work environment that is less hierarchical, authoritative, and division of labor. Consequently, it boosted up staff morale and students' outcomes. Likewise, Jangid and Dalal (n.d.) studied the impact of female leadership on academic performance in schools and reached the conclusion that female led schools have high teacher satisfaction, student engagement, and academic results. Setlhodi and Ramatsui (2024) claimed female leaders have higher grit and determination to achieve the objectives of the school so they allow less preference to their personal self; hence more resilient. Maharromiyati et al. (2024) mentioned that female school leaders' help to subvert the established stereotypical notion that female are followers, not leaders. In addition, the authors highlighted effective leadership traits women leaders possess like conflict management and creating inclusive organizational culture. Realizing intersectionality within women, Johnson (2024) studied the need for employing more minority women in K-12 school leadership. The author claimed that appointing more minority women in school leadership can have a positive effect on racism, poverty, work-life balance, and oppression. Women leaders have to struggle harder to establish themselves compared to men. They have to fight back socio-cultural, organizational, personal, and many times policy barriers for the ascension to the headship. These hurdles have made women leaders more resilient and competent hence can perform better than the male counterpart (Bruyn & Mestry, 2020; Kotiranta et al., 2007).

In the context of Nepal, too manifold of studies were taken related to the gender and school leadership. To succeed in school leadership roles studies highlighted the role of policy, structural and family support (Pant & Shiwakoti, 2025; Khadka, 2024). In addition to it, improved school settings such as good school facilities and due respect from the school community motivates women leaders (Subedi, 2023; Ghimire, 2023). However, the issue like the barriers women faced to access leadership opportunities in terms of policy, organizational culture, a socio-cultural aspects are being less explored. This study was undertaken to fulfill this gap.

The main objective of this study was to uncover the perceptions of the women leading secondary schools pertaining to the leadership opportunities, focusing on the roles of policies, organizational culture, and socio-cultural aspects. This study is pertinent for four significant reasons: i) the context of an influx of large numbers of females in teaching, ii) the evolving situation of a male deficit in teaching, iii) the underrepresentation of females in secondary school headship, and iv) fulfilling the gap in literature. Finally, this study helped uncover issues in policy, organizational culture, and sociocultural aspects that impede women from thriving. The findings could be useful to all the stakeholders concerned with education for the utilization of women's potential. If this study was not undertaken, the status quo of unequal representation in leadership could prevail. The prosperity could be less achieved.

Methods and Procedures

This study followed an interpretative paradigm applying a qualitative research approach. Fifteen female school heads (five retired and ten in the service) from Chitwan district were selected on purpose to answer the research questions. Those female school leaders who served as heads for at least five years in community schools and each from different ethnic groups were selected as informants.

Study Tools

This study employed Key Informants Interview (KIIs) guidelines as study tools for collecting the information. The informants were insured for confidentiality of the information and anonymity of their identity. After obtaining informed consent, the interview was taken in a predetermined time according to the convenience of the participants. The interview was conducted in the office, which was well ventilated and without any disturbances. The participants were informed that they could exit the interview anytime they wished and could avoid answering the particular or entire items they felt uncomfortable with. The interview was recorded on a recorder for capturing all the information intact.

Data Analysis

The information collected was transcribed into Nepali and translated into English by the first author and then transcription and translation were verified by the second author. This information was separately coded, categorized, and thematically analyzed using content analysis. Prior to analysis, themes were merged and finalized in mutual understanding. In doing so, just three major themes were generated and analyzed as per content.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were followed before, during, and after the study process. Written consent was obtained from each participant for taking the interview and recording. Further, they were informed of their anonymity and confidentiality of their information shared during the interview.

Results

This section illuminates three themes that were generated from the obtained information: i) policy barriers, ii) organizational barriers, and iii) sociocultural barriers for the development of women leaders

Policy Barriers

The participants of this study commonly viewed the policies regarding maternity and paternity, head teacher selection, and secondary-level teachers' recruitment TSC as the main factors that create a basis for awarding fewer opportunities for female aspirants. They also viewed prevalent provision of maternity as impractical, gender-biased, and perpetuating stereotypes. One of the participants (P12) in this issue said:

The maternity leave policy itself is impractical. For instance, the maternity issue is taken as a homogeneous experience and awarded an equal day off (98 days) in all the situations. Our policy does not address the demand of the cases of multiple births, stillbirth, and emergency termination of pregnancies, miscarriage, and the cases in which those working parents who are childless want to adopt a child. How can such complexities be addressed by a single remedy? [KII, Participant 12]

As per the above verbatim the prevalent maternity policy bears considerable improvement issues. There are varied complications related to maternity; however. The policy only acknowledges childbirth ignoring other critical reproductive health problems. Furthermore, another participant perceived leave policy as gender-biased and stereotype-affirming. In this regard, participant (P5) viewed:

The variation in days off for the parents of newly born children in our country is blatantly gender biased against women. Fathers are allotted two weeks of leave whereas mothers are provisioned 98 days off. It justifies the stereotype that child care is predominantly women's domain. So, this policy perpetuates gender discrimination. [KII, Participant 5]

Based on the above narrative, the gap in the days awarded to the new parents for handling childbirth issues inadvertently justifies that women are primary caretakers. Instead of diminishing gender discrimination, it validates the status quo. In the same way, the criteria for the selection of head teacher and devolution of authority of school education to the local government further exacerbate women's spaces in leadership. In this regard, one of the participants (P3) articulated:

Women secondary teachers are very few in number and the majority of them are newly appointed. The head teacher selection framework values seniority or experience highly, ignoring other leadership aspirations and competencies.

Furthermore, the devolution of the responsibility of school education in local government has further impaired the opportunities for women aspiring to school leadership. Since women have less access to politics and the local government is heavily dominated by males, they do not favor women possessing different chemistry. [KII, Participant 3]

On the basis of the verbatim headteacher selection guideline and devolution of school education responsibility to the local government, it has impaired chances for women in school leadership roles. In addition to the headteacher selection procedure, the secondary teacher selection policy also poses significant challenges for aspiring women leaders. Respondent (P2) uttered:

The prevailing primary teacher selection is at the district level, whereas secondary teachers are in the province. Many women serving in the lower levels and the freshers choose not to apply for the secondary posts despite having qualifications and aspirations. This “choice” is emanated from societal expectations and cultural stigma. Women are made to fear living away from home for security reasons and home responsibilities. [KII, Participant 2]

This expression of the respondents pointed secondary teachers’ selection policy itself favors males and discourages females, as not all the women have equal chances of mobility. Highlighting insufficient policy measures for female leadership development, a female school head (P10) expressed:

Though the policies are changed, the difficulties and hardships women school heads have to face are as they were. Policies are formed for rhetoric. I have viewed the policies developed for enhancing women in school leadership as serving soup with a perforated spoon- observed from a distance, it’s okay; seen minutely, the recipients get nothing. How can women benefit from policies when there are sociocultural, organizational, and personal drivers? [KII, Participant 10]

Based on the understanding of the female headteacher, the policies developed so far have a negligible effect on developing women as school heads. She demands substantial changes in policies that could drive equality of outcomes.

Organizational Barriers

The culture of the organization heavily influences the leadership aspirations of the workers. Organizational culture encompasses the environment for the preparation, acquisition, and development of the personnel. Organizational culture that awards equal chances for the development of its diverse talents is likely to prosper in this competitive world, for skills are learned behavior. Role expectations that leadership

demand are distracting for women because they perceive school leaders have to work visibly hard to prove themselves. One of the informants (P8) added:

One of my female friends did not apply for headship though she was the most senior in the school she worked in, for the headteacher had to attend schools in the early hours during extra classes. Headteachers in secondary schools have to work visibly hard, such as attending meetings off-school hours, invigilating the constructions of the school infrastructures, and frequently visiting the funding organizations for managing the resource. It is tough for working mums for it disturbs work-life equilibrium. [KII, Participant 8]

Based on the perception of the informant, working conditions for women school leaders are not gender sensitive. In the crucial years of having young family members it is less conducive for women to carry on school leadership responsibilities. As a result they less aspire for the role. However, once they miss out the opportunity they are derailed forever. Along with this, the acknowledgment of women leaders' personal life demands by the school community also determines leadership aspirations. In this issue, one of the female headteacher (P6) said:

The SMC (School Management Committee) chairman told me to call upon a meeting at 7.30 am. I corresponded with all the SMC members. However, none of the women members attended the meeting, because it was the time for the preparation of the children for school. I attended the meeting despite my domestic obligations. The meeting could not be conducted. Since then, the meetings were called upon the time on consensus. [KII, Participant 6]

This view exposed a seemingly very minor but critical issue. Women and men have different life experiences. So, the situation that men are comfortable with may not be so for women. Such a situation impedes women's leadership prospects. Therefore, all the decisions, even if they are minor, should be inclusive. In the same way, the attitude of the stakeholders towards women leaders further determines navigating leadership roles. In this regard, one of the female school heads (P14) said:

The students and guardians do not accord as equal respect to women leaders as to men. Once I was in the office room, one of the male guardians came to the office room and asked whereabouts the headteacher was. I politely requested him to put the things. He hesitated to talk to me, and when other male teachers came to the office, he shifted his position near the teachers and put his queries.

So, do the students. [KII, Participant 14]

This experience of the female school head is replicated into organizational culture in the form of patriarchy. Still, the mind model of leadership is pervasively male. The structural changes in the Nepalese political system are also unlikely to alter much for women's leadership development. In this regard (P4) expressed:

The local education regulations provisioned ward chairpersons as the SMC chairpersons in many local governments. Alarming, there are only 69 women elected among a total of 6743 wards in Nepal. The role of SMC chairperson is fundamental for the selection of the panel of experts to appoint the principal. Consequently, male candidates will get the favor. [KII, Participant 4]

This account of the female headteacher presented disparity in awarding the leadership opportunities among men and women. Men make norms for leadership, including the qualifications that adhere to their characteristics. As a result, women do not benefit from it.

Socio-cultural Barriers

The entrenched culture of male domination is ingrained into the institutional working model as well. Every organization in a less dynamic society is characterized by the replica of the gendered socialization agent. Sociocultural aspects pose an impediment to a remarkable extent for the development of women as secondary school leaders. Women are accepted as basic school leaders more easily than they are as secondary school leaders. Addressing the suffocation and difficulties women have to endure, one of the participants (P7) said:

The ancient gendered work division pushed women into the domestic responsibilities and men outside the homes. Sadly, the stereotype did not leave women even when they were working beyond domestic spheres in the modern world. Consequently, they are double burdened. [KII, Participant 7]

This expression shows working women are double burdened with home responsibilities as well as office. Subsequently, they have little time spared for career prospects. Regarding the unequal responsibility, she further added, “A more interesting fact is that even if the spouse is unemployed, the domestic responsibilities go to women because of biased sociocultural practices”.

Generally, a woman’s duty in the traditional family is hectic. She has to manage her sleeping hours to accomplish her duties. She is at the bottom of the family hierarchy. Expressing the challenges, she endured, one of the female head teachers (P11) said:

My school was an hour cycling distance away. So, I had to take my meal before 8.30 am. It would have been too early for other members to take a meal with me. So, I used to have my portion of food and reserved some for others. Some days later, I discovered that my in-laws cooked other food and wasted the reserved because the food taken after the daughter-in-law is impure according to their conviction. So, I started cooking only for myself. [KII, Participant 11]

This belief system establishes the false consciousness that women are subservient to men. This entrenched culture of male supremacy hampers the confidence of the women

to accomplish any task. In the same way, the opportunities gap between two equally educated men and women from the same family is crystal clear in traditional families. In this regard, a women school head (P15) said:

I married some twenty years ago. My husband was my classmate. Though we both were studying, he was a student by virtue, and I was his helper in some sense. I used to cook food, wash clothes, clean the surroundings, welcome the guests, and attend the social events. He was just a student. We both entered the workforce. The same situation continued even after employment. His duty was over after office time, whereas my next shift commenced-home work. [KII, Participant 15]

This shows unequal distribution of duties among men and women because of sociocultural norms. This situation leads to unequal leadership opportunities among genders. Moreover, the prevalent social psychology in the traditional society pressurizes women to have children as soon as possible after marriage; otherwise, they are stigmatized, humiliated, and questioned. In this regard, one of the female headteachers (P9) said:

Working women are criticized for not having children, and if they have children, again they are criticized for leaving the children in the care of others. If they do not have any working status and spend time looking after children again, they are branded as 'just' a mother. [KII, Participant 9]

These situations portray women as unable to decide their life choices on their own. Sometimes they have to be guided by sociocultural drivers, in some cases by the organizational culture, and in some cases by policy. These factors are not all in favor of women.

Discussion

The results of this study are triangulated with the existing literature. Some of the findings of this study coincide whereas some contradicts with the studies made earlier. This section is divided into three main heads like policy barriers, organizational barriers, and sociocultural barriers.

Policy Barriers

This study found that maternity policy itself is impractical and discriminatory. Hence, it is less likely to fulfill the practical demand of women's workforce. The existing policy pertaining to maternity awards is 98 consecutive days off, and it is the same in every situation. It has ignored the degree of complications of maternity like multiple births, subsequent birth, emergency termination of pregnancies, stillborn,

miscarriage, and other medical conditions. Higher complications warrant an additional leave. More liberal than the present study, the in England mentioned 52 weeks of maternity leave, among which two weeks are mandatory in general and four weeks are mandatory for those in factory working status. In addition to the English provision, the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2024) mentioned Finnish provision to address multiple births: 84 days per additional child. Similarly, France offered more generous maternity policies. It has different policies for multiple births and subsequent births. In the condition of twin maternity lasts for 34 weeks, whereas in triplet maternity lasts for 46 weeks. Similarly, in the first and second births, a total of 16 weeks, and for the third and more, 26 weeks maternity leave are awarded (Amantea et al., 2025). In the same way, the gap in the days off for working fathers and mothers (two to fourteen weeks) to care newborns is also perceived by the participants as discriminatory. This policy presupposes that females are the primary caretakers, which helps to perpetuate gender stereotypes and maintain gendered status quo.

Our study further illustrated that the head teacher selection guideline is biased against women as a result few women being in school leadership. The headteacher selection guideline prioritizes top seniority or experience (MOE, 2019), and as many women entered the service after the state implemented inclusive principles, hence awarding fewer chances for leadership roles. Similarly, Maranto et al. (2019) asserted that female teachers advance more slowly compared to males in their career paths because of the career system. Generally, we find strict leadership standards, limited access, and a biased evaluation system of the organization limit women's potential (Bishop, 2022). To overcome such biases, Tarbutton (2019) suggested non-traditional avenues to leadership along with the provisions that acknowledge and appreciate the struggles women make to fulfill family responsibilities. According to Meyerson and Fletcher (2000), the crux of women's asymmetrical presence in leadership is that men have formulated many workplace policies, norms, and practices that dovetail with male experience. In the same line, Andela (2000) claimed that until a substantial number of women leaders get the opportunity to participate in policy formation, women's status is likely to change less. Khumalo (2021) highlighted political will as a crucial aspect for proper policy implementation in the context of South Africa. The author further added headteacher selection panel was comprised mostly of males and favored males. Pervasive culture of male domination, nepotism, and lack of effective access to justice limit women's access to public employment (Faernsveden & Farnsworth, 2012).

The policy of secondary teacher selection of TSC was also perceived as an impending factor for female school leaders. The prevalent policy of the selection of secondary teachers at the state level discourages many females from applying for the post even though they possess academic credentials. This decision is emanated from an entrenched cultural belief that women are insecure and fragile in the absence of a male

guardian. Consequently, there are very few female secondary teachers in the pipeline. Similar to our findings, the discriminatory policy for the age of retirement between men and women (60 and 55 years) in Vietnam discourages women from striving for higher promotions. Furthermore, the promotion path poses challenges as certification from government for training programs is a must for promotion. Again, the eligibility for the training program includes three to five years of working experience and 26 to 28 years of age. However, a woman in her late twenties is much more likely to be involved in maternal and uxorial roles. Consequently, most of the women are barred from development prospects (UNDP, 2019). Zenger and Folkman (2019) claimed that an ambition gap exists between men and women during different spans of their careers. The authors further asserted that around 25 career growth ambitions between men and women diverge to a large extent in favor of men, merge around 40, and since then women's surge while men's decline. So, the policymakers should be aware that the young family responsibility prepares women less to seek promotions.

Organizational Barriers

Organizational culture plays an important role in creating an opportunity gap in secondary school leadership. According to our findings, the demand for school leadership, like extended and unscheduled working hours, lack of respect from the school community, and biased panel of experts for headteacher selection awards fewer chances for women in management roles. Similar to our findings, Abbas et al. (2021) in the context of Pakistan claimed that women are denied leadership positions because they are supposedly unable to manage domestic and career responsibilities. Simultaneously, a study in Nepal mentioned that poor resources in schools, time scarcity, and fragile teams in schools dampen women's drive to management roles (Subedi, 2023). The instance of lack of cooperation among the school community, as Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) mentioned, de-motivates female leaders. The authors further activities of students - alcoholism, substance usage, unwillingness to learn, and ill-discipline; parents- unwilling to cooperate on children's education and unavailability; and teachers- lack of respect and coordination and lack of interest in teaching in the South African context. On contrast to the general findings that women leaders are undermined, Nzeli (2013) conducted a study in Kenya that proclaimed students, teachers, and the guardians equally accorded female school heads as they are easily approachable and encourage students.

Gobena (2014) mentioned male domination in management positions as one of the important causes for favoring men for leadership roles. In the context of this study in Nepal, in most of the cases, SMC heads, heads of education in local government, and the panel for the selection of headteachers are males. The general belief that a higher

proportion women in school management create an environment for the selection of female school heads, however, a study in Spain by Campos-García and Zúñiga-Vicente (2019) claimed higher proportion of women in the school management team and school's overall performance is negative whereas having a woman school head or a greater number of women teachers is positive and significant. However, merely appointing women leaders at the top roles is likely to change women's status in the organization less. If the women leaders internalize the organizational culture, which is in most cases in the male model, she is female on outside and in essence, she is male. And if she could not internalize, she could not sustain the position (Fitzgerald, 2015). Therefore, appointing women at the management and policy level is likely to change the environment less unless fundamental changes in organizational culture are made.

Sociocultural Barriers

Sociocultural issues like gendered division of work, double burden, and unequal distribution of household chores and cultural taboos are creating obstacles for women to the top roles. Concurrent to this study's findings, Marissa Garza (2019) mentioned lack of balance between work and life impedes women from aspiring to leadership. The author added in many instances women do not apply for promotion not for performance issues but because not all the women are equally mobile since family obligations differ. In the same way, Gobena (2014) asserted home contexts prepare women less ambitious to aspire for the role, especially when there is a young family. Replacing this findings, Tarbutton (2019) claimed that duties induced from personal relationships are critical for creating unequal chances for leadership roles. Irregular and discontinued service because of the young family responsibility sometimes derails them from the potential candidates (Zhang, 2024). Consequently, women delay their careers until their children are grown, which changes their career trajectory, giving younger men a benefit in hiring (Bronars, 2015). Women leaders dream of an easier life when their children grow. Even when the children are grown, Preeti (2021) declared that women leaders are less likely to garner support in domestic chores. Extended family obligations, as Abbas et al. (2021) proclaimed, like cooking, managing groceries, child care, sanitation, and even nursing a sick child, is burdened upon her.

Cultural taboos in Bhutan, like women belonging to domestic space, and they are followers, not leaders, hinder women from career development chances and exposure in public life (Dawa & Ugyen, 2022). Similarly, Islamic tradition does not expect women in leadership roles because the roles bear with extra devotion of time and mind, consequently leaving less time for household roles (Airin, 2010). Abbas et al. (2021) mentioned women are accepted in peripheral roles in schools and in medical fields but not in leadership, as leaders have to sit together with male colleagues and

participate in meetings with the public that is not culturally accepted. It is not only gender and religion that impede women from leadership; sometimes marital status also plays challenging roles. Dzimiri and Jita (2022) studied the challenges of novice school heads and mentioned women having similar religious faith and marital status are less stigmatized by society than having different religious faith and unmarried status.

Personal choices people made are never made in a vacuum. Organizational working conditions, cultural expectations, and personal experiences drive leadership aspiration (AAUW, 2016). Women found the prevailing situation to a larger extent not favorable for them so, less hanker for it. However, those who could retaliate with the unfavorable environment could prove themselves successful. Bruyn and Mestry (2020) in this regard claimed women leaders who navigated their pathway to leadership through different organizational, cultural, and societal biases are more resilient and goal-oriented and hence, can perform better.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the stark absence of women in secondary school leadership is resulted from the limited access to the leadership opportunities because of the barriers that are related to policy, organization culture, and sociocultural aspects. Policy related issues include impractical maternity, secondary school teacher and headteacher selection practices. Similarly, organizational experiences such as extended and unscheduled working environment, lack of respect from the school community, and biased evaluation practices, curbs women's aspiration for school headship. Double burden, unequal responsibilities of domestic works, cultural taboos, and gendered work division constitute sociocultural barriers that limit women's potential. For developing women in secondary school leadership as par men nontraditional avenues to leadership opportunities, gender balanced selection panels, and family-friendly working conditions must be insured. Endless encouragement and support from the team members and family members are of great importance for motivation women to achieve the roles. Finally awareness education to the community regarding the importance of women school leaders can have an additional impact for upholding more women.

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Across the Border: Push-Pull Dynamics and the Lived Experiences of Nepalese Labour Migrants in India

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Abstract

This study explores the enduring yet under-researched phenomenon of labour migration from Nepal's Sudurpashchim Province to India, shaped by poverty, underdevelopment, and an open border. Despite its large scale, this migration remains informal and largely undocumented, receiving limited attention in academic and policy arenas. To address this research gap, the study explores the socio-economic and psychological dimensions of the migration process through qualitative methods. These include narrative inquiry, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, participant observation and case studies. The fieldwork is conducted at the primary border checkpoints of Sudurpashchim Province, specifically at Gaddachowki in Kanchanpur district and Gourifanta in Kailali district. The findings highlight a predominance of male migrants especially from marginalized caste groups, driven by chronic poverty, unemployment, environmental challenges and lack of opportunities at home. Remittances are primarily used to meet basic household needs rather than for long-term development. Due to its informal and undocumented nature, this migration provides immediate financial relief but fails to bring about significant socio-economic transformation. Moreover, limited financial literacy and the absence of institutional support further constrain the potential benefits. The study concludes that labour migration from Sudurpashchim is largely a survival strategy rooted in structural inequalities. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive policy reforms, including bilateral labour, agreements between Nepal and India, social security measures, rural development initiatives, legal awareness campaigns and community-level support systems. Such interventions are crucial to ensure safer, more dignified and informed migration experiences for Nepalese workers.

Keywords: Labour migration, open border, social network, working conditions

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Introduction

Labour migration has long been a defining feature of Nepal–India relations, particularly among the populations of Nepal’s western hill regions. Among them, Sudurpashchim Province stands out as one of the most migration-prone areas, with an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 individuals seeking employment in India. Cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Punjab, Nainital, Gujrat and Bangalore are popular destinations for these migrants, who engage in a wide range of occupations including security services, construction, agriculture, hospitality, domestic work, and transport. While resource-rich individuals from the region may opt for Gulf countries, economically disadvantaged groups—especially those from remote hill districts—often migrate to India as a livelihood strategy (Bhatt, 2023a).

The open-border policy between Nepal and India, formalized by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, has facilitated this movement by allowing Nepali citizens to live and work in India without visas or work permits (Sijapati & Limbu, 2012). However, this long-standing arrangement has also led to informality and invisibility in migrant employment, leaving most Nepali labourers without legal protection, social security, or access to basic services.

The employment landscape for Nepali migrants in India is shaped by factors such as socioeconomic status, education, and access to social networks. Many are employed as security guards in metropolitan areas, a role where Nepalese are often preferred for their perceived discipline and loyalty. Others work in construction, agriculture, hospitality, and domestic service, often under harsh, exploitative, and unregulated conditions (Adhikari & Gurung, 2020; Gartaula, 2009; Thieme, 2006). Migrant women, in particular, face heightened vulnerabilities, especially in domestic work, where they frequently experience wage theft, long working hours, and even physical or sexual abuse (Sijapati & Limbu, 2012).

Despite the critical economic contributions these migrants make through remittances, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding their exact numbers, occupational distribution, earnings, and challenges in destination areas. Estimates suggest that 1.5 to 3 million Nepalese are working in India at any given time (NIDS, 2020), with 1,000 to 1,200 crossing the border daily in search of work. Much of this movement is circular and seasonal, with migrants returning home during festivals such as Dashain and Tihar, or during agricultural seasons (Ghimire, 2014).

Nepali migrants in India are typically employed in the informal sector, lacking employment contracts and excluded from Indian labour laws and welfare schemes. They are frequently subject to wage discrimination, occupational hazards, and social exclusion, with limited recourse to grievance mechanisms (Sharma, 2019; Kharel, 2016). The socio-psychological effects of migration are equally significant,

as prolonged absences often disrupt family structures, increase emotional stress, and reshape traditional gender roles (Gartaula, 2009).

Moreover, Bhatt (2023c) observes that labour migration from Sudurpashchim often follows generational and staged patterns—first moving to the Terai, then onward to India—frequently influenced by existing social networks in major Indian cities. Unlike Indian migrants who tend to migrate for economic reasons to nearby areas, Nepali migrants’ destinations are often socially and culturally determined. Despite its importance, this cross-border labour migration continues to operate without formal bilateral agreements or effective regulatory frameworks. As a result, Nepali migrants remain invisible in both Indian labour policies and Nepal’s migrant protection initiatives.

Nepali labour migration to India has long served as a crucial livelihood strategy for people from the country’s far western regions, particularly from Sudurpashchim Province. This region, historically marked by limited economic opportunities, underdeveloped infrastructure, and weak state presence, has seen generations of its population engage in seasonal or long-term labour migration across the open border to India. Despite the prevalence and historical continuity of this migratory trend, scholarly attention to this phenomenon remains surprisingly sparse, especially in the context of Sudurpashchim Province. Most existing literature on Nepali migration tends to focus on migration to the Gulf countries and Malaysia, overlooking the nuanced experiences of those who migrate to India—often through informal routes and with little to no documentation. The lack of systematic, field-based research from this particular province has led to a significant gap in understanding how migrants navigate the socio-economic and psychological challenges associated with cross-border mobility. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the ground realities of labour migration to India through qualitative inquiry in Sudurpashchim Province. The central research question guiding this study is: “What is the current scenario of Nepalese labour migration to India, and how do various social, economic, and psychological dimensions shape this process?” By grounding this investigation in field-level evidence and narrative accounts, the research aims to generate new insights into the everyday experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of migrants and their families, while contributing to a more inclusive and regionally grounded understanding of Nepal-India labour migration.

This research aims to offer a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of Nepali migrants across diverse occupations and cities in India. The findings are expected to contribute to evidence-based policymaking, guiding both the Government of Nepal and relevant non-governmental stakeholders in developing targeted bilateral agreements, migration governance policies, and support mechanisms that ensure the safety, dignity, and economic security of Nepali migrant workers.

Methods and Procedures

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by labour migrants from Sudurpaschim Province of Nepal who travel to India for work. Given the complex and subjective nature of migration, a qualitative approach was best suited to uncover the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions of this phenomenon. Drawing on narrative inquiry and thematic exploration, the study employed grounded theory methods to allow patterns and insights to emerge organically from the data rather than being imposed a priori.

Selection of Study Locations: Rationale and Context

Fieldwork was carried out in two districts of Sudurpaschim Province—Kanchanpur and Kailali—which were purposively selected due to their high rates of out-migration and close proximity to the Indian border. These districts host two major border crossings—Gaddachowki in Kanchanpur and Gourifanta in Kailali—through which large numbers of migrants from both the plains and nearby hilly regions regularly travel to India. The selection of these sites allowed for a comparative analysis of migration dynamics across varied geographic and socio-economic settings. Special emphasis was placed on key transit hubs, particularly the Gaddachowki border point, which serves as a critical gateway for cross-border mobility.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select participants who could provide rich, experience-based insights into the processes and consequences of labour migration. The sample encompassed a diverse range of stakeholders, including outgoing and returnee migrants (interviewed while crossing the border into Nepal), local government officials, and representatives from NGOs working on labour and migration issues. This multi-perspective approach allowed for the inclusion of both direct and indirect experiences of migration. In total, the study conducted ten in-depth interviews with migrants and five key informant interviews with relevant local stakeholders.

Data Collection Tools

Multiple qualitative tools were employed to collect rich and context-specific data for this study. In-depth interviews (IDIs) served as the primary method, capturing personal migration trajectories, working and living conditions in India, remittance practices, and the challenges migrants face upon return and reintegration. Complementing this, key informant interviews (KIIs) with local government officials, border personnel, and civil society actors provided valuable perspectives on policy gaps, existing support mechanisms, and community perceptions of migration. Participant observation at border checkpoints, migrant-sending communities, and public gatherings enabled the researcher to contextualize and validate interview findings through direct engagement with the migration environment. Additionally, detailed case studies based on the life histories of selected migrants offered deeper insights into how migration experiences are shaped by identity, family structures, and socio-economic circumstances.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and translated from local languages such as Doteli, Bajhangi, and Nepali into English where necessary. The data were manually coded using open and axial coding techniques, allowing recurring themes and subthemes to emerge. These were organized into key analytical categories, including migration decision-making processes, push-pull factors, employment conditions, remittance use, experiences of exploitation, border-crossing narratives, and reintegration challenges. The thematic organization of data helped to construct a grounded understanding of the cross-border migration phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations provided regarding the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of respondents, and all personal details were kept confidential. Given the sensitivity of topics such as undocumented migration and exploitation, the researcher exercised caution and cultural sensitivity during data collection, particularly when discussing personal or traumatic experiences. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by Far Western University.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Labour Migrants

A study on Indo-Nepal migration conducted by Bhatt (2024) revealed that labour migration from Sudurpaschim Province to India is predominantly male-dominated. Approximately 87% of the migrants were identified as men, most of whom fall within the 18 to 40 age group. These male migrants commonly travel to various Indian cities in pursuit of employment opportunities. In contrast, the participation of women in cross-border migration remains limited. When women do migrate, they are often accompanied by their husbands or close relatives. Their reasons for migration typically include visiting family, caregiving for children or spouses, engaging in domestic work, or seeking medical treatment.

This gendered migration pattern is largely influenced by the deeply rooted social and cultural norms of the Sudurpaschim region, where women are generally discouraged from traveling alone or making independent migration decisions without family consultation or approval. Due to these constraints, it is rare for married women to migrate to India alone for work or other purposes. However, some unmarried women do choose to migrate to third countries for education or employment opportunities, though this, too, is more common than similar migration to India.

A small number of single women do migrate to India for work, but even they typically travel with close family members. In some cases, women who had previously migrated with their husbands return home following the death of their spouse, only to later resume migration when accompanied by supportive relatives (case found in personal communication). This is often met with criticism or social stigma from conservative neighbours and extended family, reflecting the socio-cultural backwardness that still exists in parts of the region.

One illustrative case involves a widowed woman, age of 42 years who shared her emotional and challenging journey. Two years ago, her husband, who was employed in a reputable private company in Delhi, tragically died in a road accident. At that time, the family, including their children who were studying at the secondary school level in Delhi, returned to their hometown in Sudurpaschim due to societal pressure and cultural expectations. However, the children's uncle—also employed in Delhi—later took them back with him so they could continue their education. After about a year, their mother also returned to Delhi. The same private company where her husband had worked offered her an assistant-level job. She now lives there with her children, feels secure, and expresses a sense of happiness. The company even provided them with a small accommodation facility.

This case is just one among many. Numerous families from the region remain dependent on the Indian job market due to limited employment opportunities within Nepal, especially in the rural and economically marginalized areas of Sudurpaschim. Many migrants emphasize that Nepal has not yet reached a position where it can ensure job opportunities for all, particularly in remote regions. As a result, cross-border migration to India continues, following a pattern that dates back to the time of their forefathers.

The majority of migrants belonged to marginalized caste and ethnic groups such as Dalits and Janajatis. Migration is often a household-level strategy to cope with chronic poverty, lack of local employment, and poor access to public services.

Push and Pull Factors of Migration from Nepal to India: Insights from Field Research

Based on field observations and key informant interviews conducted across the border of Sudurpaschim Province, it is evident that a complex interplay of push and pull factors continues to drive cross-border migration to India. These factors are rooted in both structural deficiencies within Nepal and perceived opportunities across the border.

Push Factors: Economic and Environmental Insecurity in Rural Nepal

One of the most prominent push factors is chronic unemployment and underemployment, particularly among the working-age population in the hilly regions of Sudurpaschim. During field visits across the border, several returnees' migrants, emphasized the severe lack of economic opportunities beyond seasonal farming and subsistence-level activities. A 24-year-old male respondent from Chainpur (Bajhang) at Gaddachowki border remarked during an interview, "We wake up every morning hoping for work, but apart from tilling small patches of land, there's nothing to do. Migration becomes the only choice."

Limited agricultural productivity further compounds this problem. Steep, fragmented land, inadequate irrigation facilities, and reliance on traditional farming methods have made agriculture an unviable livelihood option for many families. One returnee woman of Bajhang (Interview) shared that due to male outmigration, women and elderly are left to manage small farms which barely produce enough for household consumption, let alone surplus for the market.

Another critical push factor is the frequent occurrence of natural disasters, including floods and landslides, which disrupt lives and destroy the already fragile infrastructure. In one village in Darchula, respondent (One female returnee) shared how a massive landslide in 2022 washed away entire fields, forcing at least 15 households

to migrate to India. She narrated, “We were already poor, but the landslide took what little we had. My two sons had no choice but to leave for Pithoragarh (India) the very next month.”

Moreover, political instability and lack of infrastructural development were consistently cited by key informants, including local government representatives. Several rural municipalities and even some of municipalities still lack all-weather roads, quality schools, or accessible health centers. Young people feel disconnected and disillusioned with the promises of development. Mayor of Budinanda municipality Bajura (interview on side-line meeting at a programme) put it during a KII, “Development talks happen during elections, but nothing reaches these hills. That’s why our youth disappear to India every season.”

Pull Factors: Opportunities and Social Networks in India

On the other side, various pull factors in India make it an attractive destination for these migrants. The open border and ease of access serve as significant enablers. Migrants do not require a visa or passport, making India the most accessible destination. During my field visit to the Gaddachowki border point in Kanchanpur, it was observed that hundreds of Nepalese, mostly men, were crossing the border daily without any formal checks. One returnee from Delhi mentioned, “India is like an extension of home for us. We donot feel like foreigners there.”

Furthermore, pre-established kinship and community networks in Indian cities play a crucial role in facilitating migration. These networks provide shelter, guidance, and access to employment for new migrants. A 35-year-old migrant going to India from Doti shared at border, “My elder brother has been working in a hotel in Delhi for six years. He called me there when I couldn’t find any job here. Now, I work in the same hotel.” Such social capital reduces the risks and costs associated with migration, especially for first-time migrants.

India also offers a variety of low-skilled job opportunities, particularly in urban centers such as Delhi, Mumbai, Gujrat, Panjab, Haryana, Ludhiana, and Surat. Nepali migrants are commonly employed in construction, hotel and restaurant services, security services, and informal sectors like domestic work. Observations in Mahendranagar and Dhangadi revealed numerous travel agents and middlemen who informally connect job seekers with employers across the border, especially in the hospitality (hotels in Goa and other attractive destinations) and building sectors. A group of young returnees reported that while the pay in India is modest, it is still better than remaining unemployed in their villages.

Migration Routes and Destinations: A Closer Look at Gaddachowki Border Dynamics

Migration from the remote hilly districts of Sudurpashchim Province—namely Bajhang, Bajura, Doti, Achham, and Dadeldhura—follows a well-trodden path toward India, primarily through the Gaddachowki and Gourifanta border points in Kanchanpur district. These border posts serve as vital transit points for thousands of seasonal and long-term migrants seeking better livelihood opportunities across the border.

Case Observations and Interviews at Gaddachowki Border

During a field visit to the Gaddachowki border post, several firsthand accounts and purposive interviews revealed the complex but familiar migration patterns. At dawn, groups of young men, mostly aged between 18 and 40, were seen waiting for buses and jeeps that connect to Banbasa (India), with onward links to Delhi, Mumbai, Gujarat, and Himachal Pradesh. Many carried only a small backpack, indicating short-term migration, often seasonal in nature.

One of the interviewees, Ramesh Buda (27) from Doti, shared, “I go to Himachal Pradesh every year after the rice harvest. I work in apple orchards from October to February. A cousin of mine, who has been working there for six years, helps arrange the job and accommodation.”

Similarly, Sita Bohora from Bajhang, traveling with her husband and a child, mentioned, “My husband works in Surat in a garment factory. During the Dashain and Tihar holidays, we return to our village. After the festivals, he goes back to India, sometimes I go too when there are job opportunities for women.”

Migration Networks and Informal Brokers

Local brokers and middlemen, often former migrants themselves, play a significant role in facilitating transportation, job placements, and even legal formalities. Although most cross-border migration through Gaddachowki is informal—given the open border provision between Nepal and India—migrants often rely on these informal agents for logistics and contacts at the destination. These brokers charge varying fees depending on the distance and nature of the job, sometimes leading to exploitative arrangements, especially for first-time or uneducated migrants.

An observation from the border police office revealed that during peak migration seasons—particularly the post-harvest months of October and March—daily foot traffic can exceed 1,000 people, most of them temporary labour migrants.

Festivals and Return Migration

Migration is not a one-way process. Many migrants follow cyclical patterns, returning home during major Nepalese festivals. The Dashain and Tihar festivals, the

New Year celebration (*Bishu Parb*), and *Maghi*, especially celebrated by the Tharu community, act as pull factors drawing migrants back to their villages. These returns often carry economic and emotional significance—migrants bring home money, clothes, and consumer goods, while also participating in important cultural and familial rituals.

Chandra Singh Rawal, of Bouniya Kailali, a returnee from Punjab said, “We always try to return for Dashain. It’s the only time when the whole family gets together. We save money for the journey and gifts. After Tihar, we plan to go back with some of our neighbours.”

Challenges and Vulnerabilities

Labour migration from Nepal to India is a long-established phenomenon shaped by historical, geographical, economic, and social factors. The open border policy between the two nations, reinforced by the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship, has facilitated the unrestricted movement of Nepali workers seeking employment in various Indian cities (Gurung, 2016). This migration is primarily driven by economic disparities, poverty, and limited employment opportunities in Nepal, particularly in Sudurpashchim Province, where India offers better income prospects (KC, 2018; Bhatt, 2022). However, despite these economic opportunities, Nepali migrants often face significant challenges, including economic exploitation, poor working conditions, and social discrimination in India (Sijapati & Limbu, 2017).

Field observations at the Gaddachowki border point further revealed significant infrastructural and systemic gaps. Migrants often wait for long hours without access to basic facilities such as clean drinking water, shaded waiting areas, or restrooms. There is also a notable absence of informational or awareness programs that could educate them about their rights and risks associated with migration. Furthermore, the documentation systems at the border remain weak, offering little institutional support or data tracking for safe migration.

Ram Bahadur, a 28-year-old returnee migrant from Bajura district, shared his experience of crossing the border through Gourifanta. Upon reaching the Indian side, he and several others were stopped by Indian security personnel, who accused them of illegal entry despite possessing valid Nepalese citizenship documents. Ram reported being detained for several hours and verbally abused before being let go, warning him not to return without “extra payment” the next time. Such incidents create a climate of fear and uncertainty, especially for first-time migrants unfamiliar with cross-border protocols.

Similarly, it is observed another case of ‘transport exploitation’ at Banbasa-Gaddachowki routes while crossing the India -Nepal border. Hira Devi, a returnee migrant from Baitadi, narrated her suffering involving a tempo (three-wheeler

vehicle) operator at the Indian side of the border. After promising a ride to Banbasa for INR 100, the driver took her midway and then demanded an additional INR 200, threatening to show Indian police who may check her mobile as well as her baggage. He took extra money from her in the name of border security. Temo operator threatened her to get arrested in case she doesn't pay extra money. It was the time of late evening while she was coming comes alone with him. This reflects the broader issue of transportation-related exploitation that many migrants—especially women—face due to limited regulation and oversight.

These cases underscore the urgent need for improved border infrastructure, migrant support centers, legal aid services, and bilateral cooperation to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of cross-border labour migrants. Strengthening documentation, setting up grievance redressal mechanisms, and launching awareness campaigns at major transit points like Gaddachowki could significantly reduce these vulnerabilities.

Employment and Working Conditions in India

The literature collectively illustrates that Nepali migrants in India are concentrated in low-skilled, labor-intensive sectors such as security services, construction, agriculture, hospitality, transport, and domestic work—occupations often shaped by their socio-economic background, skill levels, and access to social networks (Adhikari & Gurung, 2020; Gartaula, 2009; Kharel, 2016; Sharma & Tamang, 2013; Thieme, 2006). While these jobs provide critical income for migrants escaping poverty and unemployment, they are largely informal, poorly regulated, and characterized by exploitative working conditions. Studies highlight long hours with low wages, lack of legal contracts, unsafe work environments, and widespread social discrimination (Adhikari & Gurung, 2020; Sharma, 2019; Thieme, 2006). This micro-level analysis of job nature and workplace vulnerabilities contrasts with Bhatt (2023b), who adopts a structural lens to emphasize the macro-level enablers of migration, such as open borders, geographic proximity, low travel costs, and shared language and climate. While Bhatt explains why migration occurs so easily and frequently, other scholars focus on the hardships migrants face after securing work. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive picture—migration is driven by economic necessity and facilitated by ease of movement, but the destination work environments often fail to protect migrants' rights and well-being.

Insights gathered through discussions with key informants, as well as in-depth interviews with migrants and their families, reveal that while a small segment of Nepali migrants from Sudurpaschim Province manage to obtain relatively stable low-skilled employment in Indian urban centers such as Delhi, Gujarat, and Punjab,

these opportunities are largely confined to sectors like hospitality, manufacturing, construction, and domestic work. A few migrants are employed in hotels, factories, construction sites, or as live-in domestic helpers. However, the majority are engaged in daily wage labour under highly insecure and informal conditions. Most of these jobs are unregulated, lacking written contracts, job security, or access to social protection mechanisms. Migrants and their family members frequently expressed concerns about the absence of legal safeguards, which leaves them vulnerable to various forms of exploitation—such as underpayment, wage theft, hazardous working environments, and sudden termination without notice. This widespread informality in employment not only compromises their economic stability but also deepens their social and psychological vulnerabilities while living and working in a foreign land.

Observation at the Gaddachauki Border (March 2025)

As migrants crossed back into Nepal, many were carrying only small bags, wearing dusty clothes, and showing signs of weakness. Several men, returning from Gujarat and Haryana, reported having worked 10 to 12 hours a day for wages between INR 300 to 500, depending on the nature of work and location. One young returnee, aged about 22, said:

I worked at a brick kiln in Punjab for almost 8 months. We had no fixed work hours. If we fell sick, there was no one to cover for us or provide medical help. My employer even deducted two days' wage when I was hospitalized with a fever.

Key Informant Interview (KII) with a Border Security Officer at Gaddachauki:

Most of these young men are seasonal migrants. Many travel without proper documentation or contracts, so they don't get any social security or insurance. We've even encountered cases of physical abuse and wage theft, but they rarely file formal complaints. (KII, Border Security Officer)

Language barriers further compounded these challenges. Many Nepali migrants, especially from remote villages in Bajhang, Bajura, Doti, or Achham, were unable to communicate fluently in Hindi, which led to discrimination, particularly in urban areas. A middle-aged woman returning from Delhi who had worked as a domestic worker narrated:

My madam always scolded me. I couldn't speak proper Hindi. Even when I did my work properly, she never said thank you. I often felt like an outsider.

In extreme cases, regional and racial discrimination was reported. Migrants recounted being called "Nepali" in derogatory tones, and some reported being underpaid or assigned the dirtiest jobs simply because of their origin.

Remittances and Household Economy

Migrants' earnings vary based on job type and location. Security guards earn INR 10,000–15,000 per month, while construction and agricultural workers make around INR 8,000–12,000 (NIDS, 2020). A significant portion of earnings is remitted back home, supporting household expenses, education, and agricultural investments (Ghimire, 2014). However, unreliable remittance channels and financial literacy gaps often limit effective money management (Sijapati & Limbu, 2012).

Despite the risky working conditions faced by Nepali migrants in India, remittances remain the backbone of household economies in Sudurpaschim Province. For many families, especially in rural and hilly districts with limited local employment opportunities, these earnings are essential for day-to-day survival. Remittances are primarily used for immediate consumption needs—such as food, children's education, loan repayment, and medical expenses. As one returnee (Shiv ji) interviewed at Gaddachauki in March 2025 explained:

I send around 8,000 rupees per month home from my job in Gujarat. My family uses it for groceries, school fees for my two sons, and to pay back the loan we took during COVID.

However, the seasonal and cyclical nature of migration—where many migrants return home during Dashain-Tihar and go back to India afterward in search of work—makes remittance flows irregular and unpredictable. This inconsistency limits families' ability to plan for the long term or invest in productive assets. A key informant interview with a local cooperative member (Ms. Chandani Pant) in Kanchanpur District underscored this constraint:

People do use remittances to pay back debts or fix houses, but very few actually invest in land, business, or education beyond secondary level. They don't earn enough or regularly enough to think beyond the present.

Field observations in a village near Dhangadhi further revealed that while many households had upgraded to tin-roofed homes or purchased small livestock such as goats or chickens, few had stable income sources or savings apart from migration. Financial illiteracy and the lack of rural investment opportunities further restricted the transformative use of remittances. As one woman belongs to migrants' family frankly noted:

My husband has been going to India for 10 years now. He brings money, and we live off it. But we haven't been able to buy land or start a business. If he gets sick or injured, we are finished.

These lived experiences highlight the dual nature of labour migration: while it offers a vital economic lifeline, it also exposes migrants and their families to chronic insecurity, exploitation, and vulnerability—both abroad and at home. Addressing these

issues demands coordinated efforts at both policy and grassroots levels, including safer migration channels, legal protections, financial education, and alternative livelihood opportunities within Nepal.

The situation in Sudurpaschim Province reflects a broader pattern across South Asia, where cross-border remittances from India—though crucial—tend to support subsistence rather than upward mobility. This echoes the findings of Seddon, Adhikari, and Gurung (2002), who argued that the volume and irregularity of remittances from India typically preclude long-term investments, unlike more substantial and consistent inflows from Gulf countries. For instance, the returnee who sends NPR 8,000 monthly reflects what Kollmair et al. (2006) observed: that small and sporadic remittances are usually consumed on recurring expenses like food, education, or loan repayments.

In contrast, remittances from Gulf nations—often higher and more regular—have been linked to the purchase of land, house construction, and investment in higher education (Shrestha, 2017). This disparity illustrates how the nature of destination and job type directly influences the use and impact of remittances. Migration to India, being largely informal and low-paid, rarely generates the kind of capital required for transformative change.

Moreover, the absence of institutional support structures in remote districts like Baitadi and Darchula—such as financial services, cooperatives, or entrepreneurship training—reinforces the limited development impact of Indian remittances. This aligns with Thieme and Wyss (2005), who emphasized that structural constraints in rural Nepal hinder productive remittance use. Even minor improvements, such as tin roofs or small livestock ownership, mirror Deshingkar et al.'s (2006) observation that remittances from India “help households cope, but not climb.”

Nonetheless, more recent research by Maharjan et al. (2012) highlights that remittances can contribute to poverty reduction—if complemented by targeted institutional support. In Sudurpaschim, the lack of such enabling structures limits the potential of remittances to serve as a pathway out of poverty. Without addressing the broader systemic challenges, cross-border labour migration remains a survival strategy rather than a vehicle for long-term development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that labour migration from Nepal's Sudurpaschim Province to India is a complex and deeply rooted phenomenon, driven not solely by economic factors but by a combination of historical practices, structural inequalities, social obligations, and systemic development gaps. Migration emerges as a survival strategy for many, particularly in the context of chronic unemployment, low agricultural productivity, recurring natural disasters, and poor infrastructure. While

India's open border, linguistic familiarity, and dense social networks offer accessible avenues for employment, they do not ensure dignity, safety, or long-term well-being for migrants. Field data gathered through border observations, migrant's household interviews, and key informant interactions affirm the broader literature, highlighting how migration reshapes socio-economic structures and migration pattern at the region. The Gaddachowki and Gourifanta borders exemplified the everyday realities of these mobile populations—marked by exploitation, resilience, and hope. To address these challenges, there is a clear need for a multi-pronged approach: cross-border labour agreements between Nepal and India; community-based psychosocial and reintegration support; and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote informed migration decisions. Ultimately, enhancing local development opportunities in Sudurpaschim and fostering regional cooperation will be crucial to ensure that migration is a choice—not a compulsion—for future generations.

The research faced certain limitations. Due to the informal and often undocumented nature of migration to India, some participants were reluctant to disclose full details of their experiences, especially those involving exploitation or legal complications. Additionally, the study was limited to data collection in the origin districts within Nepal and did not include fieldwork in Indian destination areas. As a result, it was not possible to cross-verify certain claims or observe conditions in the actual workplaces of the migrants.

To promote safer and more dignified labour migration for Nepalese workers to India, a comprehensive policy approach is essential. Central to this is the formulation of a Nepal-India bilateral social security agreement that ensures legal recognition of Nepalese workers' rights, including access to healthcare, insurance, pensions, and legal recourse. In parallel, the establishment of a government-managed Social Security Fund would provide critical support for migrants, covering emergency needs, health services, and reintegration efforts upon return. Strengthening awareness and capacity-building initiatives is also key. Community-level training on labour rights, safety measures, and legal provisions should be integrated into pre-departure orientations to better equip migrants and reduce their vulnerability. Simultaneously, diplomatic engagement with Indian counterparts must be enhanced to address migrant protection, improve border management, and ensure swift resolution of grievances through institutionalised mechanisms like bilateral dialogues and welfare committees.

Domestically, boosting economic opportunities through rural development, skill enhancement, and job creation—especially in high-outmigration areas like Sudurpaschim—can reduce the need for forced economic migration. Additionally, increasing public awareness of Indo-Nepal labour migration frameworks via information campaigns and community involvement will foster safer and more informed migration decisions. Together, these strategies present a multi-tiered solution to protect migrant workers and ensure more secure and sustainable migration outcomes.

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Parental Engagement in Education through the Lens of Social Capital

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Abstract

This qualitative case study explores the complex and lived experiences of parental and community involvement in school education within the rural setting of Kailali District, Nepal. It specifically examines the experiences of the Tharu indigenous ethnic group, Dalit communities, and economically disadvantaged families within a single, large and leading school in Bhajani Municipality. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations with 12 participants and analyzed thematically, drawing on Coleman's social capital theory and the Epstein model. Findings reveal a complex and uneven landscape of involvement. While the community has historically supported local schools through financial and labor contributions, direct parental engagement in children's learning is largely concentrated among socio-economically advantaged families. Educated parents demonstrate a greater capacity to influence school governance and directly support their children's academic progress. Conversely, economic constraints, low literacy and migration patterns significantly limit the involvement of a substantial portion of the population. The study underscores the need to address these disparities to foster more equitable and inclusive school-community relationships and improve children's educational outcomes in this rural Nepalese context.

Keywords: School-community relationships, indigenous communities, disadvantaged families, community involvement

Introduction

Parental participation is a significant determinant of educational attainment. Scholars have identified the parental involvement to the social capital (Colmen, 1988;



Putnam, 2000). Children who have active parental involvement in their education perform better academically and attend school more frequently (Chen et al., 2020). This involvement encompasses a range of activities, from attending school meetings and assisting with homework to maintaining open communication with teachers and fostering a supportive home learning environment. Epstein (1995) presents a framework for understanding diverse forms of participation, categorizing effective parental involvement into six primary types: parenting, communication, volunteering, home learning, decision-making, and community collaboration. Furthermore, Epstein et al. (2018) define parental involvement as the active participation of parents in their children's education, demonstrating consistent exemplary parenting abilities. This encompasses engaging with school personnel, volunteering at the institution, assisting children with home learning, participating in school governance, and collaborating with the school community consistently.

Research consistently demonstrates that strong home-school partnerships, characterized by active parental engagement, contribute significantly to student success. However, the nature and extent of this involvement can be influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic and cultural factors, particularly within marginalized communities.

In the Context of Nepal, parental involvement in public schools are highly emphasized. The National Education Policy 2076 and the Education Sector Plan 2021-2030 emphasize the importance of family and community involvement in school governance. These policies encourage parents to participate actively in School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in order to improve accountability and educational outcomes in community schools. According to Poudel et al. (2024), participants in their study emphasized that parental involvement particularly through structures like SMCs and PTAs plays a vital role in promoting instructional improvement and enhancing students' academic performance. Parental engagement in Nepal's public schools has traditionally followed customary practices, supported by factors such as active family involvement, strong parental orientation, and cooperation from school leadership.

This study explores these dynamics by examining the extent and nature of parental and community involvement in communities within the rural context of Kailali District in Nepal with a particular focus on the Tharu indigenous ethnic group, Dalit communities, and economically disadvantaged families. Grounded in Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988) and employing a qualitative case study approach, this research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the specific social and cultural dynamics that shape parental involvement in this context. The research question of this study is as:

1. What are the patterns and determinants of parental and community involvement in school education in Bhajani Municipality?
2. How do changing patterns of parental engagement, shaped by socio-economic status, literacy, and migration, affect children’s educational outcomes and school-community relationships?.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background: Social Capital and Parental Engagement in Education

Parental engagement in education, a multifaceted construct consistently linked to positive student outcomes, can be profoundly understood through the lens of Social Capital Theory. Social capital refers to the resources (e.g., information, trust, norms, obligations) embedded in an individual’s or group’s social networks. These resources can be mobilized to facilitate actions and achieve goals, including educational ones. Key theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on how social capital operates within the educational sphere.

According to Bourdieu, social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248). For Bourdieu, social capital is a form of capital convertible into economic or cultural capital, often leveraged by families to reproduce social advantages across generations. In the context of parental engagement, this perspective highlights how parents’ existing social networks—their connections with other parents, teachers, community leaders, or even extended family can provide access to valuable information, support, and opportunities that directly benefit their children’s education. For instance, parents with strong social ties within the school community might receive timely information about academic programs, extracurricular activities, or support services, enabling them to better advocate for their child.

James Coleman (1988, 1990) offers a more functionalist view, defining social capital by its function: “It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman, 1988). Coleman emphasized social capital’s role in facilitating human capital development, particularly in children. He identified three forms of social capital within families and communities crucial for education: obligations and expectations, where the trust and reciprocity within a community lead individuals to fulfill obligations; information channels, referring to the ease with which information flows through social networks; and norms and sanctions, which are shared values and behavioral expectations that

encourage or discourage certain actions. Coleman's work underscores how the density and quality of relationships within families and between families and schools create a supportive environment for learning.

Social capital is mainly categorized into two types: (a) Family social capital and (b) Society social capital. In the context of children's education, family social capital encompasses parents' education, skills, expectations, obligations, norms, values, relationships, and family networks (Coleman, 1988). Family background itself acts as capital for children's education, influenced by parental socioeconomic status. Coleman (1988) posits that the relationship between parents and children forms family social capital, contributing to educational success. Parental expectations, obligations, and social relations shape the level of parental involvement and investment in children's education.

In "Bowling Alone" (2000), Robert Putnam posits that social capital, defined as the "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit," is a critical resource for flourishing communities. Theoretically, a decline in this collective social glue, manifested through reduced civic engagement and associational life, diminishes the shared norms, trust, and reciprocal relationships that underpin collective action. In the context of education, this theoretical framework suggests that robust community social capital, fostered by active networks among parents, teachers, and community members, can directly and indirectly enhance children's educational outcomes by facilitating information flow, promoting shared values supportive of learning, and strengthening informal social controls that benefit children's development and academic success.

Parental Involvement in Education: Empirical Evidence and Challenges

The literature on parental involvement consistently highlights its positive effects on various aspects of children's education. Numerous studies have established a strong correlation between parental involvement and improved academic achievement, including higher grades, test scores, and overall academic performance (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2005). Parental involvement also contributes to increased student attendance, a reduction in dropout rates, and improved student behavior (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Epstein's (1995) framework has been influential in shaping research and practice in this field, providing a comprehensive model for understanding the multifaceted nature of parental engagement. The six types of involvement outlined in this framework—parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community offer a useful structure for examining the various ways in which parents contribute to their children's education. Research

has shown that each of these types of involvement can have a distinct impact on student outcomes, and that schools can play a crucial role in fostering and supporting these different forms of engagement (Epstein et al., 2009).

According to Boonk et al. (2018), parental involvement in education can be broadly categorized into two main types: involvement at home and involvement at school. Home-based involvement encompasses a range of activities that parents engage in to support their children's learning within the household. These include discussing school-related topics, monitoring academic progress, supervising homework, and participating in educational activities at home. Furthermore, parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's academic success are also viewed as an important aspect of home involvement. In contrast, school-based involvement refers to parental participation in the school setting, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, school meetings, and events, as well as volunteering for classroom activities, field trips, and other school-related functions (Boonk et al., 2018, p.12). However, the effectiveness of parental involvement can be influenced by a variety of factors, including socio-economic status, cultural background, and the specific challenges faced by different communities. Wildmon et al. (2024) found that parental participation had a substantial impact on children's academic achievement, exceeding the influence of socioeconomic level, race, ethnicity, or parental education. Nonetheless, they emphasised a consistent disparity between the expected and actual levels of parental involvement, chiefly attributable to several recognised impediments.

The predominant obstacles to parental involvement are those previously mentioned: parents' adverse experiences in school, intimidation by educators, lack of comprehension regarding the educational system, and the expectations imposed upon them (Baeck, 2010). Khanal et al. (2023) noted that parents expected their investment of labor and commitment to result in meaningful participation in school activities and governance. This expectation demonstrated their strong sense of ownership and pride in the school's success, emphasizing the importance of parental involvement in educational institutions. Haryanto (2024) emphasises that parental involvement need to be regarded as a dynamic collaboration wherein parents and educational institutions jointly assume responsibility for their children's educational journey. Furthermore, Pokharel (2020) emphasizes the significance of developing deep connections between families and schools in order to improve students' socio-emotional and academic development.

The existing literature on parental involvement in education in rural Nepal has primarily focused on economic hardship and lack of resources, often neglecting the cultural richness and social dynamics of marginalized communities such as the Tharu, Dalit, and indigenous groups. Most studies approach these communities through an economic perspective and seldom apply social capital theory to examine how trust,

relationships, and community networks influence parental engagement. Additionally, these groups are frequently portrayed as uniform and passive, with little recognition of their internal diversity and cultural strengths. This study addresses these gaps through a qualitative, theory-informed investigation of parental involvement in a culturally diverse community school in Bhajani Municipality, Kailali District. It underscores the importance of strengthening family-school relationships to promote both academic achievement and emotional well-being, highlighting the need for inclusive and context-sensitive educational practices that prioritize active parental participation.

Methods and Procedures

This study adopted a qualitative case study research design to explore how socio-economic status influences students' academic engagement and experiences within a secondary school setting in Bhajani Municipality. A single community school in Bhajani was selected as the research site, where approximately 1,200 students are enrolled, representing diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of the student population come from Tharu, Dalit, and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups. A total of twelve participants were purposively selected for the study, including four parents, four students, two teachers, and two members from the School Management Committee and Parent-Teacher Association. This particular school was chosen due to its strong reputation as a leading educational institution in the region, noted for both high enrollment and consistent academic performance.

The case study approach was considered appropriate for its capacity to provide an in-depth understanding of complex social realities within their natural context (Yin, 2018). A purposive sampling method was used to select information-rich participants who could provide diverse insights into the phenomenon under investigation. The sample included four students and their parents—two from low socio-economic backgrounds and two from medium socio-economic backgrounds—as well as four teachers who had direct interactions with the selected students and participated actively in parent-teacher communication. Data collection was carried out using multiple qualitative techniques, including semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document review. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, their parents, and teachers to gather perspectives on educational challenges, family involvement, and school support mechanisms. Participant observation was employed during mass meetings and teacher-parent interaction programs organized by the school, allowing the researcher to observe stakeholder engagement and communication patterns in natural settings. Additionally, school documents such as meeting records and student performance reports were reviewed to triangulate findings. Ethical considerations were strictly

adhered to throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were ensured. The data were analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process, which involved coding, categorizing, and identifying patterns across data sources to generate meaningful themes related to socio-economic disparities in educational experiences.

Results and Discussion

This study investigated the patterns and challenges of parental involvement in children's education within the community school of Kailali district, Nepal. Drawing on empirical data, this analysis is framed by Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital and Epstein's model of parental involvement to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play. The findings indicate that parental involvement in Children's education is a multifaceted issue, shaped by socio-economic disparities, cultural factors, and the varying capacities and willingness of parents to engage in their children's learning.

Disparities in Parental Involvement in School Activities

Findings from the case study conducted in Community school of Bhajani Municipality reveal significant disparities in the level and nature of parental involvement in school-related activities. While community engagement in education remains visible—especially during infrastructure development or fundraising initiatives—active and meaningful participation in educational processes is largely limited to a specific group of parents who possess higher levels of social capital.

From the lens of James Coleman's (1988) conceptualization of social capital, which emphasizes the value of networks, trust, and shared norms in facilitating collective action, it becomes evident that not all parents have equal access to these resources. Those involved in formal school structures such as the School Management Committee (SMC) or the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) are typically literate individuals with higher social standing. These include local teachers, former or current political figures, and members of economically well-off families. Their literacy, familiarity with bureaucratic systems, and established social connections enable them to navigate and influence school governance effectively.

In contrast, parents from marginalized communities—particularly those belonging to economically disadvantaged backgrounds—remain largely absent from formal decision-making spaces. Many cite feelings of exclusion, lack of confidence, and unfamiliarity with institutional procedures as barriers to participation. As one SMC member noted during an interview,

Most poor parents don't attend meetings because they feel shy or think their opinion won't matter. They also struggle with time due to daily wage labor. This aligns with broader patterns observed across rural Nepal, where structural inequalities often translate into unequal access to educational opportunities and participation in school governance.

The establishment of schools in rural areas like Bhajani Municipality was historically driven by community initiative and collective effort. Parents and local residents actively contributed to the development of educational infrastructure by providing financial support and engaging in *sramdaan* (voluntary labor). They participated in constructing classrooms, boundary walls, and other basic facilities, often sourcing materials from nearby Indian markets. According to a senior teacher with nearly three decades of service at the school, the community did not rely on government assistance during that period. Instead, local people took responsibility for building and maintaining the school, demonstrating a strong sense of ownership and commitment to education. This narrative reflects a strong sense of ownership and shared commitment to education in the early years of school development, despite limited external support. Despite this legacy of community ownership, contemporary practices reflect a shift. While contributions in the form of *sramdaan* (Voluntary Labor) and monetary donations continue often during infrastructure projects parental engagement in educational processes such as curriculum monitoring, learning assessments or student welfare has diminished. Moreover, these financial contributions persist despite constitutional guarantees of free education, highlighting gaps in state provision and placing additional burdens on families.

The data further suggest that the continued reliance on community support has not translated into inclusive participation. Rather, it has reinforced existing hierarchies, with more privileged parents dominating institutional roles and decision-making. This disparity not only limits democratic representation but also risks reproducing social advantage by shaping school priorities around the interests of the few.

The findings underscore the complex interplay between social capital, literacy, and socio-economic status in determining the extent and nature of parental involvement in education. Without deliberate efforts to bridge these gaps—through capacity-building, awareness campaigns, and inclusive policies—the promise of participatory schooling in Bhajani will remain unevenly realized.

Variability in Home-Based Educational Support

Parental engagement extends beyond formal school structures and includes the support provided to children at home. The study revealed variability in this form of involvement, shaped significantly by socio-economic status, employment patterns, and household structures. Several parents expressed a desire to support their children's

education but were constrained by economic hardship, work commitments and lack of educational attainment.

During interviews, several parents shared how they were deeply involved in their children's early education, often playing a more active role than teachers in supporting learning at home. This engagement, especially during the primary school years, reflected a strong commitment to education and can be understood as an early form of social capital investment, where parents attempt to create a supportive learning environment despite limited institutional resources.

However, this involvement tended to decline as children advanced to higher grades. One of the ladies parents from Tharu community explained the growing challenges she faced in supporting her child's education:

We are unable to support our children in the upper classes, especially because they are weak in English, math, and science. In our family, no one has studied beyond secondary school. Even in the lower classes, we try to help with homework, but it gets harder as they grow older.

Her words highlight not only the limitations imposed by low parental literacy but also the emotional weight carried by parents who recognize their diminishing capacity to assist as academic demands increase. This pattern underscores the uneven nature of parental involvement across different stages of schooling and reveals how educational background and literacy levels shape the extent to which parents can contribute meaningfully to their children's learning.

However, such support tends to diminish as children grow older and as parents' economic pressures intensify. A significant number of parents migrate seasonally or permanently to urban centers or to India for employment, leaving children in the care of grandparents or other relatives. In these cases, students reported challenges in managing their studies independently. The absence of parents translates into reduced academic supervision and emotional support, contributing to increased educational vulnerability. This situation highlights the strain on social capital, as migration disrupts family structures and weakens the support networks crucial for children's educational development. To compensate, local schools have instituted extra classes during specific periods of the year, which are generally well-received but insufficient to fully address the gaps caused by parental absence.

Influence of Socio-Economic Status and Barriers to Involvement

This study supports the well-established findings that socioeconomic status (SES) has an impact on educational attainment in the setting of rural communities. Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital is particularly relevant in explaining how family background influences children's access to educational resources. Parents from middle- and upper-income households are more likely to be literate, possess greater

awareness of educational processes, and are able to assist children with schoolwork or provide private tuition. This access to resources and knowledge enhances their social capital, enabling them to provide their children with academic advantages.

While parents from both low and high socio-economic backgrounds may seek additional academic support through extra coaching or tuition, the quality and consistency of such support often vary significantly. In this context, the role of the school becomes crucial. During the study, the head teacher and several staff members noted that the results of the Basic Level Examination had improved notably following the regular implementation of extra classes, especially in comparison to previously lower performance levels. They further emphasized the importance of continuing such initiatives and proposed organizing extra classes during school vacations to sustain and enhance student achievement.

Educated parents not only provide academic guidance but also engage more frequently with schools, participate in decision-making, and advocate for their children's needs. In contrast, uneducated or low socio-economic class families often lack the knowledge, confidence, or time required to navigate educational structures effectively. As the study observed, disparities between economically disadvantaged and socio-economically well-off families are significant. For instance, the case of a fifth-grade student whose parents were working in India and unable to provide any educational support illustrates the challenges faced by many children in the community. The student, essentially taking on a parental role for his younger brother, lacked support at home, highlighting how economic hardship can erode social capital and hinder children's educational progress.

The study pinpoints several significant barriers impeding parental involvement, especially within marginalized communities. An economic constraint, where poverty compels parents into daily wage labor, severely restricts their available time and resources crucial for actively participating in their children's education. Furthermore, low literacy among parents can erode their self-assurance and capacity to aid with school assignments or engage effectively with educators. Migration patterns, whether seasonal or permanent, undertaken by parents seeking employment, often disrupt family stability and diminish parental oversight and support. A lack of awareness among some parents regarding the significance of their engagement or the methods for effective school interaction also presents a hurdle. Finally, deeply rooted structural inequalities can establish systemic barriers for marginalized groups, limiting their access to vital information and resources necessary for meaningful involvement.

School Practices and the Need for Culturally Responsive Approaches

Despite these challenges, schools have implemented certain strategies to mitigate the effects of limited parental involvement. One such measure is the organization of

extra classes during select months of the year, which attempts to compensate for the lack of academic support at home. However, the impact of these classes is constrained by resource limitations and the sporadic nature of their implementation. While these efforts demonstrate a commitment to supporting students, they also highlight the need for more sustainable and comprehensive interventions.

Moreover, the school has yet to fully recognize or integrate alternative forms of caregivers, such as grandparents, into its engagement strategies. There is an evident need for more inclusive and culturally responsive school practices that accommodate the unique familial structures prevalent in the Tharu community. For example, orientation sessions or basic literacy workshops for grandparents and guardians could enhance their capacity to support children's learning. Similarly, schools could collaborate with local NGOs or government bodies to design community-based support programs tailored to the needs of children from migrant households.

Children Living with Grandparents and Local Guardians

A significant number of children in Bhajani Municipality live apart from their father and mother, who have migrated often to Indian cities or abroad for employment. In their absence, children are typically placed under the care of local guardians, most commonly grandparents or other extended family members. A smaller but notable group of older students manage independently, living without direct adult supervision.

While these caregiving arrangements provide children with a degree of stability and protection within familiar social environments, they also present unique challenges in terms of educational support. Grandparents, though often deeply caring and emotionally invested in their grandchildren's well-being, generally lack the literacy, academic knowledge, or confidence to assist with school-related tasks. As one grandmother belong from Dalit shared during an interview:

My grandson studies in Class 6 now. I can tell him to go to school and give him food, but when he asks about his lessons, I don't understand anything. If the teacher calls me, then I go to school, otherwise I stay home.

This pattern was echoed across multiple interviews with elderly caregivers. They expressed concern about their inability to help with homework, monitor academic progress, or engage meaningfully with teachers. In many cases, school visits were limited to formal invitations such as parent-teacher meetings resulting in infrequent and transactional interactions between schools and guardians.

The reliance on grandparents or distant relatives as caregivers, while culturally accepted and socially supported, thus creates a gap in educational oversight and emotional engagement. With no literate adult consistently involved in the child's learning journey, academic performance often declines over time, especially in subjects like English, mathematics, and science, which require continuous reinforcement at

home. An additional degree of complication is introduced by the phenomena of self-managed children, especially in higher primary grades

Without adult guidance, these children face difficulties managing school routines, completing assignments, and seeking help when needed. Teachers noted that such students often appeared disengaged or struggled to keep up with their peers.

During the course of this study, we encountered numerous children living in highly vulnerable situations—many of whom were caring not only for themselves but also for their younger siblings, often without adult supervision. These children displayed remarkable resilience, yet their experiences reflect a deeper crisis of guardianship and support. We observed cases where children were being raised by single parents—some without fathers, others without mothers, and some under the care of step-parents. Particularly concerning were situations where mothers had abandoned their children after remarrying, leaving them in the care of grandparents or, in some cases, with other households where they lived and worked under informal arrangements resembling child labor.

Although child labor has been formally abolished in Nepal, such informal caregiving arrangements persist, blurring the lines between protection and exploitation. These children often grow up without consistent emotional, educational, or financial support from their parents, which raises critical concerns about the feasibility and expectations of parental involvement in their schooling.

Despite these challenges, the study also observed emerging efforts within the community to enhance parental and community involvement in education. Local schools, community leaders, and NGOs are working together to raise awareness about the importance of parental engagement, especially for marginalized families. Initiatives include community meetings, parent-teacher associations, and outreach programs that aim to rebuild trust and reestablish the role of caregivers—however fragmented those roles may be. In some cases, even non-parental guardians such as grandparents or older siblings have begun to participate more actively in school-related activities, signaling a gradual but meaningful shift in community attitudes toward shared educational responsibility.

This complex backdrop underscores the need for inclusive strategies that recognize diverse family structures and the socio-economic realities that shape them, while still striving to create pathways for meaningful adult involvement in children's learning.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the complexity and unevenness of parental involvement in the educational experiences of children in the community of rural Nepal. While the community has historically contributed to the development and sustenance

of local schools through financial and labor inputs, direct parental engagement in children's learning remains largely the privilege of the socio-economically advantaged. Educated and politically connected parents are significantly more likely to influence school governance and directly support their children's academic progress, while a substantial segment of the population remains excluded from these processes due to economic constraints, low literacy, and migration.

To effectively address disparities and cultivate more meaningful parental involvement, schools should embrace a multifaceted strategy that harmonizes Coleman's theory of social capital with Epstein's model of parental involvement. This comprehensive approach necessitates building social capital by fortifying the connections and networks among schools, parents, and the wider community, thereby nurturing trust, reciprocity, and collective endeavors. Simultaneously, it's crucial to empower parents by equipping them with the essential knowledge, skills, and resources to champion their children's learning through initiatives such as literacy programs, workshops, and training sessions. Furthermore, promoting inclusive practices that implement culturally responsive strategies is vital to acknowledge and accommodate the varied needs and circumstances of native Tharu, Muslim, Dalit, Raji, and economically disadvantaged families, including those with low literacy, migrant workers, and alternative caregivers. Enhancing communication by establishing transparent and consistent channels between schools and families, utilizing diverse methods to ensure universal information access and engagement, is equally important. Finally, developing community partnerships through collaborations with local organizations, NGOs, and government agencies will provide supplementary support and resources for both families and schools. By tackling these critical areas, educators and policymakers can strive to build a more equitable and impactful educational system that empowers parents, strengthens communities, and ultimately improves outcomes for all children within marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities.

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Student Assessment in Higher Education: Perspectives and Practices from a Practitioner Inquiry

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Abstract

Student assessment in higher education is the systematic process of evaluating learners' academic performance, skills and competencies to ensure quality learning outcomes and guide instructional improvement. This study investigates how teachers at Tribhuvan University perceive student assessments, exploring their experiences with various evaluation methods in higher education. It highlights the effectiveness and challenges teachers face during these processes. Utilizing a practitioner enquiry and phenomenological design of qualitative research approach, this study gathers data through in-depth interviews with four university teachers and focus group discussion with five students of higher education based on purposive sampling. It delves into teachers' and students' lived experiences regarding assessment practices. The findings not only shed light on the multifaceted perceptions of grading systems and assessment strategies but also offer valuable insights into enhancing the fairness and quality of student evaluation. The implications of this study are significant, offering recommendations informed by practitioner enquiry to guide policymakers, academic leaders and educators in refining student assessment practices, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes and enriching educational experiences.

Keywords: Internal assessment, learning strategies, learning outcomes, academic performance

Introduction

Assessment measures student performance and guides teaching methods. It also helps to improve curriculum and maintain accountability. Assessment methods have changed from only using exams to using different ways like project work, peer review, and digital tools. Today, education focuses more on students and real-world skills,

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so assessments are used to promote deep learning and critical thinking. Assessment is a cornerstone of the educational process, profoundly shaping student learning and influencing the overall quality of higher education (Gallardo-Fuentes et al., 2025). Assessment holds greater importance in higher education for shaping students' teaching learning processes and evaluating curriculum effectiveness (Grant, 2008). It influences how students learn and how teachers plan their lessons. As education moves toward student-centered learning, it is important to understand how teachers feel and think about assessment.

In Nepal, Tribhuvan University (TU) is the oldest and largest university. It has many campuses and a diverse student population. But, most discussions about assessment at TU focus on policy and exams, not on teachers' daily experiences. Teachers' beliefs and experiences affect how they use assessments, which also affects student learning and fairness (Rasooli et al. 2023). This study looks into how teachers at TU experience and understand assessment. It tries to show the problems and opportunities they face. The goal is to improve assessment so that it meets teaching goals and supports different types of students. TU uses many types of assessments, but keeping them consistent across all programs is difficult. Teachers have different opinions and face many challenges in using assessment. Understanding these views is important to make assessments better and fairer.

Although student assessment is a complex, social and multidimensional aspect of higher education management, TU teachers primarily manage it through their daily schedules and session plans using modern technology. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research examining how these practices impact training improvement, policy development, and professional growth, which hinders efforts toward holistic development in the institution. This study aims to explore how TU teachers understand and use student assessment. It looks at what helps or stops them from using good assessment practices. The findings will help improve how assessments are done in Nepal's higher education system.

Literature Review

Assessment in higher education is a key for measuring students' success and influencing their learning and identity. In Nepal, research shows that assessment methods are changing, showing improvements but also facing ongoing challenges in matching modern educational aims. The study on secondary English teachers in Nepal found internal assessment dominated by assessment of learning, with limited focus on formative methods. Large classes and low professional commitment reduced it to a formality, highlighting the need for balanced, formative practices (Saud et al., 2024). The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2079 emphasizes competency-

based, student-centered, and continuous assessment in higher education, focusing on practical skills, critical thinking, and holistic learning. Assessments blend internal (40–50%) and external (50–60%) evaluations through projects, presentations, exams, and research. Key practices focus on semester and credit systems, letter grading, alternative assessments, digital tools, Quality Accreditation and Assurance (QAA) alignment, and self-assessment, emphasizing inclusivity, flexibility, feedback, and student self/peer assessments to enhance academic integrity and continuous improvement.

Nepal's student assessment system, vital for teaching and learning, faces challenges. This review explores its concepts, policies, and evolution, showing its impact on curriculum and student progress, while highlighting cultural influences and persistent inconsistencies (Shah, 2021). Assessment, often perceived as an objective measure of learning outcomes, extends beyond mere evaluation, profoundly shaping students' identities and experiences within the academic realm (Nieminen, 2024). Modern assessment approaches are not solely focused on cognitive understanding but consider the holistic competence of students, encompassing affective and psychomotor domains (Wahyuni et al., 2021). The assessment practices at Tribhuvan University, revealing a dominance of grade-focused assessment. Rooted in Vygotsky's theory, it advocates shifting to learner-centered approaches that promote creativity, reflection, and problem-solving for 21st-century readiness (Luitel, 2022). This study explores Tribhuvan University students' perceptions of internal assessments under the semester system. Most students viewed it positively, noting improved motivation and engagement.

However, concerns included inconsistent implementation, time constraints, and bias (halo effect) in scoring (Adhikary, 2023). Together, these studies suggest that while Nepal's higher education system is gradually moving toward more student-centered and formative assessment practices, significant work remains to bridge the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities. This literature review explores these dimensions in greater depth, critically examining how assessment practices influence curriculum implementation, teaching strategies, and student learning in the evolving context of higher education in Nepal.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical model of assessment of learning, assessment for learning and assessment as learning, a widely recognized framework that helps explain how assessment functions in educational settings. This framework provides a lens through which teacher perceptions and experiences with student assessment in higher education can be explored and understood.

Assessment of Learning

Assessment of learning refers to summative assessment practices used

primarily to evaluate student achievement at the end of an instructional period. These assessments, such as final exams, standardized tests, and large projects, serve as tools for grading and certification. From a theoretical standpoint, it is rooted in behaviorist and positivist traditions, where learning is viewed as a measurable outcome (Taras, 2005). In higher education contexts like Tribhuvan University, assessment of learning is often the dominant practice, as it aligns with institutional requirements for accountability and performance measurement (Biggs & Tang, 2011). However, this dominance may also restrict the adoption of more comprehensive and student-centered approaches to learning and assessment, which emphasize the development of a wide range of cognitive, emotional, social, and practical skills.

Assessment for Learning

Assessment for learning focuses on formative assessment, which is integrated into the teaching and learning process. It involves continuous feedback that helps both teachers and students identify learning gaps and adjust strategies accordingly. Theoretically, it is connected to constructivist learning theories, particularly those of Vygotsky and Bruner, which emphasize scaffolding and the active role of learners in constructing knowledge (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Bruner, 1996). Educators who implement it typically utilize tools such as quizzes, collaborative activities, and classroom discussions to support and monitor student development throughout the instructional period, rather than solely at its conclusion.

Assessment as Learning

Assessment as learning emphasizes student self-assessment and metacognitive awareness. It empowers learners to reflect on their own understanding, monitor their progress, and make decisions to improve their learning. This form of assessment draws from socio-constructivist theories and the concept of learner autonomy. In assessment as learning, teachers act as facilitators who guide students to take ownership of their learning through goal-setting, peer assessment, and self-reflection activities (Earl, 2013). This approach not only enhances student engagement but also promotes deeper understanding and lifelong learning skills.

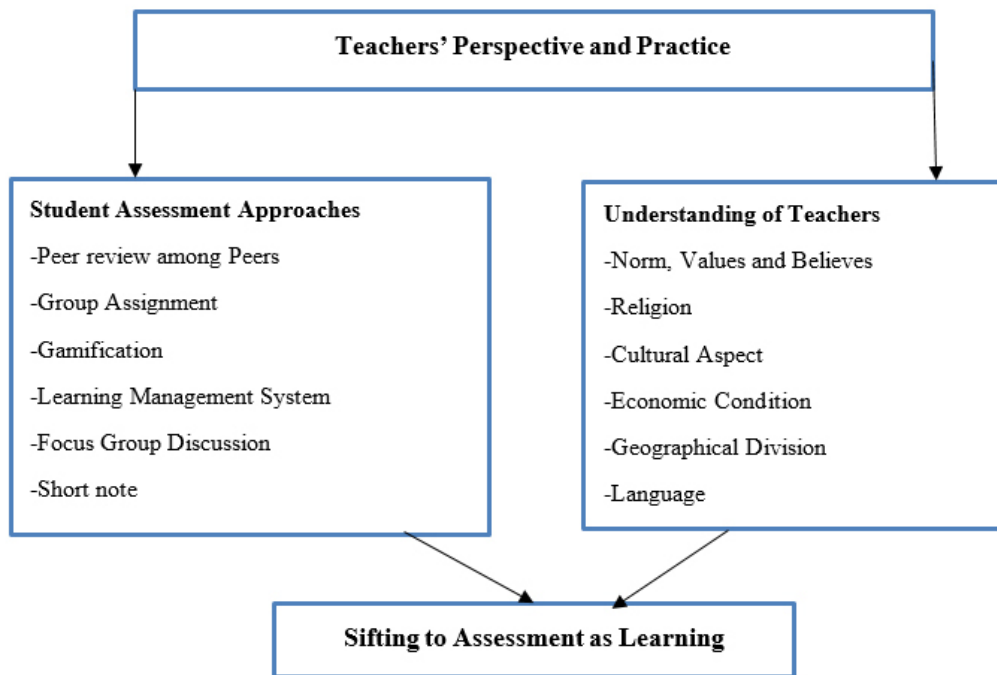
Conceptual Framework

The student assessment system is a key part of teaching and learning in higher education. While traditional methods like exams and papers are still common, they often don't reflect the full range of student skills. Recently, there's been a move toward more well-rounded and practical forms of assessment like group projects, portfolios, and peer reviews that encourage critical thinking and real-world learning. This

change supports modern educational goals focused on active and meaningful student engagement.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



The student assessment system is the way higher institutions check and measure what students have learned, their skills, and how they are doing in their studies. It uses different methods to see how well students are meeting learning goals. This process also takes into account students' backgrounds, including their values, religion, culture, and different situations. In the past, the focus was on assessment of learning/assessment for learning but now it's shifting towards assessment as learning.

Methods and Procedures

This study uses two main research approaches: phenomenology and practitioner inquiry. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the real-life experiences and emotions of teachers and students, especially how they feel and think about assessment (Philipsen et al., 2019). It helps the researcher look beyond numbers or statistics and get to the heart of what people actually go through in their daily educational lives.

Practitioner enquiry is a method where teachers examine their own teaching practices in a thoughtful and systematic way. It allows educators to study what they do in the classroom with the goal of improving their work and making meaningful

changes (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This method sees teachers not just as subjects in research but as key contributors who bring valuable insights from their own everyday experiences (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2019). In this case, the researcher is also a university teacher, which makes practitioner inquiry especially useful. It allows them to reflect on their own teaching and learning processes while also learning from others. To gather information, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with four university teachers from different departments within the Faculty of Education at Prithvi Narayan Campus in Pokhara. This qualitative study used purposive sampling to select participants based on their subject expertise, personal experiences of professional challenges, and diverse forms of academic involvement.

Additionally, a focus group discussion was conducted with five fourth-semester master's-level students to gain deeper insights into their perspectives. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their consistent participation in classroom activities. The experiences of the teachers were presented using their own words to authentically reflect their viewpoints. The students' experiences mostly supported what the teachers said, so I referred to them in the third person instead of quoting them directly. This helped keep the focus on the teachers' viewpoints while still showing that students had similar concerns. These methods helped the researcher explore how teachers understand and use assessment, the challenges they face in applying it, and what kind of support they need to improve. The results of the study are practical and directly related to the local context, making them useful for improving both day-to-day classroom practices and broader educational policies.

Moreover, this study contributes to ongoing discussions about how to make assessment systems more fair, meaningful, and effective. It is a strong example of practitioner inquiry in action, as it deeply engages with the real experiences of teachers involved in higher education at Tribhuvan University. By critically examining their own practices, the teachers and the researcher are able to better understand assessment and contribute to positive changes in the education system.

Results and Discussion

This part of the study presents the main findings from in-depth interviews with university teachers and a focus group discussion with master's-level students. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used instead of real names. Before collecting data, informed consent was obtained, and all participants were told about the purpose and process of the study. To ensure the data was accurate and trustworthy, member checking was used. This section explains what was discovered during the research. The results are connected to the study's objectives and are supported by previous research and relevant theories. It helps make sense of the data, shows how it

answers the research questions, and explains what it reveals about the topic. The aim is to highlight the importance of the findings and their relevance to real-life situations.

The findings were developed through a careful process called thematic analysis, where common patterns and important ideas were identified and grouped into key themes. These themes came directly from the data and were refined through repeated review and interpretation. To make the analysis stronger and more reliable, the researcher compared information from different sources, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and other related aspects.

Different Views on Student Assessment

Teachers at Tribhuvan University have a range of opinions about student assessment. It is mainly a way to measure performance and assign grades. Others view it as a valuable teaching tool that helps improve learning, encourages critical thinking, and gives useful feedback to both students and teachers.

One of the participants Agrima highlighted the importance of using assessment to support learning. She said:

Assessment is not just about giving grades. For me, it is about seeing what students have actually learned and figuring out how I can help them grow.

This shows a student-centered approach, where assessment helps guide teaching and supports students' progress in different sectors of learning. From my experience, many students think assessment is just a formal test or exam. This often occurs because teachers unintentionally create a stressful or intimidating classroom environment, which can lead students to develop fear or anxiety toward the assessment process as a whole. Such environments discourage active participation and hinder student engagement. However, incorporating collaborative group work and interactive classroom activities into assessment practices can significantly enhance students' theoretical understanding. These approaches create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere, encouraging all students to participate meaningfully and engage more deeply with the subject matter.

Another participant, Raman, shared a different point of view, focusing on how assessment is used more for evaluation within the university system. He explained:

In our setting, assessment is still mostly centered around exams. It is used more to rank students than to help them learn.

This response highlights how assessment is often treated as a tool for judging performance, especially through final exams. These types of tests tend to focus on grades and comparisons rather than truly understanding what students know or encouraging critical thinking. As a result, assessments may not always help students grow or develop deeper learning skills.

The next participants Riwarz supported a more balanced method by combining both formative and summative assessments. He noted that:

I try to include project work, presentations, and reflective journals along with traditional tests. This way, I get a more complete picture of each student's abilities.

In this above context students' views are also related to this context. One of my students, Rebika, also shared her experiences with me in the context of focus group discussion. She is the primary teacher in a remote village, and she takes her responsibilities very seriously. Despite her dedication, she feels unsupported by the school community. Many community members believe that her teaching efforts could negatively impact the local school culture and prefer she not focus on her studies. Despite her strong dedication to teaching, she feels a profound lack of support from the school community. Several community members hold the perception that her commitment to academic and professional development might disrupt the traditional culture of the local school. As a result, they discourage her from focusing on her studies and career advancement. She shared that this unsupportive environment has created significant obstacles in her efforts to pursue further education. The situation escalated when, on one occasion, certain members of the community went so far as to file a formal complaint against her with the District Education Office. This not only intensified her personal and professional challenges but also underscored the broader issue of limited community encouragement for teachers seeking professional growth and educational advancement.

This approach reflects a meaningful shift away from traditional, exam-centered evaluation methods, emphasizing a more comprehensive and student-centered assessment process. In my teaching context, I have also implemented various forms of alternative assessment, such as project-based assignments and journal writing tasks, as part of the higher education assessment system. These methods allow for a deeper understanding of each student's individual strengths, creativity, and critical thinking abilities. By incorporating such diverse assessment strategies, we move toward a more modern and holistic model of evaluation—one that not only measures what students know but also how they apply, analyze, and reflect on that knowledge in real-world and academic contexts. This broader perspective supports more meaningful learning and encourages students to engage with content in a thoughtful and active manner.

Traditional Assessment Still Dominates

Many teachers still depend mostly on traditional methods like written exams and assignments to assess students. These practices are common mainly because they align with existing institutional norms, help manage large class sizes, and are

familiar to most teachers. Many educators admit that such methods are simply more practical given the realities of their teaching environments. One of my participants Riya explained,

I use exams because it's what we have always done. It works for large groups. This response shows that routine and convenience often drive assessment choices more than new teaching strategies or innovation. Another participant Riwaz also pointed out the challenge of trying alternative methods in overcrowded classrooms:

With over fifty students in one classroom, it is just not realistic to assess them through portfolios or presentations. We don't have the time or resources. These highlights how big class sizes and limited resources make it hard to try more student-centered assessments. This shows how large class sizes and limited resources make it difficult to use more student-centered assessments. Even when teachers support these methods, their work conditions often make it hard to apply them. This also matches my own experience. Another participants Raman added another important perspective:

I have attended a few workshops on formative assessment, but we were never shown how to apply it in real classrooms. So, I stick with what I know. This shows a common issue teachers may hear about alternative assessment methods in training sessions, but without clear examples or continued support, they find it difficult to put those ideas into practice. Overall, these responses reveal that traditional assessments continue not because teachers are unwilling to change, but because they face real barriers like time, class size, lack of training, and institutional pressure. Still, many teachers show interest in more meaningful and holistic assessment approaches if they could get the right support and guidance to use them effectively.

Limited Use of Formative Assessment

There is limited implementation of formative assessment techniques such as peer assessment, classroom discussion, and self-reflection in the teaching-learning process. While teachers are well aware of the pedagogical value of these interactive assessment methods in enhancing student engagement and understanding, several constraints hinder their regular use. Common barriers include a lack of time, insufficient resources, and increasing administrative pressure to meet curriculum deadlines. One of the participants Riya expressed concern about time constraints, stating,

I often plan to include peer and group assessments, but by the time I complete the syllabus content, there's barely any room left. I end up relying on traditional tests.

This reflects the challenge of balancing content delivery with formative evaluation. Another participant Agrima highlighted resource limitations, saying, "We don't have

enough materials or training on how to conduct effective self-assessment or group tasks. Even if we want to do more, the support system is missing,

This suggests a need for professional development and institutional backing to integrate such assessments. Another participant Riyaz added, “I want to use more interactive assessments, but the schedule and workload don’t support it.

This indicates that despite recognizing the benefits, the daily operational demands prevent teachers from adopting innovative assessment techniques. Together, these insights reveal a gap between teachers’ intentions and their practices, largely influenced by systemic and contextual barriers that need to be addressed to improve the use of formative assessments.

Challenges in Making Assessment Fair and Reliable

Challenges in Making Assessment Fair and Reliable refers to the problems educators encounter when trying to ensure that student assessments are both fair to all learners and consistently produce accurate, trustworthy results. Some of the teachers shared serious concerns about whether current assessment practices are truly fair or accurate. One major issue they brought up was the lack of consistent and standardized tools to evaluate students. Without clear guidelines, each teacher ends up using their own way of interpreting and applying the assessment criteria. This inconsistency often leads to results that don’t clearly show what students have actually learned or how well they’re really doing. As a result, students might be judged unfairly, and their true progress may go unnoticed.

One of participants Agrima emphasises the ethical pressure that teachers face: We often face pressure to be lenient, which affects fairness and standards.

This kind of pressure from school leaders, parents, or social expectations can affect teachers’ ability to grade fairly, and it can lower the overall quality of education. Another participant, Riwarz, added that the lack of clear rubrics is a big problem:

Without proper rubrics, two teachers can grade the same student very differently. It becomes more about perception than actual learning.

This inconsistency creates confusion and frustration for students and teachers alike and weakens trust in the whole assessment system. In this context, one of my students Ramita shared her experience with me. She said that they don’t have a proper way to assess their work differently. Also, student attendance doesn’t seem to matter in all parts of the process. Participant Raman emphasized how these issues affect the bigger picture:

When assessments are not valid or reliable, we cannot identify students’ true needs or progress. It is like making decisions in the dark.

Without accurate assessments, teachers cannot give meaningful feedback or support

students in the right way, which limits the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Overall, these responses show a common concern: current assessment practices are often influenced by outside pressure, personal judgment, and a lack of proper tools. This not only affects the fairness and accuracy of grading but also damages the credibility of the education system. Teachers believe that in order to fix this, there needs to be urgent reform, better training in assessment methods, and clear policies to support fair and consistent evaluation.

Struggles to Ensure Fair and Accurate Assessment

Teachers shared strong concerns about whether current assessment methods are fair, unbiased, and truly reflect students' learning. One major issue that came up in many interviews was the lack of clear, standardized tools for assessment. Because there are no consistent guidelines, teachers often interpret grading criteria differently. As a result, student evaluations can vary widely and may not truly show what students have learned.

Participant Agrima spoke about the pressure teachers face:

I often face pressure to be mild, which affects fairness and standards.

This pressure from school leaders, parents, or even community expectations can make it difficult for teachers to grade honestly. It can lead to inflated grades and lower academic standards. Another participant, Raman raised another concern: the lack of clear grading rubrics.

Without proper rubrics, two teachers can grade the same student very differently.

It becomes more about perception than actual learning.

When grading is inconsistent, it creates confusion and frustration for both students and teachers. It also makes the assessment system seem unreliable. Another participant Riwaz, explained how these problems affect the bigger picture:

When assessments are not valid or reliable, we cannot identify students' true needs or progress. It is like making decisions in the dark.

Without accurate assessment, teachers cannot give helpful feedback or adjust their teaching to support students properly. This weakens the overall quality of education.

Together, these responses show a common concern among teachers: the current assessment system lacks fairness and trust. External pressure, unclear grading standards, and limited tools all contribute to unreliable results. Teachers believe that real change needs better training in assessment methods, clearer guidelines, and stronger policies to make the evaluation process more fair, consistent, and meaningful.

Need for Professional Development in Assessment Literacy

Teachers expressed a strong desire for practical workshops, hands-on training, and continued support from their schools to help them assess students in more meaningful and accurate ways. One of my participants Agrima noted that:

I need proper training to understand modern assessment methods and how to apply them.

In my experience, there are no opportunities for curriculum training programs, and many teachers feel unprepared to design and use effective assessment methods. In interviews, a common theme was that teachers lacked confidence in understanding and using modern student-centered assessment practices. Another participant pointed out the gap between traditional classroom assessments and newer approaches. They admitted finding it hard to move away from memorization-based testing toward more supportive tools like formative and diagnostic assessments.

Most of us are still using outdated methods because we were never trained in alternatives. We want practical workshops, not just theories.

Another participant stressed the heavy reliance on written exams and expressed uncertainty about using methods like rubrics, portfolios, or peer assessments. They emphasized the importance of hands-on, classroom-focused training.

Assessment is not just about exams anymore, but we have not been guided on what else to do. The school should also support us by giving time and resources.

They shared the view that even with training, teachers struggle to apply new strategies without time and support from their schools. They called for a coordinated effort that combines teacher training with real institutional backing.

Role of Institutional Policies and Academic Culture

Assessment practices are influenced significantly by institutional policies, academic traditions, and a lack of innovation within the university system. Many teachers express frustration with the constraints imposed by rigid curricula and outdated assessment regulations, which hinder meaningful reform and innovation. Rather than encouraging diverse or student-centered evaluation methods, universities often emphasize traditional examinations and grading systems, leaving little room for flexibility or experimentation.

Another participant Agrima, reflecting on this issue, stated,

Even if I want to try new methods, the system does not support change easily. This sentiment reflects the broader institutional resistance to pedagogical and assessment reform, even when educators are willing and motivated to innovate.

Another participant Riwarz echoed this challenge by adding, We are expected to follow the same exam patterns every semester. There is no training or discussion on alternative assessments like portfolios or project-based evaluations. It feels like assessment is just a formality rather than a tool for real learning.

This highlights the lack of professional development and institutional dialogue around assessment practices.

Similarly, another participant Raman shared, Our evaluation system is deeply rooted in rote memorization. If we try to assess critical thinking or creativity, students get confused, and sometimes even the administration questions our approach.

This study highlights the ongoing tension between individual educators' efforts to enhance assessment practices and the institutional norms that continue to uphold outdated academic traditions. From a theoretical standpoint, the findings can be understood through the lenses of assessment of learning, assessment for learning, and assessment as learning.

Most current practices at Tribhuvan University tend to emphasize assessment of learning, focusing primarily on summative evaluations such as exams and grades. While this approach provides a measure of student achievement, it often neglects opportunities for deeper engagement, reflection, and growth. In contrast, assessment for learning which emphasizes formative feedback to guide and improve student learning is still underutilized due to rigid institutional policies and lack of support structures. Even more overlooked is assessment as learning, where students actively engage in the assessment process to develop metacognitive awareness and take ownership of their learning journey.

Collectively, the responses in this study demonstrate how a lack of institutional support, inflexible policies, and deeply rooted academic traditions contribute to a stagnant assessment culture that resists innovation. Without meaningful systemic reform, even the most motivated and forward-thinking educators face significant barriers when attempting to align assessment practices with the needs and expectations of 21st-century learners.

By drawing on the lived experiences and reflective insights of university teachers, this study provides valuable, context-specific understanding of the current state of assessment at Tribhuvan University. It reveals not only the strengths of existing practices but also points to critical areas where transformation is needed particularly in integrating more formative and student-centered approaches that align with contemporary educational theories and global standards of quality learning and assessment.

This practitioner-centered perspective ensures that the findings are rooted in authentic classroom and institutional realities, making them highly relevant and actionable for those directly engaged in teaching and assessment.

Grounded in these rich, practitioner-informed insights, the study advances concrete recommendations aimed at enhancing the fairness, consistency, and overall quality of student assessments. In such a scenario, the traditional approach to assessment may fail to reflect the true capabilities of the students. This calls for a rethinking of how we embed learning experiences into the curriculum experiences that are flexible, inclusive, and capable of improving academic outcomes despite external challenges students face. Therefore, implementing assessment as learning is essential to transform the assessment system in higher education. Within the faculty of education, a significant majority of students are female. Many of them carry substantial household responsibilities, which can affect their academic engagement and time management.

Conclusion

This study offers valuable support to policymakers, academic leaders, and educators at Tribhuvan University by providing grounded insights into current assessment practices. It highlights existing challenges and promotes more inclusive, student-centered approaches that improve both learning outcomes and teaching experiences. The recommendations are drawn directly from teachers lived experiences, ensuring they are practical and contextually relevant. Beyond institutional concerns, the study addresses broader social issues such as equity and access. It draws attention to the impact of students' socio-economic challenges particularly those working part- or full-time which often leads to absenteeism and limits the effectiveness of traditional assessment methods. By connecting academic, institutional, and social dimensions, this study calls for a more flexible and compassionate assessment system one that not only measures learning but also supports inclusion, empowerment, and social mobility.

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Bridging the Digital Divide: Digital Media Literacy among College Students in Nepal

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Abstract

Digital literacy includes a wide range of concepts that feature different meanings and the ability to use digital tools and applications, examining digital media literacy among college students and its impact on the access disparity. The objective of the study was to enable students to effectively utilize digital tools and comprehend the benefits and responsibilities associated with being informed consumers. A quantitative methodology was employed, gathering data via a survey and closed-ended questionnaire from a sample of 106 undergraduate students in the Humanities and Social Sciences studying at Kailali Multiple Campus. The survey assesses students' opinions on digital media literacy, emphasizing the utilization of digital tools and the acknowledgment of the necessity to be informed, involved and responsible. The results show that 53.8% of participants view media literacy as an essential analytical ability, 61.2% rely on search engine optimization to find resources as the most reliable source, 70.2% access digital content via mobile devices, and 45.6% consider digital citizenship an important aspect of digital literacy. The results explore how teaching digital literacy can help close these gaps and guarantee that people's daily lives include access to digital skills. The findings of the study suggest improving students' ability to locate, evaluate, synthesize and use information in practical situations.

Keywords: Analytical skill, leveraging digital devices, digital citizenship, search engine optimization

Introduction

The integration of media, navigation resources and digital technologies in educational systems is crucial for bridging the digital divide and providing students with the digital literacy needed for active engagement in the knowledge economy.

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Digital literacy is crucial for youth, as it provides them with important insights into security, privacy and online safety. Grasping these concepts enables them to be more equipped to recognize and tackle risks like cyberbullying and different online safety concerns. Digital literacy is crucial in today's world, as it involves navigating digital tools and understanding complex concepts. In contrast, "digital disparity" highlights the gap between those who can effectively use technology—like computers and the internet—and those who cannot. Addressing this gap is essential for ensuring equal opportunities in our digital society. Those who have access to technology and those who do not, the term "digital divide" describes the difference.

Nepal has a significant digital divide, especially in the area of education, as claimed by Srivastava (2023). Critical thinking abilities are taught by media literacy, which enables people to assess the authority and dependability of information found online. This disparity between the different income levels, which transcends demographic characteristics like age, sex, and education, can exist within countries, in both urban and rural areas. Deussen and Dijk (2011) determined the term "digital gap," which originally referred to the differences in access to computers. As the internet quickly spread throughout society and became a major form of computing, the term expanded to cover deficiencies in both computers and internet availability.

Many advanced and developing nations are working to create and enhance e-government systems in order to efficiently provide public services. Ability to determine effective access, use, and generation of information. Your interactions with other users and content are in a critical, sensitive, ethical way, reflectively, and ensure that they are responsible for operations in online and ICT environments and achieve that right (UNESCO, 2018). The objective of this study is to improve students' ability to locate, evaluate, synthesize, and utilize information in everyday situations. Experienced digital skills are essential for students to access academic resources, collaborate effectively and meet the requirements of modern work. The goal of media literacy education is to change traditional education into a new way of "seeing," and research in this area aims to support that idea (Rowe, 2018).

The government of Nepal must also deal with the challenge of striking a balance between gathering information and protecting individuals' privacy. Digital media literacy fosters the ability to use and create technologies that contribute to social and economic well-being. It encompasses grasping the effects of modern technologies on society, being adept at managing digital identities appropriately, and possessing the skills to locate, organize, understand, assess, analyze, and produce digital information (Hobbs, 2010). Traditional definitions of media literacy competency included skills linked to access and consumption, as well as an emphasis on media message interpretation. This digital skills gap is essential since increased digital proficiency is closely related to improved academic performance. Students who can effectively

use online learning resources are more likely to obtain successful outcomes. The lack of reliable high-speed internet in rural places exacerbates the digital divide as a reality, stifling the development of crucial digital literacy skills among university-level students when compared to their urban peers.

By giving people a voice in the digital sphere and promoting greater diversity and representation, media literacy empowers people and can aid in closing the digital gap. It is indisputable that the digital divide is caused by unequal access to and usage of information. When considering believability, first inquire about the author's identity. What is the purpose behind this message? How was it built? These questions allow people to determine the credibility of a statement. The effective use of digital information enhances the ability to verify facts and compare sources of information. Being proficient with technology is not only advantageous in the current digital era but also necessary for both academic success and deep connections. Regrettably, a growing digital divide highlights the glaring disparities in people's access to technology and digital literacy. To guarantee that everyone can engage in the digital world equitably, this study explores university students' levels of digital literacy in great detail and identifies important gaps that need to be filled. By drawing attention to these differences, we support the necessary reforms that advance inclusivity and provide every student the tools they need to succeed in a society that is becoming more interconnected by the day. To lessen the digital divide, the project intends to investigate how enhancing digital literacy can be a tactic.

Literature Review

Media literacy provides individuals with the abilities to effectively utilize digital platforms such as social media, online news sources, and communication tools. It improves digital literacy by facilitating better access to, analysis of, evaluation of, and creation of digital content. Conversely, the digital divide refers to the inequalities in access to digital technologies, which are influenced by economic, geographical, and educational factors. Abu-Fadil (2016) contends that higher education in Arab countries lacks the necessary infrastructure and support for digital media literacy, a perspective echoed by Melki and Maaliki (2016), who highlight resistance from traditional academics. Similarly, Adhikari (2024) notes that Nepal's National Broadband Policy seeks to increase internet connectivity, particularly in rural regions.

Levin (2010) argues that merely providing computers in educational institutions does not guarantee digital literacy. There remains uneven access to broadband internet across different regions (Eysenbach & Kohler, 2002). Berry and Wintle (2009) discovered that media literacy improves students' critical thinking skills and memory, whereas Fox (2006) noted that users often experience confusion when searching

for health information online. Bhattarai (2017) discusses Nepal's 2017 election agenda, which includes initiatives such as smart cities and the development of digital infrastructure. Research indicates that the digital divide now encompasses disparities in skills, extending beyond mere access to technology. Conteh et al. (2015) highlight the importance of using ICT to promote efficient and transparent governance, but Poudyal et al. (2017) contend that Nepal's inadequate infrastructure hampers the effectiveness of e-government initiatives.

Security issues also influence the level of trust in ICT within Nepal (Van Deursen & Van Dijk, 2009). Ottenstein and Mainali (2022) indicate that approximately 80% of Nepal's rural residents have limited digital literacy and infrastructure, which exacerbates the digital divide between rural and urban areas. Digital platforms such as Hello Sarkar demonstrate progress in ICT-driven governance. Data Reportal (2023) reports that 49.6% of the population in Nepal are internet users, with 43.5% actively engaging on social media. The Oxford Internet Institute (2020) emphasizes the necessity of bridging the digital divide to promote fair development and warns about the dangers of social media manipulation. Ojha (2023) expresses concerns regarding Clause 11.25 of the National Internet Gateway provision, which was not included in the 2021 cybersecurity draft, suggesting a move towards greater government control. The National Broadband Policy 2014 outlines a plan to revolutionise education through ICT.

In Nepal, the 2014 National Broadband Policy (2071 BS) seeks to enhance education by encouraging online learning and the use of various communication technologies. It aims to increase access to education, particularly in remote regions, by expanding high-speed internet connectivity, which supports digital classrooms and distance education. The policy also promotes the incorporation of digital tools into the curriculum to create more interactive and adaptable learning experiences. The use of platforms such as video conferencing and online lectures helps improve teaching quality and student participation, while also facilitating teacher training and access to international resources, thereby increasing the effectiveness and reach of Nepal's education system.

Methods and Procedures

This study used a quantitative approach to assess digital media literacy among students to overcome the digital gap. 106 students were selected as sample sizes using a narrow, structured questionnaire to assess access to digital resources, skills, and models. In other words, it contains detailed information on how data is collected, defining some important tools or tools used (e.g., exams, group discussions, interviews, experiments, and observations). He also explains how participants or sources of data

are chosen (e.g., random samples, target samples, etc.) and first displays the sample and study justification. Data collected via online Google RSVP forms was analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to summarize and describe the demographic profiles of respondents. This study focuses on understanding the digital gap among university students and aims to reduce it by improving digital skills. This research seeks to explore the government's policies and legal structures that target narrowing the digital divide between urban and rural areas. The aim is to investigate how improving digital literacy can reduce the digital gap. Furthermore, this study examines how limited technical resources and a lack of digital skills affect students' ability to identify relevant trends.

Results and Discussion

This research, carried out through a structured survey at Kailali Multiple Campus with 106 participants using Google Forms, adopts a bilingual approach in English and Nepali to promote clarity and inclusivity among students. The results clearly demonstrate that basic operational and formal internet skills alone are inadequate for navigating the complex digital landscape of today. To actively participate in the information society, individuals need advanced skills in information management and strategic internet use. The study highlights that digital literacy gaps are closely linked to educational background and cognitive abilities, pointing to the urgent need for further academic investigation. While previous efforts to bridge the digital divide focused on providing physical access to technology, the current challenge is to equip people with the digital skills necessary for meaningful participation. Media literacy initiatives must now focus on ensuring equitable access and developing skills, particularly in underserved and marginalised areas.

According to Data Reportal (2024), Nepal has 37.47 million active mobile connections, representing 120.6% of the population, which indicates that simply having access does not eliminate digital inequality; differences in digital skills still exist. The study shows that closing the digital gap in higher education requires specific efforts to improve digital literacy. The data indicate that 70.2% of students have access to digital devices, and 53.8% possess confidence and analytical skills in using advanced digital technologies. These students are not only able to access digital content but also engage with it critically, demonstrating their capacity to evaluate, interpret, and respond to media thoughtfully. The survey results, supported by quantitative data and relevant literature, provide strong evidence of the increasing importance of digital literacy in influencing academic achievement and preparing students for the challenges of the modern workforce.

Table 1*Media Literacy Skills Distribution and Understanding Levels*

Media Literacy Understanding	Response Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Analyzing skills	57	53.8	53.8	53.8
Abstracting	4	3.7	3.7	57.5
Commenting or sharing	29	27.4	27.4	84.9
Evaluating contents	16	15.1	15.1	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 1 shows that a high percentage of skill analysis (53.8%) is the most frequently associated factor in media literacy. This suggests that critical thinking and evaluation of media content is an important ability. Which suggests that most respondents are confident in their ability to critically analyze media content. This indicates the ability to critically examine media content, understand its purpose, and interpret its messages. Comments and sharing (27.4%) received moderate responses, indicating that a small but significant portion of respondents are actively involved in the media through comments and sharing. Similarly, the rating (15.1%) received the lowest percentage, assuming they were confident in their ability to assess media content trust and bias. Since abstraction (3.7%) is the least recognized factor, this means that quantities and interpretations are not important for the literary of the media. These data indicate that media readability is mainly considered to be the ability to critically analyze the content of the media and not just to share it or summarize it.

Table 2*Digital Platform Selection Criteria*

Selection Criteria	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Friend engagement	9	8.5	8.5	8.5
Content quality	57	53.8	53.8	62.3
TRP and market access	12	11.3	11.3	73.6
Own knowledge	28	26.4	26.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2 reflects the high percentage of the quality of the content (53.8%) is the most important factor when choosing a digital platform, stressing that users determine the priorities of content values. Most respondents suggest that they are confident in their quality and their ability to choose reliable media content. This demonstrates the ability to critically study media content, understand its goals, and interpret messages. Another option, own knowledge (26.4%), is the second most influential factor, assuming that

individual exams play an important role. Likewise, TRP and market access (11.3%) have a certain influence, which indicates commercial and professional considerations. Since the involvement of a friend of the fourth version (8.5%) is the least recognized factor, which implies that it is the least influential and shows that social ties are not the main reason for the choice of the platform. This suggests that users determine the priorities of high-quality content compared to social influence and market trends in the choice of a digital platform.

Table 3

Most Trusted Digital Platforms

Digital Platform	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Facebook	30	28.3	28.3	28.3
TikTok	1	0.9	0.9	29.2
Instagram	9	8.5	8.5	37.7
Search Engine Optimization	66	62.3	62.3	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

To interpret the data shown in Table 3, it shows that search optimization as a significant margin shows the most reliable platform for searching for resources, and 62.3% of respondents choose it as a reliable source, assuming that search engines (Google, Bing, etc.) are the main source For reliable information. Social platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, are trusted much less when it comes to searching for resources, and Facebook occupies a relatively large share among them. However, Facebook (28.3%) is probably the second most trusted platform, probably because of community recommendations and shared content. Instagram (8.5%) shows that confidence is limited and finding reliable resources is not the main source. TikTok (0.9%) is the least reliable, indicating that short video content is not considered a reliable resource for information. These data suggest that although users are largely based on search engine optimization for correct information, social media platforms are considered an additional source.

Table 4

Factors Determining Digital Media Contents

Factor	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Users engagement & gratification	25	24.0	24.0	24.0

Factor	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Language & encoding techniques	29	26.9	26.9	50.9
Context & mass ideology	48	45.2	45.2	96.1
Virility & trendiness	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

As depicts in Table 4, the Context and Mass Ideology (45.2%) is considered the most important factor affecting digital media content, which is the most influential factor in shaping digital media content. Followed by language & encoding techniques (26.9%), which also play a significant role in determining digital media content factors. The third version of users with interaction and satisfaction (24%) has important influences with minimal fashion (3.9%) with courage and efficiency, but that is a short-term trend; it is of an ideological or broader context. These data demonstrate that users trust the context and popular ideology, as well as the fact that language and coding methods are considered additional factors.

Table 5
Digital Media Literacy Content Perception Factors

Perception Factor	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Self-reflection through contents	40	38.1	38.1	38.1
Continuous learning	22	21.0	21.0	59.1
Trending culture	10	9.5	9.5	68.6
Fact-checking & authentic sourcing	33	31.4	31.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

As shown in Table 5, the option to highly evaluate self-reflection through content to measure digital media literacy (38.1%) is the most common option to measure digital media literacy. This is the most used approach, while continuous training (21%) at the same time plays a key role in training content recognition in digital media. Because the culture of trends (9.5%) has the least impact on the way people measure digital literacy. These data show that self-reflection in content selection is a major factor and that validation of authentic facts and sources plays an important role in measuring perception.

Table 6
Major Indicators of Digital Media Literacy

Indicators	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Digital citizenship	48	45.2	45.2	45.2
Informed consensus	25	24.0	24.0	69.2
Setting social narratives	20	19.2	19.2	88.4
Safeguarding self	12	11.5	11.5	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 6 shows that digital citizenship (45.2%) is the main indicator of digital literacy. Enlightened consensus (24%) is the second most important factor. The installation of social narratives (19.2%) also plays a role. Safeguarding self (11.5%) has the lowest effect on the perception of digital literacy. This is how digital citizenship indicates that every citizen should be digitally literate to enhance informed consensus in general.

Table 7
Understanding of Fact-Checking and Verification Process

Understanding of Fact-Checking	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Confirmation bias	13	12.4	12.4	12.4
Protect user's rights	7	6.6	6.6	19.0
Encourage safer online environment	21	20.0	20.0	39.0
All of the above	65	61.0	61.0	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 7 illustrates that most respondents (61%) include all aspects of facts and verification (user rights and online environment entry) (20%). 12.4% of respondents highlighted the role of bias in confirmation in information verification. Protection of user rights (6.6%) is the least recognized aspect. This result shows that the main determinant of digital content is factual verification and corresponds to its authenticity.

Table 8*Technology Preference regarding Collecting or Gathering Information*

Technology Preference	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent (%)
Mobile phone	74	70.2	70.2	70.2
Laptop	14	13.5	13.5	83.7
Desktop computer	1	0.9	0.9	84.6
If any	17	15.4	15.4	100.0
Total	106	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8 reflects that mobile phones (70.2%) are the most preferred tools for collecting information. This illustrates the dominant role in the consumption of digital media. Laptops (13.5%) act as an alternative, but are far less used than mobile phones. Office computers (0.9%) are the least used, highlighting a decrease in information relevance. 15.4% of respondents prefer affordable equipment and flexibility demonstrated in use. This suggests that mobile phones are the main tool for consuming digital content, stressing their importance in the availability of modern information.

Conclusion

This research offers valuable insights into the changing landscape of digital literacy among university students in Nepal, highlighting that simply having access to technology is no longer enough. The clear personal takeaway from this study is that there is a significant gap not only in access but also in the ability to critically and effectively utilize digital tools, especially among students from less privileged backgrounds. Despite the widespread use of smartphones and internet connectivity, with 70.2% of respondents reporting access, deficiencies in skills remain a major concern. The study's contribution lies in its empirical investigation of how digital literacy impacts the broader digital divide within higher education. By examining 106 university students, the research provides concrete data on differences in usage habits, critical thinking skills, digital citizenship, and trust in digital content, such as SEO-based information. These results underscore the importance of incorporating structured digital literacy training into academic programs. Drawing on theories of the digital divide and media literacy, particularly the second-level digital divide theory—which focuses on differences in digital skills beyond mere access—the findings reinforce that digital literacy encompasses not only operational skills but also strategic, evaluative, and ethical engagement with digital content. The implications for the future are significant, as educational policymakers, curriculum designers, and government bodies

can use this study to develop targeted digital literacy initiatives. Such programs should be designed to address both technical skills and critical thinking, especially in rural and marginalized communities where digital inequalities are most evident.

It is advisable to develop comprehensive and inclusive digital literacy programs that focus on critical thinking, safe internet use, digital citizenship, and essential IT skills for individuals of all ages. To address the rural-urban digital gap, priority should be given to rural and marginalized communities by providing targeted resources and training tailored to their specific digital needs. Incorporating media and digital literacy as mandatory parts of university curricula is essential to prepare students with the skills necessary for success in an increasingly digital academic and professional landscape. As reliance on digital technology increases, cybersecurity education must be enhanced by raising awareness about privacy, data protection, and safe online behavior to ensure a secure digital environment for everyone. The 2015 ICT Policy, which includes 80 actionable strategies, should be actively implemented and regularly reviewed to promote sustainable and inclusive digital literacy development throughout Nepal. In summary, bridging the digital divide in Nepal's higher education requires not only infrastructure improvements but also a fundamental shift towards cultivating informed, critically engaged, and digitally proficient citizens. Collaboration among educational institutions, the government, and civil society is crucial to ensure equitable and responsible digital participation for all.

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Understanding Gender and Provincial Disparities in Labour Force Participation and Employment Patterns in Nepal

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Abstract

This study explores age, gender and provincial differences in labour market outcomes in Nepal with the objective of analyzing the socio-economic determinants of employment and labour force population. These differences are essential to grasp for equal employment opportunity policies and solving workforce issues. Descriptive analysis, analyses of variance (ANOVA) and regression models are employed to measure inequities using data extracted from the Nepal living standard survey 2022/23. Studies reveal employment levels for the 25-44 and 45-64 age groups and reveal poor outcomes for the youth (15-24) and elderly (65+). Currently, young people remain unemployed at a rate of 22.7 percent with low people being engaged in the labour force. Sudurpaschim region's labour force participation rate is 44.9 percent and negative unemployment rate while in Karnali it is 44.8 percent and Karnali has a slightly higher unemployment rate. The labour in the current society remains gender segregated with women being engaged more in unpaid work in the domestic and farming activities while men are engaged in paid activities in the non-farming activities. Of policy implications, the type of views is advocacy in matters to do with unemployment particularly the youth, regional economics, and gender through education and vocational training. The given figure shows the distribution of investment across different advantaged provinces where special efforts are needed to address the employment disparities and integrate more populace in Nepal. Therefore, this study yields wonderful insights for future policy-based intervention within the labour market.

Keywords: Gender inequality, labour market, participation rates, regional disparities

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Introduction

The gender and regional disparity still prevail in job market segmentation in Nepal as a result of historical and persisting societal, economic and cultural discrimination. Still, women's employment, considering the numerous policy measures boosting financial inclusiveness is still low compared to men's (Sharma & Bista, 2025). This paper establishes that factors that hinder female employees include: education restriction, other facilities such as childcare and cultural barriers (ILO, 2022; UN Women, 2011). Employment opportunities are not equal across provinces, which shows how place matters, geography, infrastructure, and access to resources influence employment opportunities for young people differently (CBS, 2021; World Bank, 2023). Despite these problems existing in developed and developing nations including Nepal currently available literature lacks cutting-edge work that deals with these two dimensions of employment more systematically leaving major research gaps in the Nepalese employment context.

However, the problems of regional inequality do not disappear; gender has been another sort of barrier. Some of the issues include state underdevelopment, low rates of access to non-farm employment, and socio-economic exclusion in the provinces of Madhesh and Karnali (World Bank, 2023). On the other hand, areas such as the Bagmati and Lumbini zones have advantages in urbanization and infrastructure, which enlarges the variety of employment accessibility. These regional unfair inequalities form the basis of this paper's proposal for conducting sex and geographic analysis to consider gender and regional relationships in the labor market imperfections.

Thus, this paper seeks to establish that employment patterns in the Nepalese labor market are dominantly influenced by gender and regional disparities. The labor force participation rate according to the survey is 79.4 percent for women and 80.9 percent for men, although both sexes are engaged in similar types of employment opportunities available to them, female employment is dominant in self-employment, especially in agriculture as observed at 67.7 percent while 53.6 percent of male workers (Ghosh et al., 2017). There is however progress in increasing women's employment in non-agriculture wage employment; nationally, they are over-concentrated in low-productive informality, thus increasing income disparities (Mehta & Awasthi, 2019). Changes from the agriculture sector to diversified sectors have led to the reduction of agricultural employment but poverty and gender inequality problems persist especially in rural areas where men are most dominant in long-term migration (Mishra, 2020; Sharma, 2024). It is more or less a migration of males since the socio-cultural gender prejudices majorly restrict ignorant women from accessing better employment opportunities (Mehta & Awasthi, 2019; Mishra, 2020). This has called for the

development of policies aimed at increasing access to education and vocational training for women to improve their status and performance in the labor market (Chakrabarty & Ray, 2019; Singh, 2024).

The employment structure is highly gendered with male employment in most activities dominating the male employment in Nepal (Khadka, 2020). Most employed women are unpaid family workers employed in the agriculture sector with regional differences by ecological regions (Kafle, 2015). Education factors such as higher education Employment of women are inversely related to their financial status; however, for women, who were employed, higher education means they are more likely to get paid employment (Kafle, 2015). Male migration for work hurts women's market work employment rate thus revealing some gender aspects in household welfare (Lokshin & Glinskayai, 2008). In South Asia and Nepal, female employment rates do not seem to have increased significantly since 2001 and even with the rising percentage of female employment, there is a higher employment rate in the rural regions than in any urban center (Najeeb et al., 2020). The employment rate often sharply declines with age, particularly middle-aged women and women with some College or University education experience lower employment than those who have less education or advanced education.

It is hoped that this work will help bridge the identified gaps in the current literature by exploring how gender and regional inequalities interact in shaping employment prospects in the Nepalese labour market. The primary research question guiding this investigation is: When comes to employment issues in Nepal, how do gender and regional biases affect labor market? This is a key question because earlier studies continue to reveal gender disparities in labour market, employment, and regional distribution (ILO, 2022; CBS, 2021). However, Nepal's labor market today is still characterized by gender and regional disparities which limited the economic opportunities of the population. Sharma (2025) underscores the significance of culturally adapted strategies in addressing depression among Nepalese individuals, highlighting the necessity of investing in rural infrastructure, integrating mental health services into primary care, and reducing costs through subsidization. It attempts to explore how men and women are being employed, their employment profiles, and participation rates and hence, identify employment differences between the two genders in this Nepalese context. The research will reveal 'how gender impacts employment opportunities and equity for sectors, for policy interventions'. In enriching the knowledge of gender-based discrimination and segregation in the labor market by incorporating the aspects of regional inequity, the research is useful in providing bases for formulating policies for gender equity as well as regional employment equity. Relying on the framework of segmented labor markets and gendered economic division of labor, the paper explores

gender-related structural factors that entrench gender disparities and makes policy-relevant evidence-informed suggestions to the national and global policymakers based on existing national surveys and cross-national databases.

Method and Procedures

The Nepal Living Standard Survey 2022/23 adapts the conventional method of defining a household and the sampling technique used is two-stage stratified sampling and the sample is purposely selected to be nationally and fifteen analytical domains representative; the domains are the seven provinces outside the Kathmandu valley area, the rural and urban of Kathmandu valley area. Many changes have been made to the questionnaire to make it correspond with the current-day problems as well as the consumption habits and tendencies, critical emphasis is being paid to the acquisition of data on food intake, expenditure that is not tied to food products, as well as durable goods. Conducting the actual data collection was time-consuming, the staff was trained extensively and data were collected and entered online in real time to reduce errors.

Sampling Design

NLSS-IV situates itself with an improved sampling frame from the Population and Housing Census 2021. It is nationally representative as well as representative for 15 domains or Strata; urban and rural separately of the seven provinces and Kathmandu Valley urban. It does not, however, have a panel sample like that being used in the NLSS-III. The sampling method adopted in the study was a conventional two-stage stratified sampling technique. During the first stage, employing the complete list of census EAs as PSUs 800 EA's were selected from the fifteen domains by applying PPS. In the selected areas, detailed household listing was done using tablets to update the list of households. The actual procedure was to list all the households in a selected enumeration area, and then sort the resulting list of households (on a statewide basis) according to the size of the households (implicit stratification). Each was purposely selected at the EA level and all households in post-listing or sorted list sampling frame in each EA were considered the secondary sampling units (SSUs) to be randomly selected with equal probability.

Statistical Unit

The NLSS-IV employed a standard Two-Stage Stratified Sampling technique where the census Enumeration Areas (EAs) are the Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) in the first stage and households are the Secondary Sampling Units (SSUs) in the second

stage. The definition of a household used herein is a direct extraction from United Nations “Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Rev 3” By the Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, UN 2017. Based on the guideline the concept of household is defined by the kind of arrangements made by persons individually or in groups of offering themselves food or other essentials for life. A household can be composed of one individual, or several persons living in a size that they can combine their incomes, share any expenses, or are related or unrelated. For this survey, a ‘household head,’ is any person presents in the household and oversees the functioning of the household.

Coverage

The survey is a generalization of the whole country with accidental samples and random samples from fifteen domains (strata) urban and rural areas of seven provinces and Kathmandu Valley and urban separately. All households in the country were included in the selection frame for the survey except those of diplomatic missions and institutional households (residential schools, hostels, prisons, army camps and hospitals). The criterion used in defining household members was according to their place of residence.

Questionnaire Design

The NLSS-IV questionnaire which has been administered to households in NLSS-IV is designed on similar lines as the NLSS-III household questionnaire. In NLSS-IV, there are some differences in which the community questionnaire was excluded from the previous rounds. The survey formation used the NLSS-III tool but with enhancements and alterations to suit the current assessment. The sections on marriage and maternity history, anthropometry and breastfeeding, which were included in the last round, were excluded in this round. Given the shift in the consumption pattern between 2011 and 2023, the survey expanded the list of foods, the disaggregated list of other items of daily use, and the list of durable items that were useful to capture household welfare in contemporary society. Thus, the NLSS-IV obtains the household consumption and expenditure data on the items in addition to those encompassed by the NLSS-III. The NLSS-IV retained the recall period for food consumption as was done in the NLSS-III but for a slight modification that was done to collect information on meals consumed outside the home for every member of the household separately, a seasoned questionnaire was pre-tested several times and the final version was made after the technical and steered committee of the NLSS IV had approved it.

Field Teams

NLSS-IV data was accrued over the period of one year from July 2022 to June 2023. The fieldwork was designed to cover the sample across the three seasons of summer, monsoon and winter in the Nepal region.

Data Entry and Management

Field teams keyed in their data on laptop computers while they were in the field so that any missing or inconsistent data could be pointed out and corrected by the team led by the supervisor, who was 17 Nepal Living Standards Survey IV. This enabled the team to visit the household for actual data in case the wrong data was recorded in the field. With the help of a real-time dashboard, this was further done in parallel at the national/aggregate level by the NSO and the error was communicated to the concerned field teams on real real-time basis. This practice ensured the quality of data collected in the region and reduced the time used in data processing. To do the further processing, cleaning and quality checks, STATA was used by NSO.

Results and Discussion

Results

The result analysis of the labor market shows that age and provinces play an essential role in determining the employment status in Nepal. Employment status reveals that the peak age group for employment is the working ages of 25-44 years (46.2%), followed by the second productive age group 45-64 years (34%) while the 65 years + employment ratio is at a low 7.8 percent.

Table 1

Labour Market Indicator by Province and Age Category (15 Years and Above)

Age Category	Employed (%)	Unemployed (%)	Outside Labour Force (%)	Total (%)	Unemployment Rate (%)	Labour Force Participation Rate (%)
Nepal	32.4	4.7	62.9	100	12.6	37.1
15-24	20.5	6	73.5	100	22.7	26.5
25-44	46.2	6	47.8	100	11.5	52.2
45-64	34	2.8	63.2	100	7.5	36.8
65+	7.8	0.7	91.5	100	8	8.5
Koshi	31.7	4.3	64.0	100.0	12.0	36.0
Madhesh	32	1.9	66.1	100	5.5	33.9
Bagmati	40.9	4.2	54.9	100	9.4	45.1

Gandaki	33.6	7.3	59.1	100	17.9	40.9
Lumbini	27.9	7	65.1	100	20	34.9
Karnali	25.6		66.4	100	23.8	33.6
Sudurpaschim	24.4	3.5	72.1	100	12.5	27.9

Table 1 shows that youth between the age of 15-24 are most affected by unemployment (22.7%), proving they have a difficult time finding jobs, and 73.5 percent of youth are outside the workforce, corresponding to elderly people at 91.5 percent. According to the provincial statistics, Bagmati province has the highest employment and labor force participation rates of 40.9 percent and 45.1 percent respectively, which shows better economic opportunities, Sudurpaschim province has the lowest employment and labor force participation rates of 24.4 percent and Karnali has the second lowest 25.6 percent. Karnali and Lumbini provinces also have relatively high unemployment levels, where the unemployment was established to be 23,8 percent in Karnali and 20 percent in Lumbini. Nationally, the employment to total population ratio of Nepal is 32.4 percent while other populations that are in the group of unemployed are 62.9 percent; therefore, labor force participation rate is a meager 37.1 percent. These results highlight the necessity of organizing prevention activities for youth unemployment, the development of measures that would stimulate employment in regions, including Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces, and the promotion of employment opportunities for vulnerable populations, including those in the context of COVID-19.

Table 2

Employment by Sector of Economy and Employment Type (15 years and above)

Category	Employment by Sector (%)				Employment by Type (%)		
	Agriculture	Non-Agriculture	Paid Agri	Paid Non-Agri	Self Agriculture	Self Non-Agriculture	Unpaid HH both
Nepal	13.3	86.7	10.4	56.6	1.9	22.6	8.4
Male	9.9	90.1	7.3	63.2	2	23.4	4.1
Female	19.5	80.5	16	44.8	1.6	21.3	16.3
Province							
Koshi	16.9	83.1	12.7	49.8	2.7	25	9.8
Male	13.6	86.4	10.1	56.7	3	24.8	5.4
Female	22.5	77.5	17.4	37.8	2.1	25.2	17.4

Madhesh	21.8	78.2	21.2	55.3	0.4	18.4	4.8
Male	14.5	85.5	13.9	62.9	0.5	19.8	2.9
Female	41.1	58.9	40.7	34.9	0	14.4	10
Bagmati	8.2	91.8	5.4	62.2	1.6	22.3	8.4
Male	6.5	93.5	3.8	66.6	1.8	24	3.8
Female	10.9	89.1	8	55.3	1.3	19.6	15.8
Gandaki	15	85	11.9	51.8	2.1	24.7	9.6
Male	9.7	90.3	6.8	60.5	2.6	25.4	4.7
Female	21.6	78.4	18.3	40.8	1.4	23.7	15.8
Lumbini	9.3	90.7	5.8	56.9	2.5	24.2	10.6
Male	7.1	92.9	4.1	63.6	2.4	25.2	4.7
Female	13.6	86.4	9.2	43.5	2.8	22.2	22.3
Karnali	11.1	88.9	3.5	59.6	5.3	23.5	8.1
Male	9	91	2.3	67.5	5.7	20.5	4
Female	14.5	85.5	5.5	46.4	4.7	28.6	14.8
Sudurpaschim	8.3	91.7	4.7	58.8	2.1	25	9.4
Male	5.7	94.3	2.5	65.9	2.2	24.7	4.7
Female	12.9	87.1	8.8	45.5	1.8	25.6	18.2

The employment patterns by sector and type showed that gender and regional disparity by sector exist in Nepal. At a national level, outside agriculture is much more pronounced (86.7 %), than agriculture (13.3%). Non-agricultural employment: 90.1 percent of employees are males, while only 9.9 percent, are females' total agriculture: 19.5 percent of the target audience is female while 80.5 percent is male. Paid employment is much higher in non-agriculture (56.6%) than in agriculture (10.4%) and women are more involved in unpaid family work (16.3%) than men 4.1 percent. At the regional level Bagmati represents the highest non-agricultural employment (90.8%) indicating urbanization and Madhesh and Koshi shows comparatively higher agricultural employment(21.8% and 16.9% respectively.). Two regions Karnali and Sudurpaschim have relatively high reliance on agriculture and unpaid work, indicating low levels of employees in formal employment. These trends suggest the necessity of specific measures, i.e., gender and regional equalization, focused on employment issues.

Table 3*Labor Force Participation Rate by Province*

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Statistic	p-value
Between Groups (Provinces)	373.26	6	62.21	25.03	0.0001
Within Groups (Error)	48.29	40	1.21		
Total	421.55	46			

It also compares variations in labour force participation rates (LFPR) between different provinces. The value of the between-groups sum of squares, $SS = 373.26$, suggests a large variability of the level of LFPR across the provinces and explains most of the total variability, $SS = 421.55$. $SS = 48.29$ and it indicates that the between groups degree of dispersion is also moderate, showing that the variation of LFPR within each located individual province is not much. The calculated F-statistic is 25.03 the p-value is 0.0001 and therefore at a 95 percent confidence level we reject the null hypothesis of no significant difference in LFPR across the provinces. This may imply that province-level variables have a very significant effect on LFPR and calls for a comprehensive study of regional socio-economic and policy influences on LFPR.

Table 4*Regression Results on Labor Force Participation Rate and Employment Indicators*

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Constant	100	1.72E-11	5.82E+12	0	[100.000, 100.000]
Age 15-24 Employed (%)	1.78E-15	7.07E-14	0.025	0.984	[-8.97e-13, 9e-13]
Age 25-44 Employed (%)	-1.78E-15	6.34E-14	-0.028	0.982	[-8.08e-13, 8.04e-13]
Age 45-64 Employed (%)	-1.78E-15	3.59E-14	-0.05	0.968	[-4.57e-13, 4.54e-13]
Age 65+ Employed (%)	-7.11E-15	3.04E-13	-0.023	0.985	[-3.88e-12, 3.86e-12]

Unemployed (%)	-7.11E-15	2.10E-13	-0.034	0.978	[-2.67e-12, 2.66e-12]
Outside Labor Force (%)	-1	1.48E-13	-6.77E+12	0	[-1.000, -1.000]

The regression analysis determines the correlation of LFPR with the distinction of employment status and age groups. The constant term reveal that in hypothesis condition, meaning in absence of variation of the independent variables the value of LFPR was be 100 percent with very significant relationship ($p=0$). Overall employment proportions in all age categories from 15-24, 25-44, and 45-64 plus, and 65 plus have negligible coefficients and insignificant p-values meaning that they are not determinant affecting the LFPR. Likewise, the unemployment exhibits no evidence of having substantial effect. But, the coefficient of outsiders of labor force, negatively correlates with the LFPR ($\beta = -1$, $p=0$) by definition. These findings imply that age-related employment and unemployment rates are not directly related to LFPR, though a focus on the rates of people outside the labor force is important for increasing participation. To understand other ways in which LFPR may be affected other than age related employment, then further research is needed.

Discussion

This study suggests that there are huge differences in labor market in Nepal, especially across age groups, gender and provinces, which reflect structural and regional reality. The employment rates among workers aged 25–44 equal 46.2percent which is not far from global average among all workers where 45.5percent of them are employed; and the workers aged 45–64 with the overall employment level of 34percent which is actually higher than the global average where 27.2 percent of them are employees (ILO, 2022). On the other hand, the employment to population ratio of the elderly population (65+) is 7.8 percent which is possibly due to retirement and low capacity to work, supported by various aging and employment literature reviews (Chand, 2018). A high level of NEY (22.7percent) and a large percentage of non-workers under 15–24 years (73.5%), confirm constraints to entering the labor market, which aligns with South Asian studies on difficulties for youth labor force integration (Chakravarty et al., 2019). They imply the required public policies, including skill development and demanded youth employment policies, to consider the labor market.

Further inequalities are unveiled by provincial variations in the employment rates. Bagmati has the highest employment and labor force participation rate both of which show signs of urbanization and access to economic opportunities as pointed out earlier by Timsina et al. On the other extreme, Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces

have low employment and participation rates and high unemployment, among them, Karnali Province has a 23.8 percent unemployment rate and Lumbini Province 20 percent.

These results support prior research revealing how insufficient development and economic activities reduced the employment rate in regions of Nepal (Kaiser & Barstow, 2022) action and access to economic opportunities, as previously reported by Timsina et al. (2020). Conversely, Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces exhibit the lowest employment and participation rates, coupled with high unemployment, as seen in Karnali (23.8%) and Lumbini (20%). These findings align with studies showing the impact of limited infrastructure and economic activity on regional employment levels in Nepal (Kaiser & Barstow, 2022). These discrepancies are essential to be closed by investing in the regions, focusing on industries, transport and educational systems.

The existing trends indicate that men and women have significantly different employment patterns. The labor force map shows that women are predominant in agriculture at 19.5 percent, and unpaid care giving at 16.3 percent while men have dominion of paid and non-agriculture employment percent. These findings are in line with studies that point to the perennial issues of gender disparities that affect women employees in the Nepalese labour market as shown indicated by studies by Khadka (2020). The issues that affect women in the Nepalese labour market include; access to education and credit. Provincially, provinces such as Bagmati have relatively higher non-agricultural employment proportion, and provinces such as Karnali and Sudurpaschim rely mostly on agriculture and unpaid, indicating that there are limited employment opportunities in formal employment in the provinces. Addressing these gender and regional inequalities entails gender-transformative economic policies and programs that create employment in the forms that are recognized by the law.

Moreover, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) highlights a very high degree of variability in labour force participation rates (LFPR) by province by presenting a high F-cal value of 25.03 and a very low p-value of 0.0001. Thus, this result implies that provincial characteristics including economic development, transportation networks and institutional measures have a strong bearing on LFPR. This can be paralleled with other regional investigations stressing SES impacts on LM participation (Pant et al., 2024).

The analysis realizes that the least squared regression equation indicates that the proportion outside labor force is the most significant predictor of LFPR ($\beta = -1$; $p=0$). Such variables as employment and unemployment rates by age categories do not exhibit significant impacts. This is in synergy with research findings showing that the elimination of system constraints like lack of education, health care and family support play a key role in increasing the labour force participation (Koirala, 2021). Therefore, such literature highlights the importance of policies, that may improve the characteristics

of employment and, therefore, economic reintegration of excluded segments including prejudiced communities and underrepresented provinces in Nepal.

Conclusion

A gender and age disaggregated analysis of labor market indicators in this paper indicates that youth, female, and provincial disparities that exist in Nepal are highly pronounced. Productive-age employees (25–44 and 45–64 years) surveyed for the employment rates exhibit numerous opportunities consistently higher than those either unemployed or inactive in the labor market among the youth (15–24) and the elderly (65+). The employment participation rates do appear disparate within provinces with Bagmati province enjoying high employment from high participation emanating from high urbanization levels, while Sudurpaschim and Karnali provinces suffer low employment participation and high unemployment rates compounded by low participation in arable farming to feed them. The roles are still fairly divided by gender, with women being most dominant in the unpaid category such as agriculture thus implying that there are blank policies that need to be fulfilled to encourage more women to be economically active.

Therefore, the current study advocates for the need to overcome structural factors, the likes of education, skills development, as well as access to employment in the labour market. Socioeconomic characteristics of provinces directly affect labour force characteristics and call for policy targeted at regions. It is therefore recommended that future papers look into the relationship between employment opportunities, education and training so as to provide an input to policy making.

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Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour: Reflection and Future Perspectives

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Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive bibliometric and thematic analysis of digital marketing and consumer behaviour research from 2010 to 2024, examining publication trends, citation impacts, key contributors, and evolving research themes. Data were extracted from the Scopus and Web of Science databases. In total, 1803 research journals were analyzed. This study utilized R programming software (R Studio) to analyze the bibliometric data. The analysis highlights a rapidly expanding field centered on social media marketing and consumer behaviour. The findings reveal an exponential growth in annual publications, increasing from 11 articles in 2010 to 284 in 2023, with a notable 16.01% yearly growth rate, signaling the field's expanding scholarly significance. However, the trend appears to decrease in 2024, as data extracted in the first quarter suggests a decline. Three key field plots structure the discussion and dominant themes: platform-specific studies (Instagram, Facebook), brand equity, and ROI measurement. Thematic trends further underscore the shift from theoretical frameworks

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to data-driven applications, with emerging focus areas such as adolescent consumer behaviour and cross-cultural dynamics. The study concludes that while social media marketing research has matured rapidly, challenges remain in striking a balance between productivity and its impact. Future research should address understudied platforms (e.g., TikTok), integrate advanced analytics, and reconcile new digital behaviours with classic marketing theories. This analysis provides a roadmap for scholars and practitioners to navigate the evolution of the field and prioritize high-impact research avenues.

Keywords: Digital marketing, bibliometric analysis, platform-specific marketing, consumer engagement

Introduction

In recent years, social media marketing has become essential for shaping consumer purchasing decisions and enhancing customer satisfaction. Advancements in social media marketing in the contemporary era contribute to saving consumers both time and money while also increasing their satisfaction levels (Mazeed & Kodumagulla, 2019). Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok enable businesses to showcase their products and services effectively (Hefler et al., 2013; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). The growth of the Internet and social media marketing is a critical consideration when formulating marketing strategies (Yu et al., 2023). Social media marketing plays a pivotal role in disseminating information about products, brands, and target audiences (Khraiwish & Alsharif, 2024), thereby augmenting sales. It has become indispensable for businesses, brands, and emerging small-scale enterprises to enhance their marketing strategies (Ali et al., 2023; Bauer & Tian, 2024).

The evolving concept of social media marketing has a significant impact on Internet users (Jena et al., 2024). The development of social media is a consequence of the proliferation of social networks within the field of communication technology. Social media marketing (SMM) has fundamentally transformed consumer behavior, establishing itself as a pivotal component of contemporary business strategies (Letunovska et al., 2021; Potter, 2012). Platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook (Curtis et al., 2021; Tartaraj et al., 2024), facilitate global brand engagement, streamline purchasing processes, and enhance customer satisfaction through targeted content (Goel et al., 2022). The transition from static Web 1.0 to interactive Web 2.0 technologies has heightened the significance of SMM, fostering two-way communication and facilitating real-time feedback (Yu et al., 2023). As digital connectivity continues to expand, businesses increasingly depend on SMM to reduce costs, personalize outreach, and drive sales, rendering it indispensable for firms of all sizes (Kemp et al., 2021).

Historically, consumer behavior has been influenced by physical touchpoints (Pahari et al., 2024) and traditional advertising methods (Mazeed & Kodumagulla, 2019; Thakur & Kushwaha, 2024). However, social media marketing (SMM) has disrupted these conventional patterns by emphasizing accessibility, interactivity, and viral reach (Sheth & Sinha, 2015). SMM utilizes advanced tools such as AI-driven analytics and influencer partnerships to decipher consumer preferences and optimize marketing campaigns (Thakur & Kushwaha, 2024). In contrast to traditional methods, such as print advertisements, SMM offers dynamic, multi-platform engagement (Bauer & Tian, 2024; Singh & Kunja, 2023), enabling brands to monitor trends in real-time (Sharabati et al., 2024). This paradigm shift highlights the necessity for agile marketing strategies that align with digital-native behaviors (Manyanga et al., 2024; Peltier et al., 2024).

The proliferation of smartphones has solidified the ubiquity of social media marketing (SMM), with users anticipating seamless and interactive brand experiences (Elshaer et al., 2024). This study provides insights into leading countries, universities, journals, authors, and the most frequently cited papers, while also offering a prospective overview of research in social media marketing and consumer behavior. It serves as a valuable resource for journal editors to identify areas for growth within this discipline. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of understanding social media marketing and consumer behavior for policymakers who aim to enhance the promotion of locally produced goods. Additionally, it provides multinational companies with strategic guidance to refine their branding and marketing approaches, enabling them to attract consumers more effectively.

Despite the predominance of social media marketing (SMM), research on consumer behavior remains fragmented, particularly concerning the impact of platform-specific features (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) on decision-making processes (Pahari et al., 2024). Over the past decade, significant research has focused primarily on social media marketing and consumer behavior (Mude & Undale, 2023). Bibliometric analysis involves an examination of published literature across various academic disciplines, including management, economics, accounting, consumer studies, promotion, and entrepreneurship (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022).

This study identifies significant deficiencies in existing research and addresses them through a bibliometric analysis. There has been insufficient comprehensive mapping of the field. Numerous studies have examined specific themes or patterns; however, a systematic endeavour to monitor the evolution of these concerns over time has been lacking. Consequently, the overall advancement of the research domain remains ambiguous. Much of the literature focuses on specific regions, overlooking global trends and disparities between locations, particularly in non-Western areas. This

limited focus complicates the application of the findings to a broader array of locations. Limited studies have employed bibliometric techniques to examine the performance analysis and science mapping within the subject over time. However, few studies have employed citation network analysis to identify connections across various study domains and examine the influence of publications on other subjects.

This study aims to address these deficiencies and provide a more straightforward and structured overview of the research landscape by conducting a bibliometric analysis of 1,803 publications indexed in Scopus and Web of Science. Research has covered diverse subjects, including journals, leading authors, most-cited papers, and universities. Consequently, bibliometric analysis is considered the most effective method for synthesizing research on social media marketing and consumer behavior. This study seeks to address these gaps through a bibliometric analysis of 1,803 Scopus and Web of Science-indexed publications (2010-2024), trends in social media marketing and consumer behavior through bibliometric analysis, by addressing the following research questions:

1. What are the trends in annual publications and citations?
2. Which documents are most influential?
3. Which journals, authors, countries, and organizations are the most productive?
4. What are the future research directions?

Methods and Procedures

Bibliometric techniques were used for data analysis. Bibliometrics, a subfield of library and information science, utilizes quantitative methods to analyze data (Pahari et al., 2024). It enables the identification and examination of previous research across various journals, research domains, or regions by analyzing general patterns on specific topics (Pahari et al., 2024; Ye et al., 2021). Bibliometric studies are employed in the literature to assess the significance of a topic (Hassan Shah et al., 2022) and to evaluate the contributions of journals and nations (Donthu et al., 2021). The core of bibliometric analysis involves identifying research gaps across different mappings of papers, authors, journals, terms, and countries to construct an intellectual framework of scholarly knowledge.

Bibliometric techniques have undergone substantial development and garnered significant popularity among contemporary researchers. This advancement has been facilitated by progress in computer technology and the availability of comprehensive bibliographic databases, such as Web of Science and Scopus. Scopus and Web of Science are the most frequently utilized and influential repositories for social science research, serving as essential resources for analytical and quantitative analyses (Donthu

et al., 2022; Singh & Kunja, 2023; Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022; Verma et al., 2021). These methods were employed to conduct detailed analyses of journals, disciplines, institutions, and countries. Our review focused on two primary aspects of bibliometric research: performance analysis and science mapping. Performance analysis evaluates productivity and impact using metrics such as publication counts and citations (Kumar et al., 2022; Sharma & Silal, 2023). In contrast, science mapping visualizes the structure and dynamics of a field (Alonso Dos Santos et al., 2022; Siritwong et al., 2024; Tajudin et al., 2022). Our study aimed to integrate these analyses to answer these research questions.

We used the search strategy by using “OR” and “AND” in SCOPUS and Web of science as: “Social media marketing” OR “Social media optimization” OR “email marketing” OR “Mobile marketing” OR “Facebook Marketing” OR “Instagram Marketing” OR “Tiktok Marketing” OR “Twitter Marketing” OR “social networking sites” AND “Consumer behaviour” OR “Consumer behavior” OR “consumer Purchasing” OR “consumer buying Intention” OR “individual Buying” OR “consumer Buying Decision Process” OR “consumer Buying Decision Process.” Articles, conference papers, and English reviews were chosen. Similarly, the source type was limited to journals, books, conference proceedings, and book series. The documents were limited to Business, Management, Accounting, Social Sciences, Economics, Econometrics, and Finance. A total of 1,285 documents were downloaded from Scopus, along with 784 documents from Web of Science. Following the removal of duplicate records, 1,803 papers were retained for final analysis. Relevant data were retrieved on April 4, 2024.

Results

Descriptive Analysis of Bibliometric Data

A descriptive analysis of documents published in Scopus and the Web of Science was undertaken. Table 1 presents an overview of the data, document types, content, authors, and collaborations among authors. Bibliometric analysis indicates a rapidly expanding field, with 1,803 documents published between 2010 and 2024, reflecting an annual growth rate of 16.01%. This increase in research output suggests a growing academic and practical interest in the subject. The average document age of 4.33 years signifies a predominance of recent publications, while the high average citation count (26.28 per document) underscores the field’s impact. The 42,759 references across all documents (23.7 per article) highlight extensive engagement with prior literature, characteristic of well-established yet evolving research domains.

Table 1*Main Information*

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	2010:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc.)	717
Documents	1803
Annual Growth Rate%	16.01
Document Average Age	4.33
Average citations per doc	26.28
References	42759
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	2360
Author's Keywords (DE)	4158
AUTHORS	
Authors	4207
Authors of single-authored docs	222
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	251
Co-Authors per Doc	3.05
International co-authorships %	18.41
DOCUMENT TYPES	
Article	1500
article article	9
article; book chapter	1
article; early access	42
article; proceedings paper	6
article; retracted publication	1
book review	12
conference paper	131
conference paper article	1
conference paper conference paper	1
editorial material	22
Letter	2

meeting abstract	8
news item	2
meeting abstract	8
news item	2
Review	61
Review conference paper	1
review; early access	3

The dataset comprises 717 distinct sources, indicating a moderately diverse publication landscape. The majority of documents were research articles (1,551, including early access papers), supplemented by 131 conference papers and 61 reviews, which likely contributed to the elevated citation rates. The inclusion of retracted publications and early access articles suggests ongoing knowledge refinement and underscores the necessity for quality control mechanisms within the field.

Authorship patterns indicated the presence of 4,207 unique authors, with an average of 3.05 co-authors per document, suggesting a robust culture of collaboration. Nevertheless, the existence of 251 single-author papers, constituting 14% of the total, underscores the continued significance of independent research. The international collaboration was observed at 18.41%, which is less prevalent than in highly globalized disciplines, highlighting opportunities for enhanced cross-border research partnerships.

The analysis of keywords revealed 4,158 author-provided keywords (DE) and 2,360 Keywords Plus (ID), indicating a broad spectrum of research themes. The disparity between the DE and ID terms may reflect either interdisciplinary diversity or a lack of standardized terminology, necessitating further thematic mapping, such as co-word analysis, to discern dominant trends.

Publication Trends and Citation Analysis

Trends and citation analysis reveal the annual trends in publications and citations, with a specific focus on journal publications and citations. Figure 1 illustrates the trends in publication outcomes related to the investigation of social media marketing and consumer behavior. The publication data revealed a significant growth in research output within the field. Beginning with only 11 articles in 2010, annual publications exhibited a consistent upward trajectory, reaching a peak of 284 articles by 2023. It represents a compound annual growth rate of approximately 30%, indicating rapidly expanding scholarly interest in the subject area. The current year (2024) has recorded 88 publications, suggesting that this growth trend is likely to continue.

A notable inverse relationship emerges between the publication volume and citation impact over time. Early publications from 2010 to 2013 demonstrate exceptionally high mean citation rates, with the 2010 cohort achieving an impressive 204.09 citations per article. This pattern suggests that these foundational works have established critical frameworks that continue to influence subsequent research. However, as the publication numbers increased substantially after 2015, the mean citation rates showed a corresponding decline. The most recent complete year (2023) shows a mean of just 3.17 citations per article, while 2024 publications average only 0.75 citations to date.

Several factors are likely to have contributed to the observed trends. The high citation rates of early publications can be attributed to their pioneering status and extended period available for citation accumulation. The subsequent decline in citation rates is correlated with both the exponential increase in publication volume and the inherent citation lag for newer works. This pattern aligns with established bibliometric principles, wherein seminal early works accrue a disproportionate number of citations, whereas newer contributions require time to demonstrate their impact. The data suggest that the field has transitioned from an initial phase dominated by foundational research to a more mature phase characterized by broader, yet less immediately impactful, contributions.

Figure 1
Trends of Publications

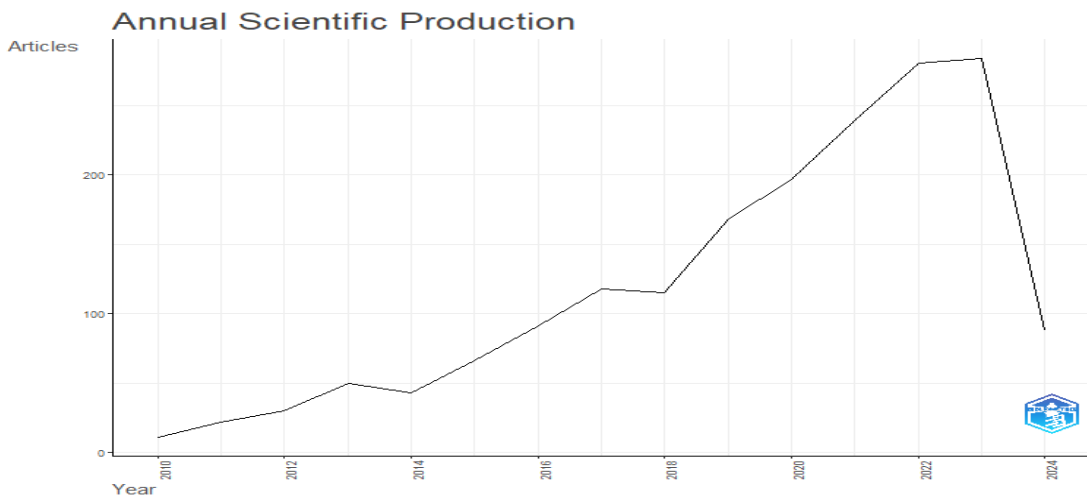


Table 2*Trends in Publications*

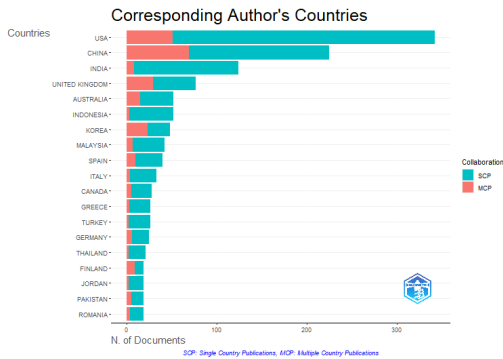
Years	Articles	MEAN Citation per Article
2010	11	204.09
2011	22	68.41
2012	30	124.43
2013	50	77.54
2014	43	46.88
2015	66	73.86
2016	91	40.46
2017	118	42.27
2018	115	36.06
2019	168	27.64
2020	197	23.41
2021	239	17.23
2022	281	7.06
2023	284	3.17
2024*	88*	0.75*

Note: * means running year

The findings presented herein have significant implications for understanding the evolution of the field. The continuous increase in publications reflects robust and growing scholarly engagement, likely propelled by the field's practical significance in an increasingly digital environment. Nonetheless, the observed decline in citation metrics suggests that researchers should contemplate strategies to augment the visibility and impact of recent studies, potentially through more targeted dissemination or interdisciplinary collaboration. Future research could investigate whether this citation pattern persists across various subdomains within the field or differs according to methodological approaches.

Leading Countries in Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Research

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of publications by corresponding authors across various countries. The United States ranks first, publishing 342 articles. China followed, with 258 articles. India occupied the third position with 225 articles. The United Kingdom was the fourth-largest contributor, with 124 articles.

Figure 2*Leading Countries in Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Research*

Australia published 77 articles. Other countries on the list included Indonesia and Korea, each with 52 articles, Malaysia with 48 articles, Spain with 42 articles, and Italy with 40 articles. The figure distinguishes between single-country publications (SCP) and multiple-country publications (MCP). Numerous countries have published significant studies on social media marketing and consumer behavior. This section examines the implications and effects observed in most countries within the scope of studies on social media marketing and consumer behavior from 2014 to 2024.

Table 3 presents the outcomes for the top 10 countries based on the total number of citations for their papers. In instances of a tie, the country with the most recent publication was ranked higher.

Table 3*Top 10 Leading Countries in Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour Research*

S.N	Country	Total Citations	Average Article Citations
1.	USA	12059	35.3
2.	CHINA	4703	20.9
3.	UNITED KINGDOM	3886	50.5
4.	KOREA	2730	56.9
5.	CANADA	2574	91.9
6.	INDIA	2105	17
7.	NETHERLANDS	1486	165.1
8.	FRANCE	1428	158.7
9.	FINLAND	1159	61
10.	AUSTRALIA	1062	20.4

Table 3 illustrates that the United States has emerged as the most prolific nation, with 12,059 citations of these publications. These data suggest that scholars in the U.S. are conducting significant research in the domains of social media marketing and consumer behavior. China ranked second with 4,703 citations, followed by India and the United Kingdom, each with 3,886 citations. Similarly, Korea, with 2,730 citations, ranked fourth in social media marketing and consumer behavior, while Canada, with 2,574 citations, ranked fifth. India accounted for 2,105 citations and was ranked sixth, the Netherlands for 1,486 citations, ranked seventh, France for 1,428 citations, ranked eighth, Finland for 1,159 citations, ranked ninth, and Australia for 1,062 citations, ranking tenth in the field of social media marketing and consumer behavior.

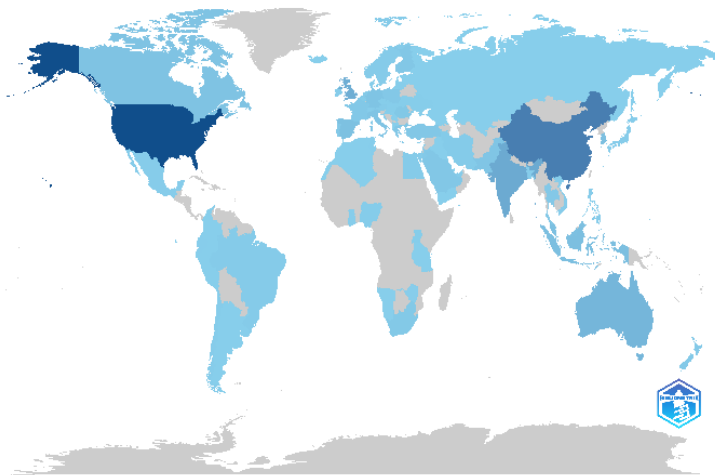
Country Scientific Production on Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

As illustrated in Figure 3, the United States exhibits the most substantial scientific output concerning social media marketing and consumer behavior, with 12,059 citations and 342 articles.

Figure 3

Country Scientific Production

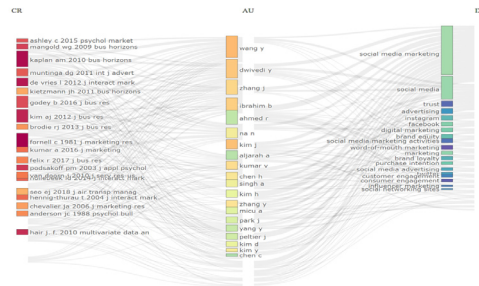
Country Scientific Production



Three field plots

Three-field plots, also known as Sankey plots, illustrate the interconnections among three distinct fields, with the size of each segment corresponding to the value of the respective node.

Figure 4
Three-Field Plots



The first field plot highlighted the most influential authors and foundational publications in this domain. Notable scholars, such as Kaplan AM (2010), Mangold WG (2009), and Godey B (2016), emerge as pivotal contributors, with their works published in high-impact journals, including *Business Horizons* and the *Journal of Business Research*. These publications often focus on conceptual frameworks for social media marketing, digital advertising, and consumer behavior, laying the groundwork for subsequent research. The presence of seminal works, such as Fornell C (1981) and Hennig-Thurau T (2004), further underscores the interdisciplinary roots of the field, bridging marketing, psychology, and information systems. This plot reveals a strong academic lineage in which early theoretical contributions continue to anchor contemporary studies.

The second plot identifies prolific authors driving recent advancements and suggests their active role in expanding the literature. Their work often intersects with emerging themes, such as customer engagement, social media advertising, and brand equity, reflecting the field's shift toward empirical and platform-specific studies (e.g., Instagram and Facebook). The clustering of these authors around post-2010 publications aligns with the rapid evolution of digital marketing practices, emphasizing metric-driven and technology-aided research. This plot highlights the field's dynamic nature, where newer scholars build upon foundational theories while addressing modern challenges, such as data privacy and algorithmic targeting.

The third plot maps the most recurrent keywords, revealing the field's thematic priorities: social media marketing and consumer engagement dominate, followed by specialized terms, such as word-of-mouth marketing and brand equity. The prominence of platform-specific keywords (e.g., Instagram and Facebook) indicates a focus on channel-specific strategies. At the same time, broader terms such as digital marketing and trust in advertising reflect enduring conceptual concerns. The coexistence of theoretical constructs (e.g., trust) and practical tools (e.g., social media advertising)

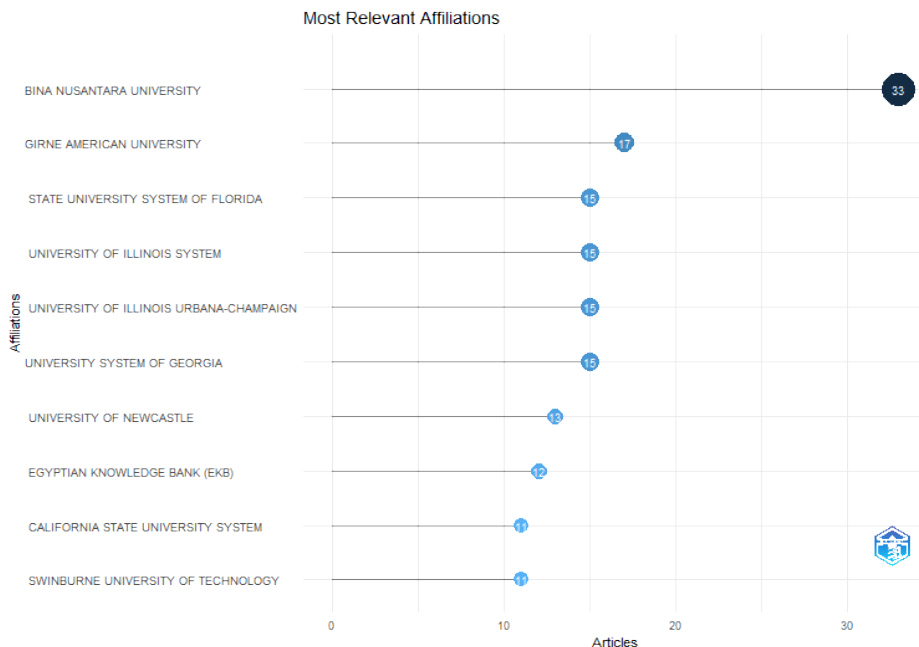
suggests a balanced interplay between theory and application. This thematic structure underscores the field’s responsiveness to technological trends while maintaining ties with traditional marketing principles. This structure informs future research directions, suggesting opportunities to explore understudied platforms (e.g., TikTok), integrate advanced analytics, and revisit classic theories in light of new digital behaviors.

The Most Productive Institutions of Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

A significant component of the bibliometric analysis involved identifying universities that demonstrated the highest levels of creativity and productivity in the domains of social media marketing and consumer behavior. The results, as depicted in Figure 5, indicate that Bina Nusantara University has emerged as the most productive institution. Girne American University secured the second position, followed by the State University of Florida in third place. The University of Illinois system and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign ranked next. The University System of Georgia, University of Newcastle, EKB, California State University System, and Swinburne University of Technology closely followed.

Figure 5

Top Ten Most Productive Universities



Leading Journals: Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behavior

A comprehensive bibliometric review necessitates an examination of the most prolific sources, particularly those that make significant contributions to research on social media marketing and consumer behavior. Table 4 lists the top ten sources that have been published extensively in these areas. The JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MARKETING has emerged as the leading journal, with 77 publications spanning the period from 2014 to 2024. The JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH has 41 publications. SUSTAINABILITY ranks third, contributing 38 publications, while the International Journal of Data and Network SCIENCE ranks fourth, with 33 publications on social media marketing and consumer behavior.

Similarly, SPRINGER PROCEEDING IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS was ranked fifth, with a total of 29 publications. FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY and the JOURNAL OF RETAILING AND CONSUMER SERVICES occupied sixth and seventh positions, respectively, each with 28 publications. Subsequently, the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING and the JOURNAL OF DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING, each with 24 publications, were ranked eighth and ninth. The ASIA PACIFIC JOURNAL OF MARKETING AND LOGISTICS was identified as the tenth most prolific source on the list.

Table 4

Top 10 Sources that Published Social Media Marketing Research

Rank	Sources	Publications
1	JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN INTERACTIVE MARKETING	77
2	JOURNAL OF BUSINESS RESEARCH	41
3	SUSTAINABILITY	38
4	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DATA AND NETWORK SCIENCE	33
5	SPRINGER PROCEEDINGS IN BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS	29
6	FRONTIERS IN PSYCHOLOGY	28
7	JOURNAL OF RETAILING AND CONSUMER SERVICES	28
8	INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVERTISING	24
9	JOURNAL OF DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING	24
10	ASIA PACIFIC JOURNAL OF MARKETING AND LOGISTICS	19

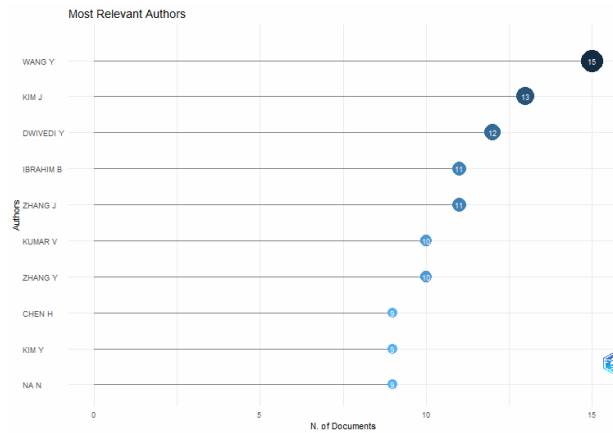
Most Relevant Authors: Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Social media marketing has become a prominent subject in contemporary marketing research. Numerous researchers have enriched the literature on social media marketing through scholarly publications. The figure below identifies the top ten authors who have made significant contributions to this field. The rings in the figure represent the authors, with the size of each ring indicating the productivity level.

Larger rings correspond to higher productivity.

Figure 6

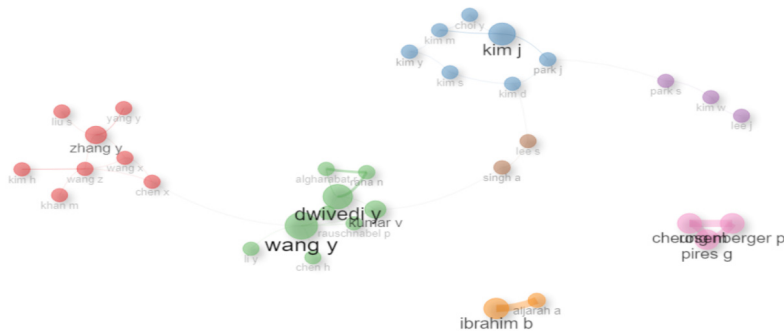
Top 10 Most Relevant Authors for Social Media Marketing



WANG Y led the list with 15 publications, followed by KIM J with 13 publications. DWIVEDI Y ranked third with 12 publications, whereas IBRAHIM B and ZHANG J ranked fourth and fifth, respectively, each with 11 publications. KUMAR V is sixth, with 10 publications, and ZHANG Y is seventh, with 10 publications. CHEN H is eighth with nine publications, KIM Y is ninth with nine publications, and NA N. completes the list in tenth place with nine publications. WANG Y emerged as the most prolific in terms of bibliographic coupling, demonstrating the most substantial bibliometric connections with other authors.

Figure 7

Bibliographic Coupling of Authors

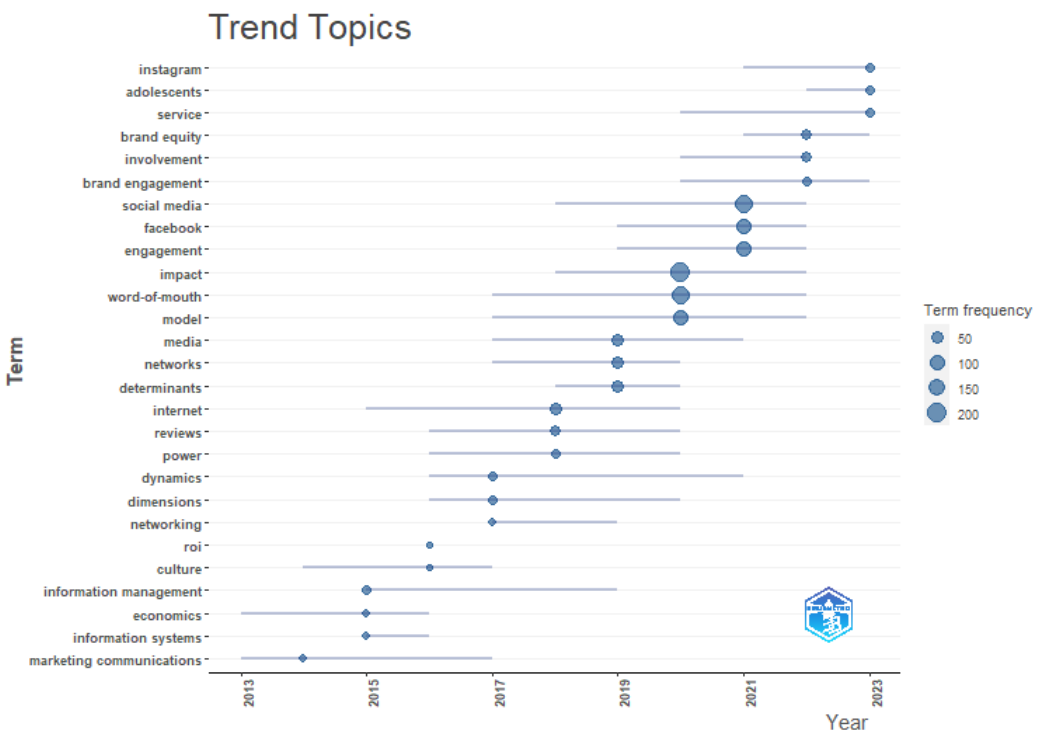


Trending Topics Relating to Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behavior

Social media marketing represents a burgeoning area of interest within business and technology. Figure 8 presents the trends in scholarly topics as evidenced by the number of documents published over specified time intervals. For instance, the topic of marketing communications was prominent from 2013 to 2017, with six papers published during this period. Between 2015 and 2019, 13 documents were published in the field, comprising 13 papers. Similarly, the Internet reached its peak in article publications, totaling 47, from 2015 to 2020. By contrast, the topic of media was associated with 40 articles published between 2017 and 2021. The research topic of word-of-mouth was particularly prevalent from 2017 to 2023, with 193 articles published during this period. Overall, the trend in social media was significant from 2018 to 2022, with 176 articles published.

Figure 8

Trending Topic Relating to Social Media Marketing



Additionally, Facebook has experienced a notable increase, with 110 articles published from 2019 to 2023. Facebook is a prominent online platform that has

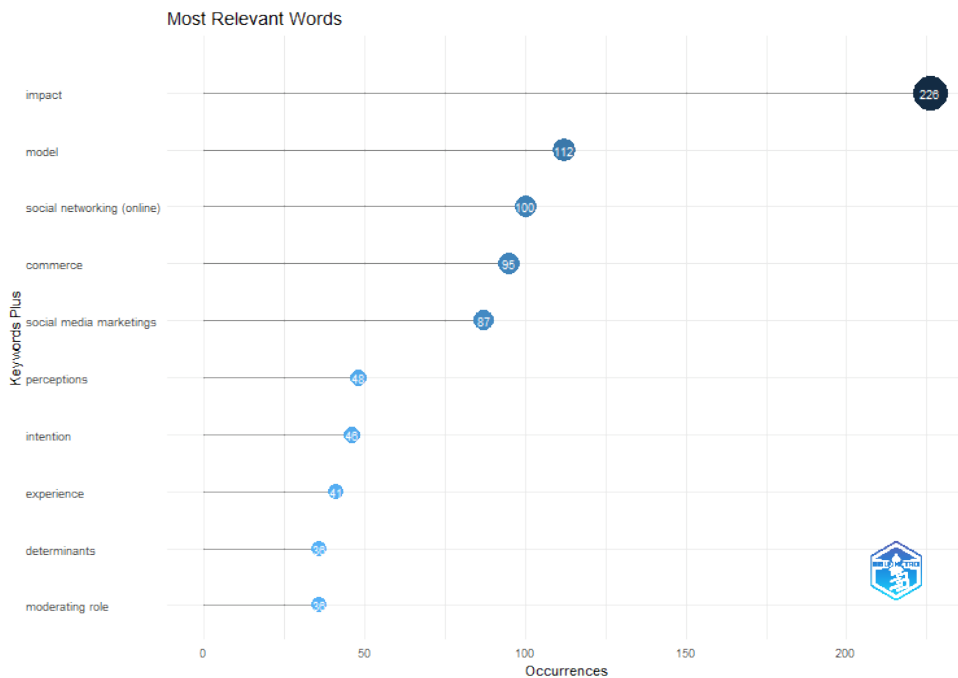
significantly engaged individuals, groups, and organizations in the dissemination of market information. Similarly, Instagram exerted a considerable influence. Thirteen articles were published between 2021 and 2023, which addressed various trending topics related to social media marketing.

Most occurrences of words related to Social Media Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

Figure 9 presents the most relevant terms used in social media marketing. The most frequently referenced terms pertain to social media marketing. The term “impact” appears most frequently, with 226 occurrences. In contrast, “moderating role” is the least frequent among the top ten terms in the occurrence table, with 36 occurrences.

Figure 9

Top 10 Most Relevant Occurrence Words in Social Media Marketing



The most frequently cited references pertain to social media marketing and consumer behavior. Social media marketing underscored the most significant terms used over time. Additionally, the most prevalent keywords employed in research on social media marketing were identified as social media marketing (827), social media (511), marketing (111), Facebook (110), and digital marketing (102).

Figure 10

Top 10 Most Relevant Occurrence Words in Social Media Marketing



Discussion

The findings of this study elucidate several significant trends and patterns in social media marketing and consumer behavior research from 2010 to 2024. The exponential increase in publications, with the output rising nearly 26-fold during this period, highlights the field's emergence as a crucial area of scholarly inquiry. This growth trajectory corresponds to the rapid digital transformation of marketing practices worldwide, as both businesses and academics contend with the implications of social media platforms, data analytics, and evolving consumer behaviors. The observed annual growth rate of 16.01% significantly surpasses that of many traditional business disciplines, reflecting both the field's novelty and practical relevance in an increasingly digital economy.

Citation analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of the field. While early works (2010-2013) achieved notably high citation rates, likely due to their foundational nature and extended citation windows, the subsequent decline in citations per article despite an increase in publication volume suggests several possible interpretations. First, this pattern may indicate the field's maturation, where foundational theories have become widely accepted and newer works contribute incrementally rather than revolutionarily. Second, the proliferation of publications may lead to greater fragmentation of research attention, with citations being distributed across a larger number of articles. Third, the observed trend could reflect a shift from theoretical contributions to more applied context-specific studies, which may have a narrower citation potential.

The thematic progression identified through keyword and content analyses illustrates the expansion of research on digital marketing and consumer behavior from initial platform-specific studies (e.g., Facebook marketing) to more advanced investigations into consumer psychology, engagement metrics, and cross-platform strategies. The prominence of terms such as "brand equity" and "ROI," alongside

“adolescent” behavior and “cultural” dimensions, indicates an increasingly comprehensive approach that integrates marketing theory with practical business outcomes and societal impacts. This evolution reflects the digital transformation occurring in industry practice, in which marketers are now required to incorporate data analytics, psychological insights, and cross-cultural considerations into their strategies.

Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis of digital marketing research spanning 2010 to 2024 elucidates a field that has experienced exponential growth in volume while undergoing significant thematic and methodological transformations. This study contributes to the understanding of the discipline’s development in three primary ways. First, it documents and quantifies the remarkable growth trajectory of social media marketing and consumer behavior as a research domain, establishing benchmarks for future comparative studies. Second, it provides empirical evidence on the evolution of citation patterns as the field matures, offering insights that may inform research evaluation practices. Third, it maps the thematic progression from platform-specific studies to more sophisticated multidimensional investigations of digital consumer behavior, marketing strategies, and marketing effectiveness.

These findings indicate several significant avenues for future research. There is a persistent need for additional longitudinal and empirical studies to assess the enduring effects of social media marketing strategies, particularly as new platforms emerge and consumer behaviors continue to evolve. Theoretical development and practical application require further investigation, as does the challenge of maintaining research quality amid the rapid growth of publications. Furthermore, the relative underrepresentation of specific emerging platforms (e.g., TikTok) and geographic contexts in the literature highlights valuable opportunities for expansion. This analysis lays the groundwork for more comprehensive investigations of publication patterns, knowledge dissemination, and research impact within the discipline. These findings may guide funding decisions, editorial strategies, and individual researchers’ publication approaches as the field continues to develop.

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A Comparative Study of Financial Literacy among Undergraduate Management and Humanities Students of Pokhara University

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Abstract

This study aims to assess and compare the level of financial literacy among undergraduate Management and Humanities students of Pokhara University. Specifically, it evaluates differences in financial knowledge, financial skills, and financial attitudes between students from these two academic disciplines. This descriptive, cross-sectional, and comparative study assessed the financial literacy of 327 undergraduate students from Pokhara University's Management and Humanities programs using convenience sampling. Data were collected with a verified financial literacy questionnaire based on OECD guidelines. Independent t-tests compared financial literacy between disciplines, one-way ANOVA examined differences by year of study, and Cohen's d measured effect size. A radar chart visually displayed group variations. The findings revealed a significant difference in financial knowledge, skills, and overall financial literacy between Management and Humanities students, with management students performing better in all areas, although the effect sizes were small. However, financial attitude did not differ between the two faculties. Financial literacy, knowledge, skills, and attitude significantly varied by year of study, with fourth-year students demonstrated higher score than those in earlier years. No significant differences were found in financial knowledge, skills, and overall financial literacy between male and female respondents, but females exhibited a higher financial attitude than males. The findings highlight the need for targeted financial literacy programs tailored to each faculty's needs. While financial attitudes are similar, fostering positive financial behaviour is crucial for long-term well-being. A holistic



approach, incorporating knowledge, skills, and attitudes, is essential, with faculty-specific solutions to prepare students for financial success. These insights can guide policymakers, educators, and financial institutions in developing effective programs to improve students' financial preparedness.

Keywords: Financial knowledge, financial skills, financial attitude, financial institutions

Introduction

Despite extensive research, financial literacy does not have a single agreed-upon definition, as differing scholarly perspectives have led to varied interpretations and methods of measurement (Kimiyağhalam & Safari, 2015). Financial literacy is the knowledge, skills, and confidence to grasp financial concepts, handle money and risks prudently, make educated decisions, and promote both personal well-being and participation in the economy (OECD, 2014). Financial Literacy also encompasses attitudes that guide financial decision-making, such as financing children education, planning for retirement and major life events ultimately enabling better decisions and greater control over financial resources (Vieira, 2012). Financial literacy is crucial for any society to be successful and competitive in the global community, yet many people, particularly the young, have limited understanding of important personal finance topics such as budgeting, investment, credit, and spending, leading to poor financial decisions and exacerbating financial crises (Borodich et al., 2010). A person's financial literacy is closely linked to their ability to manage finances, with higher financial literacy resulting in better financial management and vice versa (Arofah, 2019; Calvet et al., 2007). Financial literacy is increasingly recognized as a critical life skill essential for enhancing individual well-being and living standards, as its absence can lead to poor financial decisions that adversely affect both individuals and communities in today's complex financial landscape (Hussain & Sajjad, 2016). In an increasingly financially integrated and complex world, financial literacy has become essential for students, individuals, and their families, as they are often required to make sophisticated and sometimes irreversible financial decisions (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011b). Globally, only one in three adults grasp basic financial concepts, and despite higher financial literacy among the wealthy, educated, and those using financial services, billions remain unprepared for the rapidly evolving financial landscape (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2011a). Despite its critical importance, research reveals that financial literacy remains alarmingly low worldwide, with the issue being particularly severe in developing and underdeveloped countries (Philippas & Avdoulas, 2019).

Financial literacy is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for navigating today's complex financial landscape, prompting governments worldwide to develop national strategies for financial education that offer lifelong learning opportunities (Atkinson & Messy, 2012). During the financial crisis, the relationship between financial literacy

and unspent income levels was notably stronger, even after accounting for household characteristics, emphasizing how greater financial literacy enables individuals to better navigate unexpected macroeconomic and income shocks (Klapper et al., 2012). Financial crisis highlighted the severe consequences of financial illiteracy, which has been widely recognized as a key contributing factor to the crisis's escalation (Atkinson & Messy, 2011). Financial literacy should not be taken for granted, as it enables individuals to make informed financial decisions, protect themselves from economic shocks, and contributes to both market stability and macroeconomic resilience, particularly in countries with developing financial markets (Klapper et al., 2013). Differences in investment strategies between financially literate and illiterate investors can exacerbate income inequality, as financially illiterate individuals may miss out on higher long-term stock market returns and are less likely to reinvest in risky assets following economic downturns, thereby missing potential recovery gains after crises (Bucher-Koenen & Ziegelmeyer, 2011).

In Nepal, college students possess a fundamental level of financial knowledge, which is influenced by factors such as their family income, age, field of study, the type of college they attend, and their financial attitude (Thapa & Nepal, 2015). In Nepal, vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic minorities, conflict victims, and low-income individuals require empowerment, and ensuring financial awareness, capability, accessibility, and sustainability in financial services are key strategies to uplift marginalized and excluded communities while other factors remain constant (Chaulagain & Devkota, 2018). In Universities of Nepal, the results revealed that students have a strong understanding of banks, the stock market, inflation, and money illusion, but they face difficulties in grasping concepts related to taxes and compound interest (Kharel et al., 2024). The effective implementation of literacy and financial inclusion initiatives requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders, such as government agencies, educational institutions, financial organizations, and community groups in Nepal (Chand & Bhatt, 2024).

Studies have shown that financial literacy levels can vary significantly between students of different academic disciplines. For instance, commerce students tend to demonstrate higher financial literacy compared to their counterparts in the arts, suggesting a discipline-based knowledge gap (Antoni et al., 2020). This highlights the need to explore similar patterns among students at Pokhara University, particularly between management and humanities students. College students in Nepal have demonstrated a basic understanding of finance, with their highest levels of knowledge found in numeracy. However, their knowledge is only moderate in areas such as banking, inflation, and the stock market, while it remains notably low in critical topics like credit, taxes, financial statements, and insurance. This uneven distribution of financial knowledge highlights significant gaps that need to be addressed (Thapa & Nepal,

2015). Research indicates that financial literacy among students remains below the average level, leading to poor financial planning and inadequate understanding of key financial concepts. Many students lack sufficient knowledge about the importance of savings, and their budgeting and financial planning skills are notably weak (Rupakheti, 2020). This underscores the necessity for further research into financial literacy among students to identify effective strategies that can enhance their financial knowledge and skills. The review of literature revealed that there has been extensive research on financial literacy among college/university students in other parts of the world; there have been very few such studies in Nepal. So, we aimed to assess and compare the levels of financial knowledge, skills and attitude and overall financial literacy between management and humanities undergraduate students of Pokhara University.

Literature Review

Commerce students generally have greater access to financial courses throughout their academic journey, gaining early exposure to financial concepts and skills that enable informed decision-making, whereas non-commerce students often lack similar opportunities, leading to a disparity in financial literacy between the two groups (Jain et al., 2024). A study on financial literacy among University of Porto students revealed that those from Economics and Management had the highest levels of financial knowledge, while students from Fine Arts, Psychology, and Education Sciences exhibited the lowest, highlighting a significant contrast in financial literacy across disciplines (Mendes, 2013). Financial literacy was examined among postgraduate commerce students of Mangaluru Taluk found their understanding of key financial concepts to be relatively low, despite their advanced academic level, while also highlighting the significant impact of demographic factors on financial literacy (Razak & Ishwara, 2022). Unsurprisingly, students who had taken a finance related course demonstrated significantly higher financial knowledge scores compared to those without such coursework (Förster et al., 2015). A study found that students majoring in economics received more practical financial information than those in other fields, with financial attitudes significantly influenced by their academic specialization (Zéman et al., 2023). A study found that diploma students in Commerce programs had higher financial literacy levels than those in non-Commerce programs (Botha, 2013). Students from commerce-related programs, such as Financial Management, demonstrated significantly stronger financial skills, while those in non-commerce disciplines like Psychology exhibited moderately high, yet comparatively lower, financial skill levels (Ilar et al., 2024). Another study at a South African university found that Commerce students had higher financial knowledge than their non-Commerce counterparts, though no significant difference was observed in financial

skills between the two groups, emphasizing the need for education on emergency savings, long-term financial planning, and evaluating financial products (Antoni et al., 2020). A study from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, Punjab, found that commerce and management students had relatively strong financial literacy, unaffected by demographic factors, highlighting the curriculum's crucial role in bridging literacy gaps while also recommending early parental involvement in financial decision-making to enhance students' financial literacy (Kaur et al., 2015). Students who had completed a Financial Management course demonstrated higher financial knowledge, which in turn had a significant influence on their financial attitudes, suggesting that management students, who are more likely to be exposed to such coursework, tend to develop stronger financial attitudes than their humanities counterparts who often lack similar academic exposure (Yahaya et al., 2019). An investigation into non-commerce university students in Pakistan found their financial knowledge to be moderate in banking, general finance, and mathematics but weak in core concepts like the time value of money, interest, investment, spending, and risk-return, emphasizing that greater financial knowledge helps control unnecessary expenses, improves decision-making, and reduces the risk of financial instability or bankruptcy (Liaqat et al., 2021). A study on financial literacy among undergraduates in Jaipur City found that while financial market knowledge was broadly understood across disciplines, basic financial knowledge differed significantly between finance and non-finance students, with over 50% supporting the inclusion of financial education in all academic programs (Kedawat & Pathak, 2021). Business students tend to exhibit stronger financial attitudes than non-business students, likely due to greater exposure to financial education and related coursework that positively shapes their financial mindset (Peach & Yuan, 2017). A look into the financial understanding of undergraduate students in Alappuzha District found that only a small percentage believed their colleges provided sufficient personal finance education, emphasizing the need to enhance financial literacy across faculties through motivated educators, adequate resources, a well-structured curriculum, and active community participation (Rajan & Sritharan, 2018).

Factors Related to the Study

Demographic Characteristics

The study found differences in financial literacy between first-year and final-year students, with both groups displaying low levels of financial literacy, though final-year students had slightly higher average scores than their first-year counterparts (Homan, 2015). The study revealed a significant positive correlation between financial literacy and factors such as financial education, age, education level, and income, while gender showed mixed results, with males outperforming in some cases but not consistently (Yoshino et al., 2017). The study found that men scored lower in financial

skills than women but had greater financial knowledge, and specialization played a key role in the relationship between financial awareness, experience, and knowledge, with economics and business majors gaining knowledge through experience, while non-majors were more influenced by financial awareness (Dewi, 2022).

Financial Knowledge

Financial knowledge serves as the foundation of financial literacy, equipping individuals with the ability to make informed decisions (Dewi et al., 2020). Financial knowledge was identified as a crucial component in determining overall financial literacy (Robb & Woodyard, 2011). Numerous studies indicate that limited financial knowledge is the main cause of low financial literacy, with awareness of existing products and services acting as a key factor, as greater familiarity with these offerings directly enhances financial literacy (Kane et al., 2016). The research identified positive effect of Financial Knowledge on Financial literacy level (Banthia & Dey, 2022).

Financial Attitude

Financial attitude is another variable that influences financial literacy, as it reflects an individual's attitude towards money and sense of financial responsibility (Firli, 2017). Financial attitude is recognized as a key factor in determining an individual's level of financial literacy, as it significantly shapes and influences financial literacy outcomes (Rai et al., 2019). A positive financial attitude positively influences personal financial management, playing a crucial role in shaping effective financial practices, as students with such an attitude are more likely to manage their money wisely, leading to an improved quality of life (Yogasnumurti et al., 2021). A financially literate person tends to have attitudes that allow effective and responsible management of financial affairs, demonstrating how financial attitude significantly influences financial literacy (Schagen & Lines, 1996).

Financial Skills

An essential component of financial literacy is financial skill, as it not only involves the ability to work with numbers but also requires the effective application of knowledge and skills to manage financial resources over a lifetime, as emphasized by the President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy (Paiella, 2016). Research suggests that low financial literacy levels are primarily due to the lack of financial skills education in high schools, a deficiency that is likely to negatively impact individuals' future lives by contributing to poor financial management (Beal & Delpachitra, 2003). Financial literacy largely depends on financial skills, including both general and specific analytical and synthetical abilities essential for sound financial decision-making (Schagen & Lines, 1996). Financial literacy involves the ability to use financial skills

effectively to manage resources, make sound decisions, and foster positive financial behaviors (Dewi et al., 2020).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Hypothesis Development

H1: There is a significant difference in the financial literacy levels between Management and Humanities students of the Pokhara University.

H2: There is a significant difference in the financial knowledge levels between Management and Humanities students of the Pokhara University.

H3: There is a significant difference in the financial skills levels between Management and Humanities students of the Pokhara University.

H4: There is a significant difference in the financial attitude levels between Management and Humanities students of the Pokhara University.

Methods and Procedures

Research Design

The research design for this study is descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative, and comparative.

Study Sample

The target population consists of undergraduate students in Pokhara University, specifically, those studying Management (e.g., BBA and BBA-BI) and Humanities (e.g., BDEVS, BECS, BALLB and BED). This study employed a convenience sampling technique to select participants from undergraduate management and humanities students of Pokhara University. Due to its affordability, speed, effectiveness, and simplicity, convenience sampling is widely used by researchers in social sciences (Jager et al., 2017). Convenience sampling was suitable since researchers did not have access to a predefined sampling frame (Dorofeev & Grant, 2006). Subsequently, a non-probability convenience sample of 327 Undergraduate students across the two disciplines was drawn, which is in the range of other studies alike (Antoni et al., 2020; Kharel et al., 2024; Ling, 2023).

Instrumentation

In this study, the instrumentation will consist of a financial literacy questionnaire developed by (Stella et al., 2020), as outlined in their 2020 paper A Proposal for a New Financial Literacy Questionnaire published in the International Journal of Business and Management (Stella et al., 2020). The questionnaire used in this study was developed following the OECD guidelines on financial literacy assessment, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of financial knowledge, skills, and attitudes. To assess financial knowledge, a set of questions from the NFCS has been adapted (NFCS, 2009). This section comprises five multiple-choice questions designed to evaluate students understanding of fundamental financial concepts. Each correct response is awarded 1 point, while incorrect responses receive 0 points. The total score for this section ranges from 0 to 5, with higher scores indicating a stronger grasp of financial concepts. The financial skills questions were developed using established guidelines to ensure a comprehensive assessment (Lusardi, 2015; Lusardi et al., 2011). Similar to Financial Knowledge, this section comprises five multiple-choice questions evaluating students' ability to apply financial concepts in real-life scenarios. Scoring follows the same pattern, with a total range of 0 to 5. Financial attitude was assessed using 10 statements developed by (Stella et al., 2020), measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represents "Completely Disagree" and 7 represents "Completely Agree." The total possible score for this section is 70, which was standardized to a scale of 0 to 5 by dividing the total score by 14. Financial literacy in this study was calculated by combining the scores from the three components—financial knowledge, financial skills, and financial attitude with equal weight assigned to each of the three factors. The maximum possible score for financial literacy is 15, obtained by summing the highest scores from financial knowledge, financial skills, and financial attitude.

Data Analysis

In this study, Microsoft Excel was used for data entry and SPSS for statistical analysis. To analyze the variance between groups, an independent T-test was used. This test was employed to determine whether there were significant differences between financial knowledge, financial skills, financial attitude, and financial literacy across management and humanities undergraduate students of Pokhara University. The independent T-test helped assess the differences in these variables across faculties. Additionally, Cohen's *d* was calculated to measure the effect size of the differences observed in the respondents' financial knowledge, skills, attitude, and literacy. A one-way ANOVA was used to determine the differences in financial literacy, knowledge, skills, and attitude based on the year of study. Additionally, an independent T-test was employed to assess the differences in financial literacy, knowledge, skills, and attitude between male and female students. Finally, a radar chart was created to visually

display the differences between management and humanities students, highlighting the variations across the different dimensions of financial literacy: knowledge, skills, and attitude.

Results

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis of Demographic Variables

Variables	Academic Disciplines				Total			
	Management		Humanities				Financial Literacy	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Mean (FL)	SD
Gender:								
<i>Male</i>	52	15.9	64	19.6	116	35.5	8.80	2.55
<i>Female</i>	113	34.6	96	29.4	209	63.9	9.18	2.45
<i>Prefer not to Say</i>	1	0.3	1	0.3	2	0.6		
Age:								
<i>18-20</i>	79	24.2	80	24.5	159	48.6	8.49	2.19
<i>20-24</i>	87	26.6	66	20.2	153	46.8	9.67	2.66
<i>25-29</i>	0	0	12	3.7	12	3.7	7.95	2.27
<i>30+</i>	0	0	3	0.9	3	0.9	8.19	2.70
Year of Study:								
<i>1st Year</i>	40	12.2	50	15.3	90	27.5	8.00	2.09
<i>2nd year</i>	32	9.8	38	11.6	70	21.4	8.75	2.24
<i>3rd year</i>	64	19.6	54	16.5	118	36.1	9.39	2.38
<i>4th year</i>	30	9.2	19	5.8	49	15	10.39	2.97
Marital Status:								
<i>Unmarried</i>	162	49.5	155	47.4	317	96.9	9.02	2.50
<i>Married</i>	4	1.2	5	1.5	9	2.8	9.66	1.79
<i>Divorce/Widow</i>	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.3	5.07	-
Monthly Family Income (Rs):								
<i>Below 20000</i>	17	5.2	23	7	40	12.2	8.15	1.88
<i>20000-30000</i>	29	8.9	22	6.7	51	15.6	8.96	2.53
<i>30000-40000</i>	18	5.5	28	8.6	46	14.1	9.23	2.28
<i>40000-50000</i>	23	7	23	7	46	14.1	8.78	2.68
<i>Above 50000</i>	79	24.2	65	19.9	144	44	9.29	2.60

Occupation:									
<i>Student</i>	158	48.3	137	41.9	295	90.2	9.00	2.49	
<i>Student+ part time job</i>	8	2.4	17	5.2	25	7.6	9.20	2.75	
<i>Student+ full time job</i>	0	0	7	2.1	7	2.1	9.11	1.73	
Parental Level of Education:									
<i>Below +2</i>	51	15.6	75	22.9	126	38.5	9.10	2.51	
<i>+2</i>	72	22	37	11.3	109	33.3	8.68	2.30	
<i>Bachelors</i>	37	11.3	37	11.3	74	22.6	9.49	2.70	
<i>Masters or Above</i>	6	1.8	12	3.7	18	5.5	8.63	2.46	

A summary of demographic profile of respondents is shown in Table 1. 63.9% of respondents were female, compared to 35.5% who were male, while 0.6% preferred not to say. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 18-20 (48.6%), followed by those aged 20-24 (46.8%). A smaller proportion of respondents were between 25-29 years (3.7%), while only 0.9% were 30 years or older. For the year of study, the majority of the respondents were in their third year (36.1%), followed by first-year students (27.5%) and second-year students (21.4%). The smallest proportion of respondents were in their fourth year (15%). Similarly, in terms of marital status, most respondents were unmarried (96.9%), while 2.8% were married, and only 0.3% were widowed or divorced, reflecting a predominantly young and single student population. Since students made up the majority of the respondents, their monthly family income varied across different income brackets. A significant proportion of respondents (44%) reported a family income of above 50,000, making it the largest income group. This was followed by 15.6% of respondents whose families earned between 20,000 and 30,000, while both the 30,000–40,000 and 40,000–50,000 income brackets accounted for 14.1% each. Lastly, 12.2% of respondents reported a monthly family income below 20,000. When looking at the occupation of respondents, it is evident that the majority are primarily focused on their education. Most of the respondents are students (90.2%), while 7.6% juggle their studies alongside part-time jobs. A smaller proportion (2.1%) manage both their studies and full-time employment. In terms of the parental education level of the respondents, a significant proportion (38.5%) had parents who had completed below +2 education. This was followed by 33.3% of respondents whose parents had completed +2 education. A smaller percentage of respondents (22.6%) had parents with a bachelor’s degree, while only 5.5% had parents with a master’s degree or higher.

Table 2

T-test of Independence for Level of Financial Knowledge, Skills, Attitude and Literacy

Factors	Management		Humanities		T-value	P-value	Cohen's d
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Financial Knowledge	2.72	1.401	2.21	1.291	3.392	0.001*	0.38
Financial Skills	2.83	1.379	2.39	1.356	2.868	0.004*	0.32
Financial Attitude	3.94	0.723	3.95	0.840	-0.132	0.895	-0.013
Financial Literacy	9.48	2.426	8.55	2.490	3.413	0.001*	0.38

As shown in the data, there is a statistically significant difference in the levels of financial knowledge, skills, and literacy between the Management and Humanities faculties. For financial knowledge, the t-value is 3.392, with a p-value of 0.001 ($0.001 < 0.05$), indicating a significant difference between the two faculties. The Cohen's d value for financial knowledge is 0.38, which suggests a small practical significance. Similarly, for financial skills, the t-value is 2.868 with a p-value of 0.004 ($0.004 < 0.05$), showing a significant difference between the faculties. However, the Cohen's d value for financial skills is 0.32, indicating a small practical significance. There is also a statistically significant difference in financial literacy, with a t-value of 3.413 and a p-value of 0.001 ($0.001 < 0.05$). The Cohen's d value for financial literacy is 0.38, which again points to a small practical significance. On the other hand, there is no significant difference in financial attitudes, as indicated by the t-value of -0.132 and a p-value of 0.895 ($0.895 > 0.05$), which is greater than the 0.05 threshold. This suggests that respondents from both faculties have similar perceptions of their financial attitudes.

Table 3

Differences in Financial Literacy among Undergraduate Students of Pokhara University based on their Year of Study (one way ANOVA)

Factors		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Financial Literacy	Between Groups	207.953	3	69.318	12.255	<.001*
	Within Groups	1827.024	323	5.656		
	Total	2034.977	326			

Financial Knowledge	Between Groups	36.097	3	12.032	6.755	<.001*
	Within Groups	575.316	323	1.781		
	Total	611.413	326			
Financial Skills	Between Groups	42.177	3	14.059	7.809	<.001*
	Within Groups	581.499	323	1.800		
	Total	623.676	326			
Financial Attitude	Between Groups	6.408	3	2.136	3.575	.014*
	Within Groups	192.985	323	.597		
	Total	199.393	326			

As indicated in Table 3, there was statistically significant difference between the first, second, third and fourth year undergraduate students of Pokhara University in terms of Financial Literacy ($P < 0.001$), Financial Knowledge ($P < 0.001$), Financial Skills ($P < 0.001$) and Financial Attitude ($P = 0.014 < 0.05$). These results suggest that student's levels of financial knowledge, skills, attitude, and overall financial literacy vary significantly by year of study. To identify the specific differences, particularly how fourth year students compare with other cohorts, a post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test was performed.

Table 4

Post Hoc Comparison of Financial Literacy Dimensions among Academic Years Using Tukey HSD Test

Dimension	Comparison (Mean \pm SD)		Mean Difference	p-value	
	Group year	Mean \pm SD			
Financial Literacy	4 th	1 st	8.00 \pm 2.09	2.39	<0.001*
	(10.39 \pm 2.97)	2 nd	8.75 \pm 2.24	1.64	0.001*
		3 rd	9.39 \pm 2.38	1.00	0.018*
Financial Knowledge	4 th	1 st	1.97 \pm 1.156	0.93	<0.001*
	(2.90 \pm 1.461)	2 nd	2.49 \pm 1.213	0.41	0.027*
		3 rd	2.66 \pm 1.469	0.24	0.048*
Financial Skills	4 th	1 st	2.22 \pm 1.364	1.13	<0.001*
	(3.35 \pm 1.466)	2 nd	2.47 \pm 1.188	0.88	0.001*
		3 rd	2.69 \pm 1.357	0.66	0.007*
Financial Attitude	4 th	1 st	3.81 \pm 0.829	0.34	0.009*

	(4.15±0.718)	2 nd	3.80±0.778	0.35	0.006*
		3 rd	4.04±0.745	0.11	0.041*

As presented in Table 4, post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that fourth-year students (M = 10.39, SD = 2.97) demonstrated significantly higher Financial Literacy scores compared to first-year (M = 8.00, SD = 2.09), second-year (M = 8.75, SD = 2.24), and third-year students (M = 9.39, SD = 2.38), all with p-values < 0.05. Similarly, in Financial Knowledge, fourth-year students (M = 2.90, SD = 1.46) scored significantly higher than students in the first (M = 1.97, SD = 1.16), second (M = 2.49, SD = 1.21), and third years (M = 2.66, SD = 1.47). A comparable trend was observed in Financial Skills, with fourth-year students (M = 3.35, SD = 1.47) outperforming their first-year (M = 2.22, SD = 1.36), second-year (M = 2.47, SD = 1.19), and third-year (M = 2.69, SD = 1.36) counterparts. In terms of Financial Attitude, fourth-year students (M = 4.15, SD = 0.72) also reported significantly higher scores than first-year (M = 3.81, SD = 0.83), second-year (M = 3.80, SD = 0.78), and third-year students (M = 4.04, SD = 0.75). These findings indicate that fourth-year students demonstrate a greater level of financial literacy, knowledge, skills, and attitude compared to those in the first, second, and third years. This could be attributed to their increased experience in handling financial matters, making informed decisions, and managing personal finances. Additionally, their extended exposure to financial concepts throughout their academic journey may have contributed to their enhanced understanding.

Table 5

Gender Differences in Financial Literacy among Undergraduate Students of Pokhara University (Independent T-test)

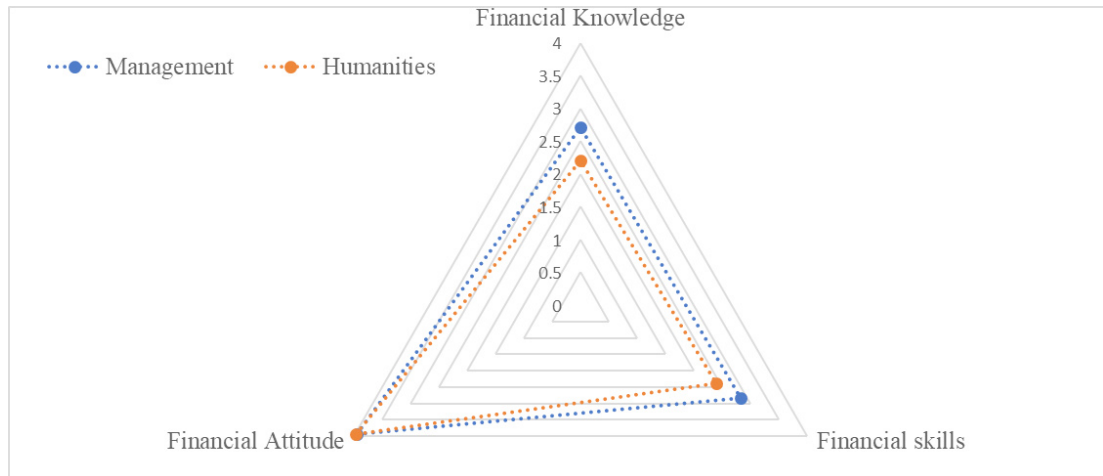
Factors	Male		Female		T-value	P-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Financial Knowledge	2.56	1.534	2.43	1.270	0.818	0.414
Financial Skills	2.47	1.309	2.69	1.422	-1.372	0.171
Financial Attitude	3.76	0.789	4.05	0.754	-3.280	0.001*
Financial Literacy	8.80	2.550	9.18	2.455	-1.323	0.187

As shown in Table 5, there was no significant difference in financial knowledge ($p = 0.414 > 0.05$), financial skills ($p = 0.171 > 0.05$), and overall financial literacy ($p = 0.187 > 0.05$) between male and female respondents. However, a significant difference was observed in financial attitude ($p = 0.001 < 0.05$), indicating that female

respondents ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.754$) had a higher financial attitude score than their male counterparts ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.789$). Additionally, two respondents who selected the “Prefer not to say” option were excluded from the analysis. This suggests that male and female respondents have similar levels of financial knowledge, skills, and overall financial literacy, while financial attitude differs between the two groups.

Figure 2

Comparison of Financial Literacy Dimensions across Academic Disciplines



The above figure illustrates the differences in financial literacy dimensions—financial knowledge, financial skills, and financial attitude—between Management and Humanities students. Management students exhibit higher financial knowledge ($M = 2.72$) compared to Humanities students ($M = 2.21$), as indicated by the blue dotted line extending further on this axis. This suggests that Management students may have greater exposure to financial concepts through their coursework. Similarly, financial skills are higher among Management students ($M = 2.83$) than Humanities students ($M = 2.39$), reflecting stronger practical financial competencies among Management students. However, in terms of financial attitude, Humanities students score slightly higher ($M = 3.95$) compared to Management students ($M = 3.94$), as shown by the orange dotted line extending further on this axis. This suggests that despite having lower financial knowledge and skills, Humanities students may have a more positive financial mindset. Overall, the chart highlights that while Management students outperform Humanities students in financial knowledge and skills, Humanities students demonstrate a slightly stronger financial attitude. This pattern indicates that academic background plays a role in shaping different aspects of financial literacy, with Management students benefiting from financial education, while Humanities students may develop their financial attitude through alternative experiences.

Discussion

This study examines financial literacy among undergraduate Management and Humanities students of Pokhara University, comparing their financial knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In addition, the study investigated whether students' financial knowledge, skills, and attitudes differed based on their gender and year of study. The empirical findings reveal a significant disparity in financial literacy between faculties, with Management students exhibiting higher levels of financial literacy compared to Humanities students. These results align with previous studies, further supporting the notion that academic discipline influences financial literacy levels (Antoni et al., 2020; Dewi, 2022; Mendes, 2013; Van Deventer & De Klerk, 2017). The findings indicate that the students studying towards a Management degree have a higher level of financial literacy in general financial knowledge and skills than those students studying towards a Humanities degree but no disparity was found in terms of financial attitude.

The results of the study indicate that students differ in their financial literacy based on their year of study, but not their gender. The findings indicate that there is no significant difference in financial literacy between male and female undergraduate students of Pokhara University. This is in contrast to previous studies (Chen & Volpe, 2002; Ergün, 2017; Murphy, 2005). In particular, fourth year students have a higher level of financial literacy in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude than the first, second and third year students which is similar to findings of previous studies (Homan, 2015; Van Deventer & De Klerk, 2017).

The findings of this study offer an empirical analysis of the financial literacy levels among undergraduate students in the Management and Humanities faculties at Pokhara University. The implications of this study are multifaceted, particularly for educational institutions, policymakers, and students. Firstly, the significant differences observed in financial knowledge and skills between Management and Humanities students suggest the need for targeted financial literacy programs. Educational institutions could develop specialized curricula or workshops tailored to the specific needs of different faculties, ensuring that all students, regardless of their major, acquire essential financial skills. Furthermore, the similarity in financial attitudes across faculties highlights the importance of fostering positive financial behaviours from an early stage. While financial knowledge and skills may differ, attitudes toward money management are crucial for long-term financial well-being. This study suggests that broad, faculty-wide interventions may be effective in shaping more responsible financial attitudes. For policymakers, these findings can inform the development of national or institutional financial literacy initiatives aimed at enhancing students' preparedness for real-world financial challenges. By focusing on the areas where disparities exist, such as knowledge and skills, policymakers can prioritize interventions that improve financial education outcomes.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the use of non-probability convenience sampling to select participants which limits the objective assessment of the findings. Secondly, the study was conducted exclusively with undergraduate students from Pokhara University, which may not accurately reflect the financial literacy levels of students from other universities or regions, thus restricting the generalizability of the results. These factors suggest that future research could expand to include a larger and more diverse sample from multiple universities or regions, providing a broader perspective on financial literacy.

Conclusion

Understanding the financial literacy levels of undergraduate students at Pokhara University can assist policymakers, educators, and financial institutions in developing effective financial literacy programs tailored to the student population. Such interventions are likely to have a positive impact on the students' financial well-being and, by extension, contribute to the broader community. Overall, the study underscores the importance of addressing financial literacy in a holistic manner, incorporating knowledge, skills and attitude and providing faculty-specific solutions to better equip students for future financial success.

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Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted by the Institutional Review Committee of Pokhara University (Reference Number: 138/2081/82-IRC, approval date: December 2, 2024). Formal permission was also obtained from School of Management and School of Humanities and Social Sciences of Pokhara University prior to data collection. We obtained written informed consent from each participant before enrolling them in the study. We ensured that participation in the study was voluntary and maintained confidentiality throughout the study.

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From Knowledge to Action: Students' Personal Financial Management in Rupandehi District of Nepal

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationships of financial literacy, attitude, behavior, and personal financial management among college students in Rupandehi District of Nepal. The increasing financial challenges faced by students and the specific socio-economic context of Rupandehi district, understanding these relationships is crucial for promoting financial well-being. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior and Behavioral Finance, the research hypothesized direct and mediated effects among these constructs. A quantitative study was conducted using a survey questionnaire administered to 500 college students from various institutions in Rupandehi. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings reveal significant positive relationships among all variables. Financial literacy strongly predicts both financial attitude and behavior. Importantly, the results confirm that financial attitude significantly mediates the relationship between financial literacy and financial behavior. Furthermore, financial behavior is a significant mediator in the relationship between both financial literacy and financial attitude, and personal financial management. Financial literacy also has a direct positive effect on financial management. These results underscore that while financial knowledge is foundational, positive attitudes and responsible behaviors are essential pathways translating knowledge into effective financial management. The study supports all proposed hypotheses, emphasizing the need for holistic financial education programs that cultivate not just knowledge but also positive attitudes and practical habits. The findings have implications for educational institutions and policymakers aiming to enhance students' financial capability in the region.

Keywords: Financial literacy, financial attitude, personal finance, college students



Introduction

In a world that is increasingly full of complexity in financial matters, personal finance management cannot be emphasized enough. Personal financial management is crucial for individuals to be able to successfully steer their finances, especially for college students who are mostly doing this for the first time on their own. Personal finance incorporates budgeting, saving, investing, and an understanding of credit, which are essential skills that translate into economic stability and well-being (Barreto & Gamble, 2020; Kharel et al., 2024; Prakash & Bhatt, 2024). The relevance of financial literacy, behavior, and attitude to shaping financial decisions is particularly relevant among students at institutions of higher learning because they affect their ability to make good financial decisions and efficiently manage their resources (Trang, 2022; Kharel et al., 2024; Prakash & Bhatt, 2024).

Financial literacy, or the ability and knowledge required to make smart financial decisions, plays a vital role in optimizing the financial potential of students (Okamoto & Komamura, 2021; Simarmata, 2022; Maalouf et al., 2023). Evidence shows that more financially literate students are in a better position to manage financial problems, including student loans, credit card debt, and expenses for everyday needs (Bradley, 2021; Cai-yun, 2023; Tan et al., 2024). However, many college students face severe financial challenges, including rising tuition rates, limited income, and the burden of student debt that can perpetuate their financial struggles and impede their academic success (Hanson, 2022; Raut & Twanabasu, 2024; Poon et al., 2022).

In Rupandehi District, Nepal, the challenges mentioned above are very acute in nature. The socio-economic context of the region, along with restricted access to overall financial literacy, enables an environment where several students do not practice good money management (Lamichhane et al., 2024). Understanding the overlap of financial behavior, attitude, and literacy plays a crucial role in addressing such matters as well as in promoting correct financial management mechanisms in students from Rupandehi district.

Despite the recognized importance of financial literacy, there are significant gaps in financial knowledge and management among college students, particularly in Rupandehi District. Many students lack the necessary skills to navigate financial decisions, leading to poor financial outcomes and increased stress (Bradford et al., 2023; Alshebami & Aldhyani, 2022; Deda et al., 2022). Specific issues in this context include a lack of access to financial education resources, cultural attitudes towards money management, and the absence of structured financial literacy programs within educational institutions (Hardika et al., 2022; Çera et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the unique socio-economic characteristics of Rupandehi District, including varying levels of parental education and income, contribute to disparities

in financial literacy among students (Ilar et al., 2024; Marchyta et al., 2024; Gultom & Liyas, 2024). This situation necessitates a focused investigation into the financial literacy levels of college students in the district, as well as the factors influencing their financial behaviors and attitudes. In this context this research will fill the gap by addressing these research questions 1) How do students' attitudes towards financial management mediate the relationship between financial literacy and financial behaviors? 2) How do financial behaviors mediate the relationship between financial literacy and personal financial management? 3) What is the impact of students' financial behaviors on their overall financial management in Rupandehi District?

This study contributes to the academic literature on financial literacy and management by providing empirical evidence on the financial literacy levels of college students in Rupandehi District. The findings will have practical implications for students, educators, and policymakers, highlighting the need for improved financial education initiatives and resources (Zhong & Hu, 2024; Elifneh, 2021). By addressing the financial literacy gap, the study aims to empower students to make informed financial decisions, ultimately enhancing their financial well-being and academic success.

The focus of this study is on college students in Rupandehi District, with an emphasis on understanding their financial literacy levels and management practices. However, the research is subject to certain limitations, including constraints related to sample size, geographic coverage, and time limitations for data collection (Adhikari, 2024; Yang et al., 2023). These factors may affect the generalizability of the findings, necessitating caution in drawing broader conclusions.

Literature Review

The exploration of personal finance among college students, particularly in the context of Rupandehi District, Nepal, necessitates a robust theoretical framework that encompasses financial literacy, behavior, and attitudes. One of the foundational theories relevant to this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which posits that individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which in turn are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ratnawati et al., 2022). This theory is particularly pertinent as it allows for the examination of how students' attitudes towards financial management and their perceived control over financial decisions can shape their financial behaviors. Additionally, behavioral finance theories provide insight into the psychological factors that influence financial decision-making, highlighting how cognitive biases and emotional responses can lead to suboptimal financial choices (Maalouf et al., 2023).

Moreover, the integration of financial literacy into this framework is critical, as it encompasses the knowledge and skills necessary for effective financial management. Financial literacy is often linked to improved financial behaviors, suggesting that students who possess a higher level of financial knowledge are more likely to engage in positive financial practices (Ninan & Kurian, 2021). This relationship underscores the importance of educational interventions aimed at enhancing financial literacy among college students, as these interventions can foster better financial behaviors and attitudes, ultimately leading to improved financial management outcomes.

Globally, the importance of financial literacy among college students has gained significant attention, particularly in developed economies. Studies indicate that financial literacy is crucial for effective financial management, influencing behaviors such as budgeting, saving, and investing (Brugiavini et al., 2018). For instance, research by Brugiavini et al. highlights that financial education positively impacts students' financial literacy levels, leading to improved financial behaviors (Brugiavini et al., 2018). Furthermore, a study by Grewal and Sweeney emphasizes that enhanced fiscal knowledge among medical students resulted in increased confidence in managing personal finances (Grewal & Sweeney, 2021). These findings suggest that financial literacy education is essential for fostering responsible financial behaviors among students.

However, challenges persist. Many students report high levels of financial stress, often stemming from inadequate financial management skills and knowledge (Bamforth et al., 2018). For example, a study by Bamforth et al. illustrates that students' money management behaviors are influenced not only by their financial literacy but also by psychological factors such as stress and anxiety related to financial obligations (Bamforth et al., 2018). This underscores the need for a holistic approach that addresses both knowledge and emotional factors in financial education.

In the Asian context, financial literacy among college students varies significantly across countries. Research conducted in China reveals that while many students possess basic financial knowledge, their practical financial management skills remain lacking (Huang et al., 2023). Huang et al. found that students enrolled in finance-related majors exhibited better financial habits compared to their peers in non-finance disciplines, indicating that academic background plays a crucial role in shaping financial behaviors (Huang et al., 2023). Similarly, studies in Malaysia have shown that cultural factors and socioeconomic status significantly influence students' financial attitudes and behaviors (Harrington & Smith, 2023).

Moreover, the integration of financial literacy into the educational curriculum has been emphasized in several Asian countries. For instance, a study by Al-Houti and Al-Daihani highlights the positive impact of financial literacy education on students' attitudes towards financial management in Kuwait (Al-Houti & Al-Daihani, 2018). This

suggests that educational interventions tailored to the cultural context can effectively enhance financial literacy and improve financial behaviors among students.

In Nepal, the landscape of financial literacy among college students is still developing. Thapa and Nepal (2015) indicates that financial literacy levels among students in Nepal are alarmingly low, with many lacking basic knowledge of financial concepts such as budgeting and saving. This deficiency is compounded by cultural factors that often discourage open discussions about money management within families, leading to a lack of financial socialization (Rupakheti, 2020).

Furthermore, the financial behaviors of Nepalese college students are influenced by their attitudes towards money, which are often shaped by societal norms and peer influences. Research suggests that students who perceive financial management as a burden are less likely to engage in proactive financial behaviors (Pandey & Bhandari 2022; Acharya & Hamal, 2022). This highlights the need for targeted financial education programs that not only impart knowledge but also address the underlying attitudes and beliefs that hinder effective financial management.

Studies have examined the financial literacy of college students, revealing a concerning trend of inadequate financial knowledge among this demographic. For instance, research conducted by Pandey and Bhandari (2022), Acharya and Hamal (2022) highlight that many college students possess only a basic understanding of financial concepts, which can lead to poor financial decision-making. Similarly, Akça et al. found that financial literacy levels among college students are often intermediate, with significant disparities based on gender and socioeconomic background (Akça et al., 2018).

In addition to financial literacy, studies have explored the financial behaviors and attitudes of college students. Danahy's research indicates that financial stress is prevalent among students, often exacerbated by both positive and negative financial management behaviors (Danahy, 2024). This highlights the dual nature of financial behaviors, where even seemingly positive practices can lead to stress if not managed appropriately. Furthermore, the work of Kim et al. emphasizes the role of family financial socialization in shaping students' financial attitudes, suggesting that parental guidance can significantly influence financial behaviors (Kim et al., 2018).

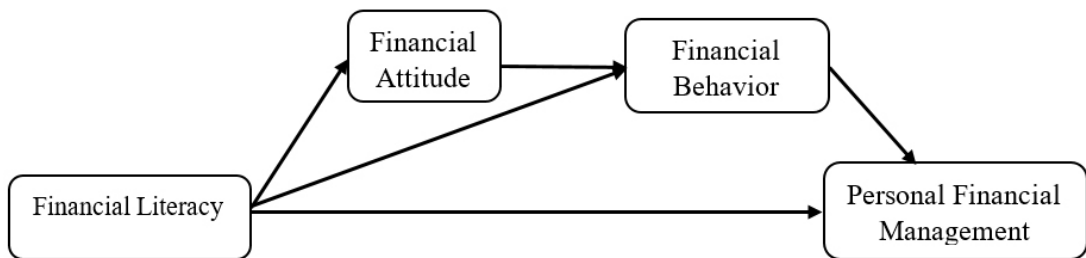
Challenges in financial management are also well-documented. Many students face difficulties in budgeting, saving, and managing debt, often leading to financial strain (Azer & Mohamad, 2018). The findings from Huang et al. further corroborate this, indicating that despite the importance of personal finance education, many students lack the necessary skills to navigate their financial responsibilities effectively (Huang et al., 2023). These studies collectively underscore the critical need for targeted financial education programs that address the unique challenges faced by college students.

The conceptual framework for this study illustrates the interrelationships between financial literacy, behavior, attitude, and financial management among college students. Financial literacy serves as a foundational element that influences both attitudes and behaviors related to financial management. Students with higher financial literacy are likely to develop positive attitudes towards budgeting, saving, and investing, which in turn can lead to more responsible financial behaviors (Huang et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the role of social influences cannot be overlooked. Research indicates that peer behaviors and family financial practices significantly impact students' financial behaviors, aligning with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of observational learning in shaping individual behaviors (Tan et al., 2024). This suggests that students who observe positive financial behaviors in their social circles are more likely to adopt similar practices. Consequently, the interplay between financial literacy, social influences, and individual attitudes creates a complex web that ultimately shapes financial management practices among college students.

The empirical evidence suggests that financial literacy, behavior, and attitudes are intricately linked in shaping the financial management practices of college students. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how these factors interact within the specific cultural and socioeconomic context of Rupandehi District, Nepal.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed for further investigation:

- Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of financial literacy among college students in Rupandehi District are positively associated with responsible personal financial behaviors.
- Hypothesis 2: Students' attitudes towards financial management significantly mediate the relationship between financial literacy and financial behaviors.

Hypothesis 3: Students' financial literacy positively influence financial management among college students in Rupandehi District.

Hypothesis 4: Students' financial behaviors towards financial management significantly mediate the relationship between financial literacy and personal financial management.

Hypothesis 5: Students' financial behavior positively influence financial management among college students in Rupandehi District.

Moreover, existing research often overlooks the longitudinal impact of financial education interventions on students' financial behaviors over time. Understanding how financial literacy education influences long-term financial management practices is crucial for developing effective educational programs (Stoddard & Urban, 2019). Lastly, there is a need for more qualitative research that delves into the personal experiences and narratives of college students regarding their financial management challenges, as this can provide deeper insights into the complexities of their financial behaviors and attitudes (She et al., 2022). Addressing these gaps will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of personal finance navigation among college students in Rupandehi District.

Methods and Procedures

This study employs a descriptive and casual research design, integrating quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of how financial literacy, behavior, and attitude shape financial management among college students in Rupandehi District, Nepal. The quantitative component was involved the collection of numerical data through structured questionnaires, allowing for statistical analysis of financial literacy levels and behaviors. This method is supported by the notion that research can enhance the validity and reliability of findings by triangulating data from different sources (Johan et al. 2020).

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises college students enrolled in various institutions within Rupandehi District. This demographic is particularly relevant as they are at a critical stage of financial independence and decision-making. A

purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across different colleges and academic disciplines. Five hundred sample respondents were collected from various institutions, which is deemed sufficient to achieve statistical significance and provide a robust analysis of the data. This approach aligns with previous studies that have successfully utilized similar sampling methods to explore financial literacy among student populations (Knowles & Schifferes, 2020).

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected using surveys through google form. The survey consisted of a structured questionnaire designed to assess financial literacy levels, behaviors, and attitudes towards personal financial management. The questionnaires include multiple-choice questions, and five-point Likert scale items. Key areas of focus were budgeting practices, saving habits, investment knowledge, and attitudes towards personal financial management. This approach is consistent with best practices in financial literacy research, which emphasize the importance of quantitative approach in literature (Yu et al., 2023).

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), SmartPLS and Excel. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and assess overall financial literacy levels. Inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, were used to examine the relationships between financial literacy, behavior, and attitudes. This approach allows for a comprehensive analysis of the data, providing a richer understanding of the factors influencing financial management among college students (Wu et al., 2022).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in conducting research involving human participants. Informed consent were obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, ensuring that they were fully aware of the purpose of the research, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time

without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing data. Additionally, the research adhered to data protection regulations to safeguard participants' personal information. These ethical guidelines are essential to foster trust and integrity in the research process, aligning with established standards in academic research (Ashourizadeh et al., 2022).

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Respondents

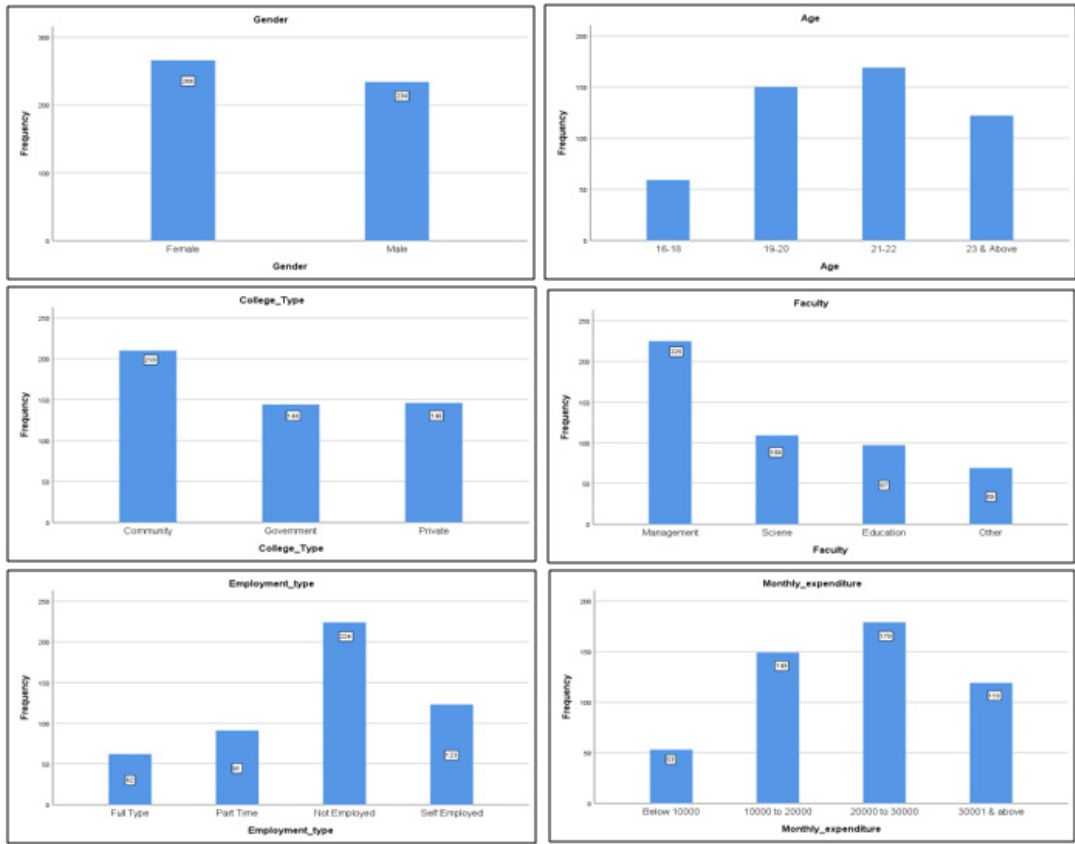
The study surveyed 500 college students from Rupandehi District, representing diverse academic disciplines. The sample included a balanced gender distribution, with respondents aged 18–25 years. Most participants were from middle-income families, and a significant proportion reported limited prior exposure to formal financial education, highlighting the need for targeted financial literacy interventions.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Respondents

		Gender		Age				College Type		
		Female	Male	16-18	19-20	21-22	23 & above	Community	Government	Private
Faculty	Management	135	90	22	60	69	74	120	49	56
	Science	54	55	15	39	45	10	29	21	59
	Education	38	59	13	35	35	14	30	36	31
	Other	39	30	9	16	20	24	31	38	0
Education type	Full Time	165	110	27	78	107	63	113	65	97
	Part Time	101	124	32	72	62	59	97	79	49
Employment type	Full Type	25	37	2	15	18	27	21	22	19
	Part Time	38	53	12	17	31	31	39	40	12
	Not Employed	145	79	28	74	82	40	93	39	92
	Self Employed	58	65	17	44	38	24	57	43	23
Monthly expenditure	Below 10000	31	22	16	11	18	8	19	14	20
	10000 to 20000	74	75	24	61	43	21	67	42	40
	20000 to 30000	104	75	12	50	80	37	87	49	43
	30001 & above	57	62	7	28	28	56	37	39	43

Figure 2
Demographic Profiling of the Respondents



The table summarizes data from 500 college students in Rupandehi District. Gender distribution shows female dominance in Management (135 females vs. 90 males), while males outnumber females in Science (55 males and. 54 females) and Education (59 males and 38 females). Most respondents (19–22 years) attend Community colleges (120 Management, 87 Science). Full-time enrollment is higher (275 students), with 63% unemployed. Monthly expenditure peaks at NPR 20,000–30,000 (179 students), while 119 spend above NPR 30,001, predominantly males (62). Private colleges attract Science students (59), whereas Community colleges lead in Management (120). Employment status highlights 224 unemployed (145 female, and 79 male) and 123 self-employed (58 female, 65 male). The data reflects gender disparities, enrollment trends, and spending patterns, emphasizing socio-economic diversity.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the measurement scales used in the study. Cronbach's alpha (α) was employed, with values ≥ 0.70 considered acceptable, indicating strong scale reliability, while $\alpha \geq 0.80$ denotes good consistency, and $\alpha \geq 0.90$ reflects excellent reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Taber, 2018). This analysis ensures the instruments reliably measure the latent constructs of attitude, behavior, financial literacy, and financial management.

Table 2

Reliability Analysis

Name of Variables	Cronbach Alpha	No of Item	Remarks
Attitude	0.847	5	Acceptable
Behavior	0.792	5	Acceptable
Financial Literacy	0.857	5	Acceptable
Financial Management	0.831	5	Acceptable
Overall	0.919	20	Acceptable

The results demonstrate strong internal consistency across all constructs. Attitude ($\alpha = 0.847$), financial literacy ($\alpha = 0.857$), and financial management ($\alpha = 0.831$) exhibit good reliability, while behavior ($\alpha = 0.792$) meets the acceptable threshold. The overall scale ($\alpha = 0.919$) indicates excellent reliability, affirming the robustness of the 20-item instrument (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). These values confirm the scales' suitability for analyzing the interrelationships among the variables, supporting the study's validity, and enabling confident interpretation of findings.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between financial behavior, financial literacy, financial attitude, and personal financial management. Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) were calculated, with values interpreted as follows: weak (0.10–0.29), moderate (0.30–0.49), and strong (≥ 0.50) (Cohen, 1988). Significance was tested at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), ensuring robust inferences about variable associations. This analysis explores how these constructs interrelate, providing insights into their collective influence on financial outcomes.

Table 3
Correlation Analysis

Variables	Financial Behavior	Financial Literacy	Financial Attitude	Personal Financial Management
Financial Behavior	1			
Financial Literacy	.630**	1		
Financial Attitude	.523**	.493**	1	
Personal Financial Management	.529**	.563**	.528**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results reveal significant positive correlations among all variables ($p < 0.01$). Financial literacy exhibits the strongest association with financial behavior ($r = 0.630$), followed by its relationship with personal financial management ($r = 0.563$). Financial attitude moderately correlates with financial behavior ($r = 0.523$) and personal financial management ($r = 0.528$), aligning with prior studies (Hair et al., 2010). All coefficients exceed the moderate threshold ($r > 0.30$), indicating meaningful relationships. The findings underscore the interconnectedness of financial literacy, behavior, and attitude in shaping effective financial management practices, reinforcing the need for holistic educational interventions.

Figure 3
Path Model

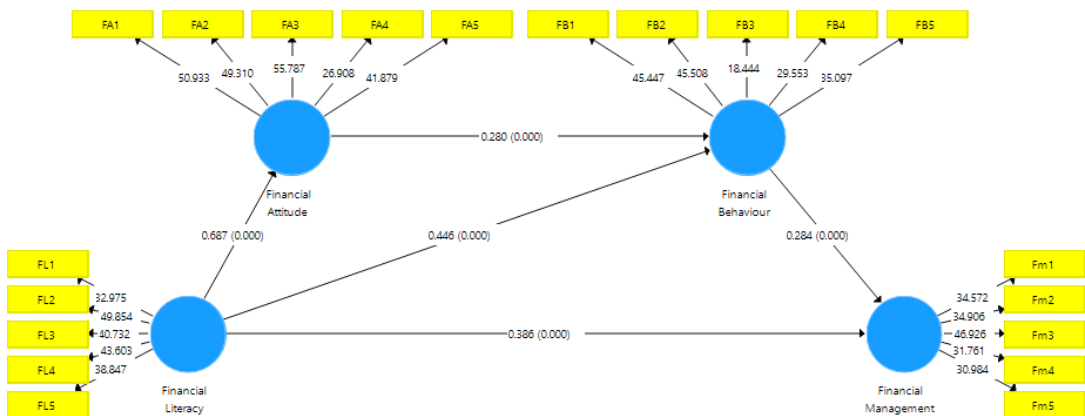


Table 4*Path Coefficients*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Financial Attitude -> Financial Behavior	0.280	0.284	0.053	5.312	0.000
Financial Behavior -> Financial Management	0.284	0.279	0.055	5.196	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Attitude	0.687	0.686	0.028	24.165	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Behavior	0.446	0.442	0.054	8.237	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Management	0.386	0.390	0.052	7.493	0.000

Table 5*Total Indirect Effects*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Financial Attitude -> Financial Management	0.079	0.080	0.023	3.533	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Behavior	0.192	0.195	0.038	4.995	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Management	0.181	0.178	0.036	4.980	0.000

Table 6*Specific Indirect Effects*

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Financial Literacy -> Financial Attitude -> Financial Behavior	0.192	0.195	0.038	4.995	0.000
Financial Attitude -> Financial Behavior -> Financial Management	0.079	0.080	0.023	3.533	0.000

Financial Literacy -> Financial Attitude -> Financial Behavior -> Financial Management	0.055	0.055	0.016	3.403	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Behavior -> Financial Management	0.127	0.123	0.028	4.494	0

Table 7
Total Effects

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/ STDEV)	P Values
Financial Attitude -> Financial Behaviour	0.280	0.284	0.053	5.312	0.000
Financial Attitude -> Financial Management	0.079	0.080	0.023	3.533	0.000
Financial Behaviour -> Financial Management	0.284	0.279	0.055	5.196	0.000
Financial Literacy -> Financial Attitude	0.687	0.686	0.028	24.165	0
Financial Literacy -> Financial Behaviour	0.638	0.637	0.034	18.974	0
Financial Literacy -> Financial Management	0.568	0.568	0.037	15.376	0.000

The findings show that financial literacy has a strong and positive influence on financial attitude, with a path coefficient of 0.687 and a p-value of 0.000, indicating high statistical significance. This means that students who are more financially literate tend to develop more positive attitudes towards money and financial planning. This result is consistent with past research that suggests financial knowledge helps individuals build positive beliefs and confidence in handling money (Shim et al., 2010).

Financial attitude, in turn, was found to significantly influence financial behavior. The direct effect of financial attitude on financial behavior was 0.280 (p = 0.000). This shows that when students have the right mindset toward managing finances, such as being careful with spending or planning, they are more likely to act responsibly in their daily financial decisions. Importantly, the indirect effect of financial literacy on financial behaviour through financial attitude was 0.192 (p = 0.000). This confirms that financial attitude partially mediates the relationship between financial literacy and behaviour. In other words, knowledge alone is not enough, students also need the right attitude to translate that knowledge into action.

In terms of financial management, the study found that both financial literacy and financial behaviour significantly affect how students manage their money. Financial literacy had a direct effect of 0.386 ($p = 0.000$) on financial management, while financial behaviour had a direct effect of 0.284 ($p = 0.000$). The total effect of financial literacy on financial management was even higher, at 0.568. These findings imply that students with strong financial knowledge and responsible financial habits are better at planning, saving, and making smart financial decisions. The indirect effect of financial literacy on financial management through financial behaviour was 0.127 ($p = 0.000$), while the special indirect effect through both financial attitude and behaviour was 0.055 ($p = 0.000$). This suggests that behaviour plays a key mediating role in linking knowledge with effective money management, reinforcing the idea that action is just as important as awareness (Xiao & Porto, 2017).

Furthermore, the indirect effect of financial attitude on financial management, via behaviour, was 0.079 ($p = 0.000$), which confirms another important mediation pathway. These results point to a chain relationship: financial literacy leads to better attitudes, which in turn lead to better behaviour, which finally enhances financial management. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which argues that attitudes shape intentions, which then influence behaviour.

Based on the analysis of the path model using SEM-PLS, all five hypotheses proposed in this study are supported. Hypothesis 1, which states that financial literacy is positively associated with financial behaviour, is supported with a significant path coefficient of 0.446 and a p -value of 0.000. Hypothesis 2, which suggests that financial attitude mediates the relationship between financial literacy and financial behaviour, is also supported through a significant indirect effect of 0.192 ($p = 0.000$). Hypothesis 3, stating that financial literacy positively influences financial management, is confirmed with a direct effect of 0.386 ($p = 0.000$) and a total effect of 0.568. Hypothesis 4, which assumes that financial behaviour mediates the relationship between financial literacy and financial management, is validated with an indirect effect of 0.127 ($p = 0.000$). Lastly, Hypothesis 5, which proposes a direct positive relationship between financial behaviour and financial management, is supported with a significant path coefficient of 0.284 ($p = 0.000$). These findings confirm that all the proposed relationships in the model are statistically significant and meaningful within the context of the study.

Overall, the model supports all five hypotheses. It shows that financial literacy is a foundational factor influencing both financial attitudes and behaviour, and that both acts as channels through which financial literacy improves financial management outcomes. The findings emphasize the importance of holistic financial education programs that not only teach technical knowledge but also shape students' values and encourage responsible financial habits.

These results contribute to the growing body of literature on youth financial capability in developing countries, particularly in the South Asian context. They highlight the need for universities and policymakers to integrate financial education in the academic curriculum. Doing so can equip young people with the tools, mindset, and habits needed for long-term financial well-being.

Conclusion

This study explores how financial literacy, financial attitude, and financial behaviour shape the way college students in Rupandehi District manage their personal finances. The findings clearly show that financial literacy plays a central role in influencing both students' mindset and actions when it comes to money. When students have a solid understanding of financial concepts, they are more likely to develop a responsible attitude and make thoughtful financial decisions. These attitudes and behaviour, in turn, significantly support better financial management practices. From the analysis the research finds the strong connection between knowing, thinking, and doing. Knowledge alone is not enough. It needs to be supported by a positive attitude and practical actions. Students who understand how money works and who hold the right attitude are more capable of handling their finances in a responsible and sustainable way. Financial behaviour acts as a key bridge that turns knowledge into real-life money management skills.

The model tested in this study successfully explains how these elements are linked together and how they contribute to financial well-being. It confirms that building financial capability is not just about teaching facts. It's about shaping how students think and behave in their daily lives. The study strongly supports the need for more focused financial education programs in colleges. These programs should not only teach financial concepts but also encourage responsible habits and positive attitudes toward money. In conclusion, empowering young people with the right financial knowledge, attitude, and behaviour can lead to better financial decisions and improved quality of life. This research highlights the value of a well-rounded approach to financial literacy and serves as a useful guide for educators, policymakers, and institutions aiming to build financially capable youth in Nepal.

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Digital Financial Literacy and Behaviour: Exploring the Mediating Effect of Financial Confidence among University Students in Nepal

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Abstract

The instrumental and behavioural growth should be parallelized to establish the fintech ecosystem. This study examines the relationship between digital financial literacy, confidence, and behaviour among university-level students. Additionally, the study investigates the mediating effect of financial confidence on the relationship between digital financial literacy and financial behaviour. A causal-comparative study design was employed to collect primary data from 404 university students in the Kapilvastu district, who were pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees in management, through a purposeful, closed-ended, structured questionnaire survey. The research framework and instruments used to measure variables were based on literature. Structural equation modeling (SEM), including EFA, CFA, Path analysis, and mediating effects, was used to analyze the data and identify a significant relationship between digital financial literacy, confidence, and behaviour among university students. Moreover, there was a significant mediating role of financial confidence. Higher digital financial literacy and confidence demonstrated greater proficiency in navigating digital financial platforms and were more likely to exhibit sound financial behaviour. The study suggests that national education and financial inclusion efforts should give more attention to including digital financial literacy. Improving access to digital financial literacy and user confidence leads to financial behaviour in a well-equipped and skilled financial digital ecosystem.

Keywords: Digital financial literacy, financial behaviour, financial confidence, financial knowledge

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Introduction

Being the development of technologies in financial sectors, the modification has been compulsion in literacy and behaviour. Traditionally, financial literacy delivered the ideas regarding the consumption of financial services, but right now only financial literacy is incomplete without incorporating digital literacy. Hence, the literacy on finance and technology formed digital financial literacy. Digital financial literacy ultimately influences the behavior of people differently than financial literacy alone. The baseline survey in financial literacy by Nepal Rastra Bank reported the rate of financial literacy in Nepal as 57.9%, whereas financial knowledge scored 47.3%, financial behavior 63.5%, and financial attitude 64.1% (NRB, 2022). Furthermore, 71.06% have a savings account, and 86.64% use investing, retirement, or savings products. Remarkably, 71.82% of people rely on friends and relatives to help them save money and borrow money to cover their expenses (NRB, 2022). Such a statistical scenario of Nepal provides the growing adoption of fintech and mandatorily invites the study of literacy and behavior accordingly.

In the sector of digital finance, 10 Payment System Operators (PSO) and 27 Payment Service Providers (PSP) in Nepal. The data revealed that the largest number of customers are engaging with mobile banking, with 23 million plus customers, followed by digital wallet users with 21 million users (IFC, 2023). The number of digital fintech startups and the positive intention of people are causing factors for the necessity of studying on literacy and behavior of citizens. Despite its challenges, the Nepal government has laid the groundwork for fintech to drive and accelerate broader economic development. Among the various determinants, digital financial literacy contributes to financial behavior. The spending and saving behavior is determined by digital financial literacy. Overspending and less saving behavior can be hindered in case DFL has been understood (Setiawan et al., 2022). Similarly, Lusardi (2008) argued that a lack of financial literacy causes adverse financial behavior and reflects inadequate proficiency in financial decision-making. Improving digital financial literacy (DFL) due to the unique characteristics, benefits, and risks associated with financial technology. Therefore, studying DFL and its influence on saving and spending behavior, as well as its implications for future financial decisions, is essential.

Nepal is seeing a gradual and noticeable shift in its technical and financial landscape, with digital literacy and the fintech ecosystem leading the way. Financial technology incorporates digital tools into financial services to boost innovation, efficiency, and accessibility. Digital literacy is the capacity to use digital instruments efficiently to promote financial inclusion and economic expansion (Gomber et al., 2017).

The specific issues and complexities presented by digital financial ecosystems may not be adequately addressed by the majority of the current literature on financial literacy, since it was developed in conventional, analog contexts. This emphasizes how present theoretical frameworks need to be improved to more fully capture the effects of digitalization on financial literacy. Financial and digital knowledge, awareness, attitude, and skill are not sufficient, but financial confidence is also required to determine the behavior of users. Financial confidence directs financial behavior and has a positive effect on planning and saving (Palameta et al., 2016). Respati et al. (2023) claimed that only a few studies have tested the effects of financial confidence on financial behavior. Therefore, the study focused on exploring the connection between DFL, financial confidence, and the financial behavior of university students. This research also puts a unique stand by focusing the university students, who may consider having financial and digital knowledge but may not have literacy and behavior accordingly.

This study has aimed to examine the status and relationship of digital financial literacy, financial confidence, and financial behavior of university students in the Kapilvastu district. Furthermore, the study aimed to test the mediation effect of financial confidence between digital financial literacy and the financial behavior of university students in the Kapilvastu district of Nepal.

Literature Review

Digital financial literacy (DFL) has two prerequisites: financial literacy and digital literacy. The ability of the individual to avoid financial problems and being able to get rational decisions is considered financial literacy. Similarly, digital literacy may also be considered as the ability to avoid the technological issues occurring in daily life (Hayati & Syofyan, 2021). Financial literacy has a connection with the development of alternatives regards financial practices and makes one able to select the best alternatives (Shen et al., 2019). Blending the financial practices and technology to form fintech as a trend in practice. Digital financial literacy has become an important education component of the digital edge (Stephen, 2022). Different studies covered DFL in several ways as awareness of digital financial services, knowledge of financial services, and awareness of the risk of DFS (Morgan et al., 2022). In other words, DFL is defined as knowledge about online purchasing and payment with different modes of digital payment (Prasad et al., 2018).

The disruption appearing in the financial ecosystem incorporates the digital financial services required for financial education, and literacy-based policies to adapt to the changing environment (Hasler et al., 2023). Technological advancement makes an effective touch for financial services and hence makes a rapid move as disruptive management. The disruption practices over the existing system, process, and sectors

of the economy ultimately impact consumer behavior and reconstruct the financial market as well (Heeks & Bukht, 2018). The market conditions and consumer behavior demand digital financial literacy combined especially during and after COVID-19. The requirement of such literacy may be filled with different dimensions of DFL, such as transferring knowledge, awareness, skill, and motivation to consume the digital platform of finance (Baskerville & Myers, 2023).

Digital technologies are crucial for achieving the goal of influencing people by embedding persuasive algorithms. Digital platforms influence the attitude and behavior of people by recommending and reminding in diverse ways (Oinas-Kukkonen, 2013). The instrumental growth of business leads to the behavioral growth of consumers and service providers. With the continuous growth and modification of fintech, tech-fin ultimately needs to enhance the knowledge, attitude, and behavior of consumers. Literacy, confidence, and behavior interplay to determine the crucial financial behavior in a techno-based financial ecosystem. Service providers can utilize persuasive technologies to influence user attitudes and behaviors through software design (Kim et al., 2019).

Digital Financial Literacy

Financial literacy is all about knowing the basics of money and being able to use that information to make smart choices (Llewellyn, 2012). People's lack of digital financial literacy (DFL) is a big reason why they don't use technology more. DFL is needed to get access to financial services to move up in the job market and daily life (Liew et al., 2020). Conceptually, Tony and Desai (2020) stated that DFL blends two ideas: financial literacy and digital platforms. This means that DFL can be thought of as financial literacy in digital financial technology. Digital Financial Literacy (DFL) should become an important part of education in the digital age because people need to improve their financial literacy to use fintech products and services more effectively and avoid excessive spending. Morgan et al. (2019) explain why it is important to give digital financial education to promote digital financial literacy, employing the skills and opportunities that will enable people to play an important part in the Digital Economy. Prasad et al. (2018) stated that DFL is a person's level of knowledge about how to buy things online, pay for things online using different payment methods, and use online banking systems. Consumptive behavior is more likely to happen to college students because that's when people start to form habits about what they buy.

Digital financial literacy and the financial behavior of consumers have been studied more in recent decades. There is much empirical evidence to test the hypothesis of digital financial literacy and financial confidence (Abdallah et al., 2025; Rahayu et

al., 2022; Respati et al., 2023; Setiawan et al., 2022). The hypotheses can be stated as below:

H₁: There is a significant relationship between digital financial literacy and financial confidence.

H₂: There is a significant relationship between digital financial literacy and financial behavior.

Financial Confidence

The capacity to properly manage finances, make wise financial decisions, and feel comfortable about the financial future are all components of financial confidence. It results from having sound financial knowledge, financial practices, and a feeling of financial control. Self-confidence is a person's belief in all parts of surplus riches and confidence that leads them to feel he is capable of achieving a variety of life goals (Arifin et al., 2017; Judge et al., 2002). Financial confidence is particularly critical for income planning and savings. Morris et al. (2022) believe that financial confidence is required to maintain the impact of financial knowledge on financial decision-making and behavior. Financial confidence is linked to a person's financial conduct and has a beneficial impact on planning and saving (Palameta et al., 2016). Several studies have found a favorable relationship between financial confidence and financial behavior. Financial confidence has a favorable impact on financial well-being by influencing financial behavior (Setiyani & Solichatun, 2019). People with financial confidence exhibit outstanding financial behavior, which leads to financial success. Based on an empirical and conceptual basis, the hypothesis has been stated:

H₃: There is a significant mediating effect of financial confidence between digital financial literacy and financial behavior.

Financial Behavior

Financial behavior can be stated as the techniques of managing money and money equivalents in broader terms. Financial management techniques are considered financial behavior (Saurabh & Nandan, 2018). Furthermore, the study provides insight into financial behavior as the methods of handling an individual's income and financial situation daily of the individual. Financial behavior is also considered the art of the ability to manage the available funds for the betterment of life (Falahati et al., 2012). Robb and Woodyard (2011) argued that the dimensions of financial literacy greatly influence financial behavior in several practices such as preparing the budget, saving for short-term and long-term, managing emergency funds.

An individual faces various types of financial challenges and needs to make decisions accordingly to manage and handle the available resources. The decision-making process is rooted in knowledge, ideas, and skill, as well as psychological factors such as the confidence of the individual (Chaulagain, 2017). Also, Wiranti et al. (2023) claimed the interconnection between literacy, mindset, and behavior for making decisions regarding financial management. Many scholars have confronted the idea of inter-linked knowledge, attitude, or convincing mindset of individuals called psychological factors, and the behavior of individuals. Based on this literature, the study poses the hypothesis to test the relationship between financial confidence and financial behavior. The hypothesis stated as:

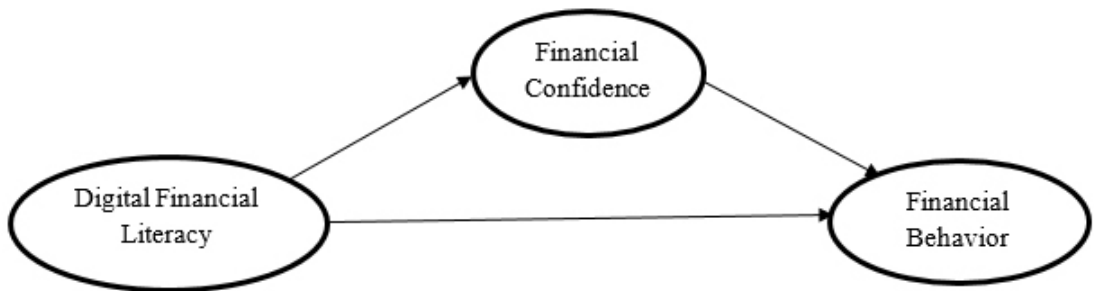
H4: There is a significant relationship between financial confidence and financial behavior.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework aims to analyze the influence of digital financial literacy on financial behavior and the role of financial confidence as a mediator between DFL and FB. In the conceptual framework, Digital financial literacy serves as an independent variable, financial behavior as an independent variable, and financial confidence as a mediating variable.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Methods and Procedures

Quantitative approach based explanatory research design to extend and test the phenomenon (Shmueli, 2010). The study identifies that changes in one construct can lead to changes in another construct. The Causal comparative research design was employed for examining the cause and effect relationship and helps to answer how the effect is caused by the next. This design has been executed to explore the effect

of digital financial literacy on financial confidence and financial behavior. Moreover, the study investigates the mediation effect of financial confidence between DFL and the financial behavior of university students. The study was focused on bachelor's and master's degree students in the Kapilvastu district of Nepal. The data collected with a questionnaire survey from the students of different 5 campuses in Kapilvastu district, using a blended physical and online (via Google link) mode of questionnaire distribution. Out of 5 campuses, 3 are community and 2 are private campuses, considering the sample size of 404, which is adequate suggested by Cochran (1977) with convenience sampling through a closed-ended structured questionnaire survey. The collected data was processed with SPSS Amos version 22 to perform structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyze the data. The study adhered to ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained during the data collection and used only for academic purposes.

Measurement

The study incorporates three constructs. Digital financial literacy was measured by financial knowledge, digital knowledge, awareness of digital financial services, and practical know-how of DFS (Lyons & Kass-Hanna, 2021). The dependent construct of the study, named Financial behavior, was measured with saving, shopping behavior, and short-term and long-term financial planning (Zulaihati et al., 2020). The mediating construct of the study is financial confidence, measured with Self-confidence/Esteem, Belief-future change, and Belief-future prosperity (Setiyani & Solichatun, 2019).

Results

Demographic Characteristics

The research survey was based on university students (Bachelor's and master's degrees) in the Kapilvastu district. 88% of respondents had bachelor's degrees, and the rest of them had master's degrees, running students in different campuses of Kapilvastu. 60% of females and the rest males participated in the survey. There were 130 males with bachelor's degrees and 28 with master's degrees; similarly, 229 females with Bachelor's degrees and 17 with master's degrees. The cross-table of gender and level of education is shown in Table 1.

Table 1*Cross-table of Gender and Level of Education*

	Male	Female	
Bachelor Degree	130	229	359
Master Degree	28	17	45
	158	246	404

Descriptive Analysis**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
DFL	1.00	5.00	3.9916	0.83973	-0.934	0.654
FC	1.00	5.00	3.4762	1.17219	-0.562	-0.677
FB	1.00	5.00	4.1079	0.81356	-1.096	0.996

Out of valid 404 responses under three constructs: digital financial literacy, financial confidence, and financial behavior in a five-point Likert scale. The mean value of digital financial literacy is about 4 means that the average responses were in agreement with a standard deviation of 0.8397. There is negative skewness of DFL -0.934, falling in between -1 and +1, which is considered an excellent value for measures of symmetry. And the value of kurtosis, 0.654, implies the peaked distribution (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The average response on financial confidence was comparatively lower than the rest of the two, 3.4762; this value implies that the respondents positioned themselves between neutral and agree responses in the Likert scale. Also, the standard deviation seems higher than the other two. The skewness and kurtosis both have negative values, but not so far from zero, so, data was normally distributed. Skewness showed a larger value, and kurtosis showed a flatter distribution. Most of the responses on financial behavior were agree and strongly agree, hence the average value becomes 4.1079 with the standard deviation of 0.8135, which is the lowest among the selected variables. The values of skewness and kurtosis both fall under acceptable criteria for normally distributed data (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Inferential Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

The reliability and discriminant validity concerns have been evaluated by CFA. Three fit indexes were used to confirm the model fit: Root mean square residual (RMR), the comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The threshold CFI value of 0.95 or more implies for excellent fit, which is accomplished in this study with the value of 0.963. The threshold for RMR is less than 0.08; the value for this study was 0.036, and the threshold for RMSEA is 0.1 or less for a good fit was also approved with the value of 0.066. (Brown, 2015). The CMIN/DF (chi-square statistics to degrees of freedom) is 2.738, which falls under the threshold values 1 and 3 and implies the acceptable and provides greater model support (Hair et al., 2014). The comparative fit index is 0.937, which is above the necessary minimum of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2017). The root mean square error of approximations was 0.069, which was just above the suggested level of 0.05 but below the upper limit of 0.08 (Hair et al., 2014). It means that the measurement model is fit (CMIN/DF = 2.738, $P < 0.01$, CFI = 0.963, RMR = 0.036, and RMSEA = 0.066).

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity (CV) is the degree of consistency with which many items can evaluate a single notion (Hair et al., 2014). It was advocated that factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) should be used to assess the CV. The suggested values of AVE should be greater than 0.5, and the CR should be greater than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2014). Furthermore, to meet the criteria of CV, the values of CR need to be greater than the respective values of AVE and meet the criteria exhibited in Table 3.

Table 3

Items, Loading, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Explained

Constructs	Items	loadings	Composite reliability	Average variance explained
DFL	DFL1	0.785	0.878	0.592
	DFL2	0.801		
	DFL3	0.729		
	DFL4	0.693		
	DFL5	0.692		

FC	FC1	0.788	0.929	0.722
	FC2	0.806		
	FC3	0.864		
	FC4	0.838		
	FC5	0.780		
FB	FB1	0.778	.894	0.627
	FB2	0.773		
	FB3	0.759		
	FB4	0.825		
	FB5	0.778		

Discriminant Validity

The degree to which predictors differentiate across constructs or measure different concepts is known as discriminant validity, and it is determined by examining the relationship between potential repeat measures (Ramayah et al., 2018). The discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) technique, with the criterion for determining discriminatory validity. When the square root of the AVE, as seen on the diagonals, exceeds the values in the columns and rows for that particular construct, we can conclude that the measurements are discriminatory. The diagonals have higher values than their corresponding columns and rows, which exhibits discriminant validity.

Table 4

Results of Discriminant Validity (Fornel-Larcker Method)

	CR	AVE	MSV	FC	FB	DFL
FC	0.929	0.722	0.468	0.850		
FB	0.894	0.627	0.435	0.564	0.792	
DFL	0.878	0.592	0.468	0.684	0.659	0.769

Structural Equation Modelling and Hypothesis Testing

Figure 2 and Table 5 performed the results of testing the structural model and hypothesis testing based on regression weights.

Figure 2

SEM for Direct, Indirect, and Mediation Relationship

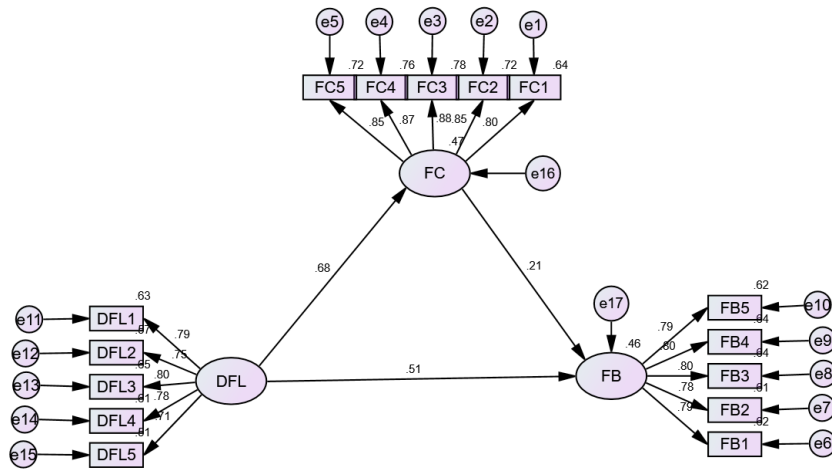


Table 5

Results of the Structural Path Model of Direct Effects

Hypothesized paths	Path Coefficient	S.E.	P-value	Decision
DFL → FB	.470	.065	***	Supported
DFL → FC	.890	.072	***	Supported
FC → FB	.149	.046	.001	Supported

With the analysis of data, it was obtained that DFL ($\beta = .470$, $P = .000$) has a significant effect on FB, and DFL ($\beta = .890$, $P = .000$) has a significant effect on FC. The third hypothesis stated FC ($\beta = .149$, $P < .01$) has a significant effect on FB. Thus, the hypothesis stated for digital financial literacy with financial confidence, and financial behavior of university students has been accepted. Similarly, the hypothesis for financial confidence and financial behavior has been accepted.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation occurs when a third variable intervenes between two related constructs. In the PLS path model, a change in the exogenous construct produces a change in the mediator variable, which leads to a change in the endogenous construct. The framework of this study considered financial confidence as the mediating variable between digital financial literacy and financial behavior. The hypothesis stated for the mediation relationship of FC has been accepted with partial mediation ($\beta = .1512$, $P = .000$, CI [.2294 - .0828]) between digital financial literacy and financial behavior.

Table 6*Results of Mediation Analysis*

Relationship	Path coefficient	Confidence Interval (CI)	P-value	Decision
DFL→ FC →FB	.1512	[.2294 - .0828]	***	Supported

Discussion

The study has strong coherence with previous empirical studies. The observations were obtained with four research hypotheses, and all have been supported. The significant effect of digital financial literacy on financial confidence and financial behavior of university students. Similar findings were obtained for digital financial literacy and financial confidence (Abdallah et al., 2025). Also, the financial behavior has been significantly influenced by digital financial literacy (Afif & Sulhan, 2022; Respati et al., 2023). Another hypothesis stated to test the relationship between financial confidence and the financial behavior of individuals, has also been supported, which has a similar finding to the study of Arifin et al. (2017). The study aimed to explore the mediating effect of financial confidence between digital financial literacy and financial behavior, and obtained a supported mediating effect similar to Jose and Ghosh (2024). The above-stated literature and findings provide theoretical and observational support for claiming the new insight.

Conclusion

The study confirmed the significant relationship between digital financial literacy and financial confidence in the financial behavior of university-level students. Individuals having higher digital financial literacy are more likely to engage in prudent and informed financial decision-making. The students having adequate knowledge, awareness, and practical know-how of DFS, and decision-making ability are more likely to exhibit behavior in shopping, saving, long-term, and short-term investments of the individual. Moreover, esteem and belief in financial services also lead to financial behavior. Financial confidence not only directly influences behavior but also serves as a mediator between digital financial literacy and financial behavior. This significant mediation serves an influential role in predicting financial behavior in the presence of digital financial literacy. Conclusively, the study imparts the necessities of digital financial literacy and a mental state of confidence to determine the behavior of customers in the techno-disrupting business environment.

Financial and technological education are distant from digital financial literacy; thus, they are treated as different in academia and practice. Promoting digital financial

literacy through knowledge, awareness, skill, and attitude may have an impact on the changing realm. Enhancing digital financial literacy must focus on building financial confidence to ensure that individuals can effectively translate their literacy into actionable financial behaviors. Despite the examining relation, the study has not free from certain limitations such as appropriateness of research design, sample size, time frame of data collection, specific geographic area may affect the generalizability of findings.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on financial literacy and behavior, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach that integrates both knowledge and confidence-building strategies to foster better financial decision-making in the digital age. Future research is recommended to examine the mediating and moderating effect for better understanding the complex relationships within financial inclusion, socialization, and digital financial contexts.

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Drivers of Economic Growth in South Asia: An Empirical Panel Data Study

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Abstract

Economic growth is the outcome of different factors as foreign direct investment, gross capital formation, size of population, government expenditure, technological improvement, rate of inflation and many others. Therefore, this study attempts to analyze the effects of foreign direct investment, gross capital formation, government expenditure, population growth rate and inflation rate on growth rate of gross domestic product (i.e. economic growth rate) of South Asia except the Maldives, through descriptive and causal research design. Panel data were taken from the World Bank data statistics between the periods of 2001 to 2023 AD. Data were analyzed by using fixed effect model on the basis of Redundant Fixed Effects Tests and Hausman Test. The study finds that population growth rate and gross capital formation positively affect the economic growth of South Asia, whereas there has been negative effect of foreign direct investment, government expenditure and inflation rate on economic growth. The study concludes that there is a critical role of population growth rate and capital formation in fostering economic growth in South Asia, with minor effect of foreign direct investment. Policymakers are advised to focus on enhancing capital investments and leveraging population growth dynamics to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: Economic growth, fixed effect, population growth rate, capital formation, South Asia

Introduction

The economic growth pattern in any region involves the analysis of the relationship between macroeconomic variables like foreign Direct Investment (FDI), government expenditure, gross capital formation, population growth rate, inflation rate

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and the economic growth, even more significant for developing regions like South Asia. The world has widely accepted the importance of foreign direct investment (FDI) as a vehicle of economic development, providing capital as well as technology transfer and productivity (Kafle, 2022; Sapkota & Gautam, 2023). The Asian Perspective Over the last 4 decades, many of the Asian economies have used Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as an instrument of their Economic Development Strategy, with varying degrees of success. South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, somewhat acts as a special case for these macroeconomic variables given that these countries are driven under different socio-economic conditions (Islam, 2021; Kaur, 2022). Although the region has undergone many economic changes in the last few decades, it remains in dire need of key transformational steps as exemplified by high inflation rates, changing population growth patterns, and government expenditure (Rahman et al., 2020; Din et al., 2024), which all impact the pace of economic growth.

In South Asia, the economic structure is featured with a high population growth rate, which could act as a demographic dividend or a demographic burden, depending on the ability of region in job creation and provide service (Abeywardhana, 2019; Janifar et al., 2020). The inflation has also affected purchasing power and investment decisions in these countries (Madurapperuma, 2016; Karki et al., 2020). Government spending can act as a growth momentum as investments in diverse sectors including infrastructure and public services, but excessive government expenditure without generating current revenue may also cause inflationary pressure (Rao et al., 2020; Budhathoki et al., 2024). Gross capital formation i.e. net increase in physical assets, is vital to economic stability and growth over the long term but is frequently disrupted by external and internal economic shocks (Bal et al., 2016; Shafrullah et al., 2024). Therefore, in order to develop a sound economic policy in South Asia, it is important to understand the complicated interaction of these variables.

To date, while FDI, government expenditure, gross capital formation, population growth, and inflation are acknowledged as important determinants of economic growth, there is still a substantial gap in the empirical literature investigating these relations in the South Asian region. Past studies have mostly focused on a specific variable or been conducted in several selected countries, so an in-depth, worldwide analysis of how these factors interplay to determine the economic outcome has not been available (Nguyen, 2022; Husnain et al., 2023). Paucity of such detailed analysis adds to the dilemma faced by policymakers, who need more nuanced understanding of the interlinkages, in order to formulate effective policies aimed at unlocking these variables for the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable growth.

Previous studies regarding the economic growth of South Asia have focused primarily on the effects of FDI and inflation individually (Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen,

2022; Sapkota & Gautam, 2023) while the simultaneous effects of government expenditure, gross capital formation, and population growth have received scant notice in the literature. Furthermore, even though a few attempts have been made in understanding the relationship between the inflation growth nexus, the majority of them do not consider the moderating impact of other macroeconomic factors (Karki et al., 2020; Din et al., 2024). In this regard, this research aims to shed light on the complex linkages amongst primary macroeconomic factors and their cumulative effects on economic growth of South Asia. Moreover, by filling in the existing deficiencies in the literature, the study intends to help in the formulation of the policies that will be most effective in stimulating economic growth in the region.

Literature Review

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), government expenditure, gross capital formation, population growth rate and inflation rate have attracted a considerable amount of academic attention in the context of economic growth in South Asia. Therefore, this section presents the theme of different growth theories and outcomes of empirical study in the context of determinants of economic growth.

Theoretical Foundation

Economic growth remained a central issue for policy makers and researchers, especially in the context of developing and emerging economies where structural challenges and capital constraints exist. In this regard, several growth theories have formulated advocating the different drivers of economic growth. The neoclassical growth theory postulates that economic growth is determined by capital accumulation and labor force growth, and technological advancement. Alper (2018), aligning with this theory, emphasizes FDI as a stimulatory of growth, because it contributes capital, technology and managerial know-how which may improve productivity and output.

In contrast to the neoclassical growth theory, Keynesian economics emphasized the role of government expenditure in stimulating the economic activity via demand side intervention. According to Keynes (1936), increased public spending on infrastructure, healthcare, and education can enhance the aggregate demand, create jobs, and accelerate growth, during the period of economic slowdown. It shows that public spending is not only the fiscal tool rather a vital stimulus for sustainable economic growth.

The endogenous growth theory believes that long run economic growth depends upon internal factors rather than only the external capital. The founder of endogenous growth theory, Romer (1990) views that technological progress, human capital development, and innovation are central drivers of long-term economic growth,

rather than external factors alone. This theory emphasizes the role of FDI as a conduit for technology transfer and productivity enhancement. By introducing advanced technologies and managerial expertise, FDI can stimulate domestic innovation and spillover effects, fostering sustained growth (Borensztein et al., 1998). This theory is relevant with present study, because government expenditure made on education and health promote the human capital as well innovation capacity of human being. Similarly, inflow of FDI results transfer of technology and technical know-how. These activities leads towards long-run economic growth.

Several investigations worldwide have shown a linkage between FDI and economic growth, some of which include Stojanov et al. (2019), connoting a greater influence of FDI has over economic growth in especially in developing regions, including South Asia, as this leads to capital accumulation and technology transfer. The several studies show a positive contribution of FDI in GDP growth in terms of capital formation, technology transfer, and employment generation. For example, Nguyen (2022) states that FDI plays the positive impact on the economy of South Asian countries, confirming earlier studies that emphasize the role of FDI in promoting economic growth through best practices and technology spillovers. In a similar line of reasoning, Chaudhury et al. (2020) claim that the nature of FDI, including sectoral components, is very influential in determining its effectiveness to promote growth. Abbas argues that the increase in FDI correlates with improved economic performance and that both phenomena may reinforce each other (Abbas, 2022). All the studies show that there is positive effect of FDI on economic growth. However, magnitude of effect is varied as per the structure of economy and absorption capacity of different nations.

Government spending is one of the most important determinants of economic growth, especially in the developing economies. Hummaira et al. (2021) discusses that government spending, in conjunction with FDI, has a significant impact on economic growth in Southeast Asian contexts, because public investment can act complementarily with private investment towards the growth of economic activity. Similarly, Sahoo and Sethi's findings also uphold this relationship, pointing out that if directed wisely, government expenditure can enhance the productivity of FDI, thereby fostering growth (Sahoo & Sethi, 2020). In the same line Das (2021) concludes that the optimum utilization of government expenditure made on required infrastructure support the inflow FDI on productive sectors and gives the maximum benefit. Likewise, government expenditure made on health and education will lead to a significant increase in output for an economy (Ali & Khan, 2020). The studies indicate that expenditure made by government creates the supportive role for inflow of FDI on the other hand development of human capital in side the nation, which promotes the economic growth. However, effect depends upon the efficient and transparent utilization fund.

Another important factor determining the economic growth is Gross Capital

Formation (GCF), which refers to the net increase of any physical assets. In Choe's study, it has been mentioned that the GCF largely influences economic growth, suggesting that there is a necessity for increased rates of formation of capital for economic development to be sustained (Choe, 2003). Particularly true of South Asia, where shortages of capital have limited growth in the past, the inflow of FDI into the domestic economy can significantly enhance GCF. In addition, with sufficient investment into infrastructure and industry, the overall economy might gain momentum through this inflow FDI (Sahoo & Sethi, 2020). Along the same lines, Adebayo and Kalmaz (2020) affirmed that gross fixed capital formation positively influences economic growth. The above studies suggest that, gross capital formation plays a vital role for the promotion of overall economic activities.

Population growth in terms of economic growth is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, a rising population could serve as a larger workforce that would yield growth in economy. On the other, it may engender higher unemployment and drain on resources if not accompanied by job opportunities creation and infrastructural development. The relationship between or the interaction of population growth with economic growth is a complex one. Abbas (2022) highlighted that demographic changes could be harnessed for economic growth if properly put in check. Furthermore, FDI is largely influenced by population growth because large size of market due to large sized population also attracts foreign investment which acts as a catalyst for economic growth (Chaudhury et al., 2020). The suitable size of population according to the economic condition, highly skill full population that can properly mobile the resources promotes the economic growth otherwise adverse effect on growth.

Inflation rate as an often-used destabilizing factor has implications that are complicated with regards to economic growth. Generally, inflation-growth relationships are described in terms of a non-linear threshold effect, whereby moderate inflation causes growth but beyond that too much inflation becomes damaging. Adeyemi et al. (2023) point out the presence of a threshold or critical level of inflation beyond which economic growth is destroyed. Likewise, Karki et al. (2020) further add by explaining that high inflation leads to the erosion of savings and investment, hence uncondusive to economic growth. In view of the high fluctuations in inflation rates within South-Asian counterparts, it is imperative to effectively manage inflation in order to preserve economic stability and growth (Iqbal & Awaz, 2022). All the studies suggest that higher inflation reduces economic growth via the reduction of purchasing power, saving and capital formation.

The interconnection between FDI, gross capital formation, government expenditure, population growth, and inflation are complex for understanding economic growth in South Asia. The literature reveals that these factors play important role in

establishing economic outcomes, suggesting integrated policies leveraging FDI, increasing efficient government spending, and managing demographic and inflationary pressures to allow sustainable growth.

Methods and Procedures

Research Design

The study employed descriptive and causal research design for the investigation of economic and social phenomena of seven South Asian countries, namely Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka. Descriptive research design systematically explains the characteristics of population, situation, or phenomenon by gathering and examining quantifiable data to uncover patterns, trends, and relationships, without altering variables. Similarly, causal research design is a methodology used to determine the causes and effects between independent and dependent variables.

Observation

This study consists of seven selected South Asian countries, each explanatory and dependent variable were observed annually from 2001 to 2023 AD. The study has a total of 161 observations focusing on specific economic indicators Gross Domestic Product Growth, Foreign Direct Investment, Government Expenditure, Gross Capital Formation, Population Growth Rate and Inflation Rate. The countries were chosen because they represent through diverse economic condition which is critical to understanding regional dynamics including policy implications (Syaifullah et al., 2024).

Nature of Data

The panel-data approach allows the referencing of both cross-sectional and time-series data, providing a robust structure for the understanding of dynamics of various economic indicators over time. The design is particularly suited for addressing cross-country heterogeneity while controlling for unobservable variables that might influence the outcomes of interest (Supianti, 2023; Rüttenauer & Kapelle, 2024). This dual nature of data enhances the analysis by providing more variability, which reduces multicollinearity issues and improves the efficaciousness of the estimators (Keča & Marčeta, 2016; Aji, 2022). The panel data will encompass both dependent and independent variables instrumental in affecting economic growth and social development, including investment, education, and health expenditures (Gautam et al., 2021; Prawoto & Basuki, 2022).

Source of Data

The data for this study are obtained from reputable international databases, like the World Bank data statistics. Such sources contain vast datasets critical for rigorous panel data analysis. The analysis rests on secondary data because it was built-upon established statistics to polish the uncertainty in the findings (Tebaldi, 2011; Kumar & Saxena, 2024).

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis was used multiple panel data regression techniques, including Pooled Ordinary Least Squares (POLS), Fixed Effects Model (FEM), and Random Effects Model (REM). The selection of appropriate model is based upon the Redundant Fixed Effects Tests, Correlated Random Effects - Hausman Test, Omitted Random effect: Lagrang Multiplier (Syaifullah et al., 2024). In addition, common diagnostic tests will be conducted like Autocorrelation tests to check for violations common in the panel data (Rahim et al., 2018).

Methods of Analysis

This study has used a panel data approach that spans nations like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and Afghanistan across a period like 2001 to 2023 in order to investigate the effect of foreign direct investment (FDI) on economic growth in South Asia. To meet the research objectives, we applied the following econometric model to achieve the study goals.

$$EG_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FDI_{it} + \beta_2 GEX_{it} + \beta_3 LNGCF_{it} + \beta_4 INF_{it} + \beta_5 POP_{it} + \epsilon_{it} \dots (1)$$

Where,

EG = Economic Growth

FDI= Foreign Direct Investment LNGCF = Gross Capital Formation calculated in log form

INF = Inflation

POP = Population Growth Rate

β = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ and β_5 = Constant Coefficients of Respective Variables

ϵ = Standard Error

Results

This section covers data analysis and interpretation of results as well as discussion part. Below are the results of the different statistical tools:

Descriptive Statistics

The given table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of all employed dependent and independent variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Dependent and Independent Variables Used under the Study

	EG	FDI	GEX	INF	LNGCF	POP
Mean	4.823842	8.18E+09	13.28537	7.815809	24.34816	1.274522
Median	5.765130	1.62E+09	12.95545	6.644547	24.34986	1.131483
Maximum	11.93187	6.44E+10	19.90532	49.72110	27.73308	2.677157
Minimum	-10.21840	-16553760	5.038812	2.007174	20.18174	-0.651321
Std. Dev.	3.653296	1.53E+10	3.242024	6.335486	2.013014	0.564071
Skewness	-1.834391	2.019724	-0.100638	4.221293	-0.284074	0.300094
Kurtosis	7.278435	5.757954	2.923258	25.91698	2.540157	4.337498
Jarque-Bera	111.1774	83.73208	0.162404	2087.628	1.869863	7.521951
Probability	0.000000	0.000000	0.922007	0.000000	0.392613	0.023261
Sum	405.2027	6.87E+11	1115.971	656.5279	2045.246	107.0598
Sum Sq. Dev.	1107.765	1.95E+22	872.3897	3331.486	336.3348	26.40864
Observations	84	84	84	84	84	84

The descriptive statistics presented in table 1 reveal high volatility across the six variables. The Economic Growth (EG) of South Asia ranges from a mean of 4.82 with the highest ever economic growth realized at 11.93 and the lowest -10.21. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) contains an enormous mean (8.18E+09) and is highly right-skewed (2.02) with a kurtosis of 5.76 showing isolated large flows. Inflation (INF) is too fluctuating with high of 49.72 and low 2.00 whereas value of mean inflation was held constant at 7.81. Value of standard deviation of inflation was also held constant at 6.33, which is far higher than any other variable. It shows too much inflation fluctuation. The mean of South Asian nations' Government Expenditure (GEX) was 13.28, with a maximum of 19.90 and minimum of 5.03., whereas LNGCF and POP have moderate dispersion.z

Table 2
Correlation Matrix

Correlation	EG	FDI	GEX	INF	LNGCF	POP
EG	1.000000 -----					
FDI	0.109501 0.3214	1.000000 -----				
GEX	0.179838 0.1016	0.115001 0.2976	1.000000 -----			
INF	-0.405099 0.0001	-0.086667 0.4331	-0.390891 0.0002	1.000000 -----		
LNGCF	0.192660 0.0791	0.705266 0.0000	-0.271116 0.0126	0.016927 0.8785	1.000000 -----	
POP	0.144740 0.1890	-0.054289 0.6238	-0.034602 0.7547	0.013542 0.9027	0.127114 0.2492	1.000000 -----

Table 2 depicts the correlation matrix which indicates that economic growth (EG) is weakly and positively correlated with foreign direct investment (FDI) ($r = 0.1095$, $p = 0.3214$), government expenditure (GEX) ($r = 0.1798$, $p = 0.1016$), log of gross capital formation (LNGCF) ($r = 0.1926$, $p = 0.0791$), and population (POP) ($r = 0.1447$, $p = 0.1890$), though none of them are significant, and all show negligible positive correlation with economic growth of South Asia. Conversely, inflation (INF) has a moderate negative relationship with EG ($r = -0.4051$, $p = 0.0001$), which indicates that inflation strongly inhibits economic growth by lowering the purchasing power and raising uncertainty. These results demonstrate that inflation is one of the important constraints on growth, and other variables might need to be explored further to establish stronger causality.

Estimation Method

Panel data has used under this study, which combines cross-sectional and time-series data. It is widely used in econometrics and social sciences as it can account for unobserved heterogeneity, improve efficiency in estimation, and allow the examination of dynamic changes over time. The advantage of panel data is that multiple entities can be tracked over time, which helps to understand the temporal dynamics and causal relationships among variables. This data setup can prevent omitted variable bias because it allows researchers to control for individual-specific impacts that do not change over time, thus arriving at more trustworthy estimates of the relationships being explored (Ambya & Hamzah, 2022; Venegas-Martínez & Aali-Bujari, 2021).

In model estimation of panel data, different approaches can be employed, including Pooled Ordinary Least Squares (POLS), Fixed Effects (FE), and Random Effects (RE) models. The approach employed can depend on data characteristics and assumptions about the error structure and individual effects.

Pooled OLS Method

The POLS is a straightforward approach that combines panel data as if it were a standard cross-sectional data set. It assumes that there are no individual-specific effects influencing the dependent variable. POLS is easy to implement, but it can generate biased estimates when there is unobserved heterogeneity. In order to take the decision of selection of POLS, there is conducted Redundant Fixed Effect-Likelihood Ratio test and if the value of cross section F and Cross section Chi-square > 0.05 (pvalue).

Random Effects Method

The Random Effects (RE) model assumes individual-specific effects are uncorrelated with the independent variables. The model is particularly useful in a scenario where interest is in the examination of the impact of variables changing across time with control over the unobserved heterogeneity across entities. The selection criteria for the use of RE are the Hausman test, which tests the null hypothesis that the random effects are uncorrelated with the regressors. Failure to reject the null hypothesis renders the RE model more desirable due to its efficiency in the estimation of parameters (Ambya & Hamzah, 2022). In addition, RE models can be useful when the number of time periods is large compared to the number of entities as they can exploit the additional information provided by the panel structure.

Fixed Effects Method

The Fixed Effects (FE) model, on the other hand, controls for time-invariant characteristics by manipulating the data, typically by differencing or demeaning. This method is particularly advantageous if the individual-specific effects are correlated with the independent variables because it readily removes the bias caused by omitted variables that are time-invariant. The basis of selection of the application of FE is the significance of the individual effects and the Hausman test results, which, if significant, suggest that the FE model is a better model compared to the RE model. FE models are most useful if the primary interest is in the within-entity changes over time and not in the between-entity differences.

Finally, in order to select the appropriate on between fixed effect and pols there is conducted the Redundant Fixed Effect-Likelihood Ratio test. If the 'p' value of cross

section F and Cross section Chi-square >0.05 there is selected pols otherwise fixed. Similarly, selection decision between fixed and random effect is based on Hussman test. If the p value of is >0.05 random effect model is selected otherwise fixed effect model.

Table 3

Redundant Fixed Effects Test: Likelihood Ratio Test

Effects Test	Statistic	d.f.	Prob.
Cross- section F	4.051136	(5,73)	0.0027
Cross-section Chi-square	20.570385	5	0.0010

Table 3 depicts that p value of cross section F and Chi-square is less than 0.05 level of significance. It indicates that Fixed effect model is appropriate than POLS.

Table 4

Correlated Random Effects – Hausman Test

Effects Test	Statistic	d.f.	Prob.
Cross- section random	20.255681	5	0.0011

Table 4 shows that p value of cross-section random is less than 0.05 level of significance. It suggests that fixed effect model is better than the random effect model. Therefore, the study has used the fixed effect model for the estimation.

Table 5

Fixed Effect Model

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.
FDI	-1.00E-10	5.23E-11	-1.915190	0.0594
GEX	-0.041187	0.148980	-0.276458	0.7830
INF	-0.179826	0.058929	-3.051581	0.0032
LNGCF	1.439905	0.778348	1.849950	0.0684
POP	2.302207	1.094820	2.102818	0.0389
C	-30.39703	20.00654	-1.519354	0.1330
R-squared	0.406034	Mean dependent var		4.823842
Adjusted R-squared	0.324669	S.D. dependent var		3.653296
S.E. of regression	3.002225	Akaike info criterion		5.158132

Sum squared resid	657.9748	Schwarz criterion	5.476453
Log likelihood	-205.6415	Hannan-Quinn criter.	5.286094
F-statistic	4.990268	Durbin-Watson stat	1.897800
Prob (F-statistic)	0.000017		

Table 5 present the effects of different independent variables on dependent variable as economic growth. FDI appears with a slightly negative and significant coefficient ($\beta = -1.00E-10$, $p = 0.059$), indicating a weakly negative effect on economic growth, possibly due to crowding-out effects or mismatched sectoral inflows. INF significantly slow down growth ($\beta = -0.180$, $p = 0.003$). It means as per the increase in inflation rate by 1 percentage, economic growth rate decline by 0.003 percentages. This is in line with theories linking high inflation with investment uncertainty. Nevertheless, POP growth tends to favor growth with a positive impact ($\beta = 2.302$, $p = 0.039$), which could be seen to be due to the so-called demographic dividends. The value of beta coefficient indicates that economic growth rate of South Asia will increase by 2.302 percentage due to the increase in population growth rate by 1 percentage. The LNGCF appears to have a mildly positive influence on growth ($\beta = 1.440$, $p = 0.068$) as capital formation does play a role. GEX is found not to be significant ($p = 0.783$), implying it does not enhance growth. The model accounts for 40.6% of the total variance in growth ($R^2 = 0.406$), thus moderately explaining the variation in growth. The significant F-statistic ($p = 0.000017$) is enough to imply the significance of the group of chosen predictors. With a Durbin-Watson stat at 1.898, there seems to be no indication of autocorrelation, and this enlarges the reliability of this model. Admittedly, major drivers (INF, POP) offer insights to be taken into consideration by policymakers; however, the unexpected negative nature of FDI and the insignificance of GEX might need revisiting.

Discussion

These findings offer both support for and a contrast with key themes in the existing literature. The negative effect of FDI on growth sharply contrasts with those studies which emphasizes FDI's growth-boosting capacity through capital and technology spillovers (Sapkota & Gautam, 2023; Kafle, 2022), yet is consistent with critiques pointing to a crowding-out effect or sectoral misallocation in institutionally weak economies (Chaudhury et al., 2020; Abbas, 2022). Likewise, the significant

negative effect of inflation corroborates the evidence of high inflation giving rise to uncertainty regarding investment and reducing real purchasing power (Karki et al., 2020; Adeyemi et al., 2023).

The positive association between population growth and economic growth does dovetail with demographic dividend theories depending on employment generation (Abeywardhana, 2019; Abbas, 2022). However, this measure is at odds with the findings of research cautioning against unchecked population growth without job creation (Janifar et al., 2020). The tentative positive role of gross capital formation provides weak support for its theoretical position in growth models (Bal et al., 2016) but diverges with studies underscoring its vulnerability to outside disturbances (Shafrullah et al., 2024).

Notably, the insignificance of government expenditure conflicts with literature advocating its complementary role with FDI (Humaira et al., 2021; Sahoo & Sethi, 2020) but is in agreement with critiques relating to fiscal inefficiency and risks of inflation (Budhathoki et al., 2024; Rao et al., 2020). These inconsistencies only reinforce the region's peculiar socio-institutional dynamics, which need policies that concern themselves with structural bottlenecks while leveraging context-specific synergies.

Conclusion

This study attempted to investigate the direction and magnitude of effect of selected macroeconomic variables on economic growth of South Asia. The research concludes that there are multifaceted determinants of economic growth in South Asia, revealing both expected and counterintuitive relationships. Inflation consistently undermines growth, aligning with its destabilizing theoretical role, while population growth exhibits a positive association, contingent on employment opportunities and skill development. Therefore, maintaining the inflation rate at optimum certain threshold level, aligned with the economic status of nations. Similarly, implementation of human capital development policies, capable of harnessing the demographic dividend, is necessary for the higher economic growth rate. Contradictory to the conventional expectations, FDI shows a weak negative connection with economic growth which suggests potential structural inefficiencies in its absorption or sectoral misalignment. Gross capital formation shows tentative positive effect, though its effect is moderated by external shocks and infrastructural gaps. Specially, government expenditure lacks statistical significance, implying inefficiencies in fiscal allocation. The model's

moderate explanatory power highlights the influence of unobserved factors, such as institutional quality, geopolitical dynamics as well as informal sector contributions. These findings collectively emphasize the region's unique socio-economic landscape, where growth paths are shaped by a complex interplay of structural bottlenecks, demographic realities, and policy effectiveness.

Policymakers should prioritize inflation stabilization through prudent monetary and supply-side measures to safeguard growth. FDI strategies require recalibration to align with productive sectors and institutional reforms that enhance absorptive capacity. Demographic dividends must be leveraged through targeted investments in education, vocational training, and labor market expansion. Strengthening gross capital formation demands resilient infrastructure development and risk-mitigation frameworks. The null impact of government expenditure necessitates fiscal reforms to improve spending efficiency, prioritize growth-oriented sectors, and avoid inflationary financing. Future research should investigate nonlinear relationships, institutional mediators, and informal economy dynamics to refine policy frameworks. Addressing these dimensions holistically could foster sustainable growth in South Asia's evolving economic context.

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Impact of Exchange Rate on Nepal's Balance of Payment: An ARDL Approach

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Abstract

This study examines Nepal's Balance of Payments (BOP) from 1998/99 to 2022/23 under its fixed exchange rate regime with the Indian Rupee (INR). Using the ARDL model, well suited for small samples and mixed-integration data along with an ECM, this study investigates the casual impact of the INR/USD exchange rate, remittance inflows, and import levels on Nepal's BOP. The results reveal a significant long-run cointegration among variables. Findings show long-run cointegration: a 1% INR depreciation versus the USD boosts BOP by NPR 6.32 billion, enhancing export competitiveness. A 1% rise in imports cuts BOP by NPR 27.47 billion, reflecting trade deficits and remittances increase BOP by NPR 15.22 billion, stabilizing it. The study highlights Nepal's vulnerability to INR fluctuations and import dependency, advocating for export diversification, remittance-driven investments, and strategic import controls. Policy recommendations emphasize enhancing forex reserves, diversifying trade partners, and strengthening monetary coordination with India to mitigate external vulnerabilities. These insights offer practical guidance for sustaining BOP stability in economies with pegged exchange rate regimes.

Keywords: Bound's test, Currency Peg, devaluation, Error Correction Model, remittance

Introduction

Balance of Payments (BOP) comprises the systematic recording of all economic transactions between the residents of the country and the rest of the world over a period



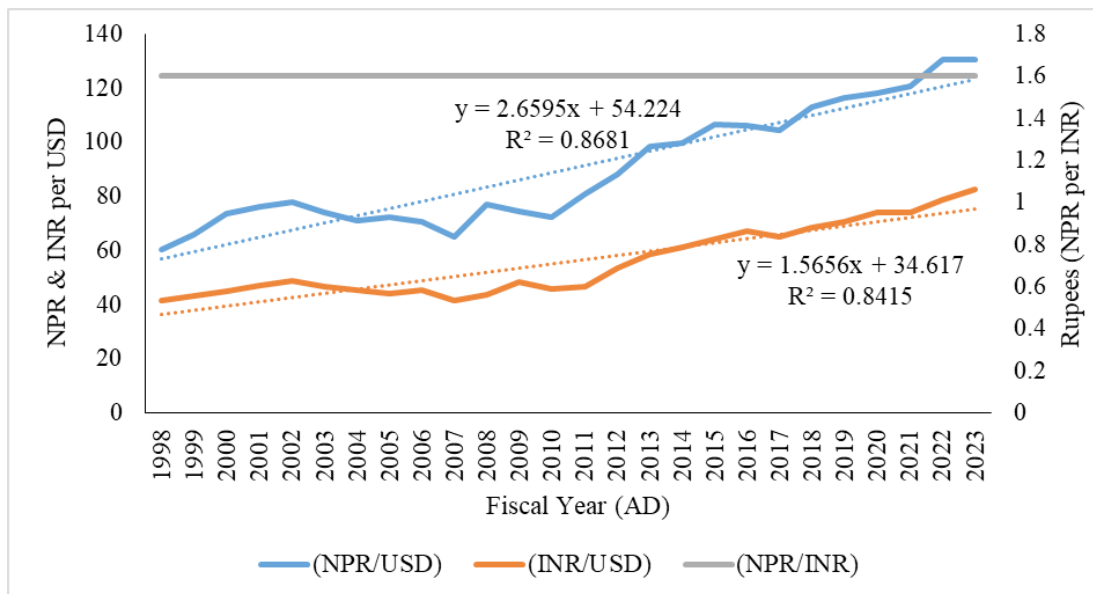
(IMF, 2009). It has three accounts: current, capital, and financial. Trade in goods and services, income, and current transfers are accounted for under the current account, where the capital account records financial transactions, including foreign direct investments, loans, and reserve assets (Ojha, 2013). The Balance of Payments is one of the crucial statistical statements reflecting a country's position on global trade, net foreign assets, economic relations with other countries, and financial capital (Ahmad et al., 2014). Information from the balance of payments reveals whether a country can cover its imports and other financial obligations through its savings (Afolabi & Kolawale, 2020). The Balance of Payments enables a country to manage and adjust its exchange rate effectively (Sangeetha & Patni, 2018). Exchange rate fluctuations influence the instabilities in the current and financial accounts of the balance of payment in the context of developing countries (Kandil, 2009).

The exchange rate is a key macroeconomic determinant of a country's economic growth, referring to the rate at which one country's currency is exchanged for another's (Ghimire et al., 2020). The US dollar (USD) is widely recognized as an international reserve currency and is commonly used as a benchmark for cross-exchange rates across global economies (Dahal & Raju, 2022). The growing emphasis on export-led growth and the dismantling of tariff and non-tariff barriers has made the exchange rate increasingly important. The effect of exchange rate fluctuations on economic activity has changed fundamentally. Nepal has pegged its exchange rate with the Indian Rupee (INR) at a rate of 1.6 Nepalese Rupees (NPR) to 1 INR since Nepal Rastra Bank to stabilize the economy, control inflation, and enhance international currency stability (Nepal & Pokharel, 2016). The objective in doing so is to balance the fluctuations between the supply and demand for foreign exchange (Adhikari et al., 2017). The exchange rate is officially determined, and the Nepalese Rupee value is influenced by changes in the Indian Rupee exchange rate (Koirala, 2018). This rate has remained unchanged since 1993 despite the growing economic disparity with India, which appears puzzling. This overvalued rate has led to a decline in export competitiveness, creating a persistent economic challenge (Paudel & Burke, 2015).

Nepal has a floating exchange rate system with other foreign currencies. The foreign exchange rate positively impacts BOP, but its volatility has inverse effects (Afolabi & Kolawale, 2020; Tijani, 2014). Also, studies (Gatawa et al., 2018; Sujianto, 2020) revealed a negative effect of the exchange rate on the balance of payments. The exchange rate of NPR/USD and INR/USD is depicted in Figure (1) along with the pegged exchange rate of NPR/INR.

Figure 1

Exchange Rate NPR/USD, INR/USD, and Pegged NPR/INR



NPR and INR have weakened significantly against the USD, with NPR facing sharper depreciation. The NPR/INR rate may deviate slightly from its peg due to asymmetrical USD trends. The fixed NPR/INR exchange rate ensures stability in Nepal-India trade, but also makes Nepal vulnerable to INR fluctuations against the USD. The high R^2 values suggest that exchange rate depreciation follows a predictable trend over time.

From mid-July 2023 to mid-July 2024, the Nepalese Rupee depreciated by 1.64% against the US dollar, following a 2.79% depreciation the previous year. The buying exchange rate was NPR 133.36 per US dollar in mid-July 2024. Nepal's gross foreign exchange reserves increased 30.4 % to USD 15.27 billion in mid-July 2024, which is sufficient to cover 13 months of imports for merchandise and services. In mid-July 2024, Nepal's imports decreased by 1.2%. Balance of Payments (BOP) recorded a surplus of NPR 502.49 billion (\$ 3.77 billion) in the fiscal year 2023/24, up from NPR 285.82 billion (\$ 2.17 billion) the previous year (NRB, 2024).

The trade deficit of Nepal has widened due to the larger volume of imports despite faster export growth (MoF, 2021). High imports and low exports have been leading to a persistent deficit balance of payments throughout Nepal's history (Acharya, 2013). Balance of Payments faces significant negative effects because of overvalued exchange rates, as it makes exports uncompetitive (Sultani & Faisal, 2022). Inflationary pressure caused by exchange rate volatility has become a significant concern for economists and policymakers (Musa, 2021). Trade and BOP deficits can

be mitigated by maintaining an optimal exchange rate, which in turn contributes to Nepal's economic stability. Several studies indicate that exchange rate devaluation improves the BOP in developing economies (Osman, 2016) and that stable exchange rates foster investment and economic growth (Ahmad et al., 2014; Koirala, 2018). Although global research has widely explored the influence of exchange rates and other macroeconomic variables on the BOP, there is a significant research gap in the Nepalese context. To address this gap, this study investigates the long and short-run causal impacts of three key macroeconomic variables: exchange rate (NPR/USD, INR/USD, NPR/INR), remittances (as % of GDP), and imports (as % of GDP) on Nepal's balance of payments.

Methods and Procedures

This study employs methodologies based on established econometric techniques (Breusch & Pagan, 1979; Nepal, 2020; Pesaran et al., 2001).

Data Sources

Secondary data on these variables for the past 25 years were sourced from the web portals of the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) and the Ministry of Finance (MoF), Government of Nepal, covering the period from 1998/1999 to 2022/2023 AD. The INR/USD exchange rate data for the same period was collected from the Handbook of Statistics published by the Reserve Bank of India. The dataset has not been seasonally adjusted, and all figures are reported in their original form as published by the respective institutions.

Research Design and Analysis

Descriptive statistics and Empirical analysis are employed as the research design for this study. An augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) unit root test is done to assess the stationarity of the variables (Dickey & Fuller, 1979). Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model (ARDL) was employed for the time series data with the ARDL bound test of co-integration (Pesaran et al., 2001). The ARDL model was chosen over other time-series models because it is suitable when the variables are integrated of mixed order, i.e., $I(0)$ and $I(1)$, but not $I(2)$, and it provides robust results in small sample sizes. The Error Correction Model (ECM) was further run to find out the short-run and long-run relationship among the variables (Engle & Granger, 1987). Normality, serial correlation, and heteroscedasticity were further assessed for diagnosing the model using the Jarque-Bera test (Jarque & Bera, 1987), Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test (Breusch & Pagan, 1980) and the Breusch-Pagan test (Breusch & Pagan, 1979) respectively. The stability of the model's parameter was assessed using the CUSUM

and CUSUM of Squares test (Kim et al., 2000). Stata (v.17.0) was used for all the analyses.

Model Specification

Given that there is an established relationship between the exchange rate and the Balance of Payments (BOP) from previous studies, this study treats the BOP as the endogenous variable with the exchange rate, remittance (% of GDP), and imports (% of GDP) as exogenous variables. INR/USD is used as the exchange rate in this model, as the Nepalese currency is pegged to the Indian Rupee at a fixed rate. The functional relationship between the variables is as follows:

$$BOP_t = f(ER_t, REM_t, IMP_t)$$

where,

BOP_t = Balance of Payments

ER_t = Exchange Rate (INR/USD)

REM_t = Remittance (% of GDP)

IMP_t = Imports (% of GDP)

ARDL Model

Since these variables are time series data, the Autoregressive Distributed Lag Model (ARDL) is employed to incorporate both I (0) and I (1) variables after conducting the unit root test. This model captures both short-term and long-term dynamics between BOP and its determinants. ARDL model is expressed as follows, where both the lagged values of the dependent variable (BOP) and the independent variables (exchange rate, remittance, and imports) are included as regressors:

$$BOP_t = \alpha + \sum_{i=1}^p \beta_i BOP_{t-i} + \sum_{j=0}^{q1} \beta_j \ln(ER_{t-j}) + \sum_{k=0}^{q2} \beta_k \ln(REM_{t-k}) + \sum_{l=0}^{q3} \beta_l \ln(IMP_{t-l}) + \varepsilon_t$$

where,

($BoPt_t$) is the current value of the Balance of Payments.

(BoP_{t-i}) represents the lagged values of the Balance of Payments.

(ER_{t-j}) is the lagged value of the Exchange Rate (INR/USD)

(REM_{t-k}) is the lagged value of the Remittance (% of GDP)

(IMP_{t-l}) is the lagged value of the Imports (% of GDP)

ε_t is the error term

$\beta_i, \beta_j, \beta_k,$ and β_l are the coefficients to be estimated

The ARDL bound test is carried out to determine the presence of co-integration among the studied variables.

Results and Discussion

Summary of the Variables Included in the Study

Data analysis was conducted using Stata (v 17.0) software following data collection and inspection. Table 1 presents the descriptive summary statistics of the variables selected for the study. The Balance of Payments (BOP) has a mean value of 44.27 billion NPR, with a wide variation as indicated by the standard deviation of 110.07 billion NPR. The Exchange Rate (NPR/USD and INR/USD) has a mean of NPR 88.50 of INR 56.33 per USD, respectively with moderate variability and a slight tendency toward higher values. Consumer Price Inflation averages a 6.69% change, with a relatively stable range and a distribution close to normal. Imports and remittances as a percentage of GDP have an average of 29.36% and 17.56 %, respectively. While the p-values from normality tests do not indicate significant departures from normality. The skewness and kurtosis statistics further suggest that most variables have distributions close to symmetric with moderate tails, implying no extreme outliers or distortions in the data, making them suitable for regression-based econometric analysis.

Table 1

Descriptive Summary Statistics of the Variables Used

Variables	Mean (S.D)	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis	p-value
Balance of Payments (NPR in billions)	44.27 (110.07)	-255.25	290.51	0.14	4.66	0.11
Exchange Rate (NPR/USD)	88.50 (20.62)	60.48	130.58	0.51	1.89	0.10
Exchange Rate (INR/USD)	56.33 (12.97)	41.34	82.59	0.55	1.87	0.09
Consumer Price Inflation (% change)	6.69 (2.83)	2.42	12.62	0.33	2.04	0.30
Imports (% of GDP)	29.36 (4.10)	23.37	38.58	0.69	2.53	0.23
Remittance (% of GDP)	17.56 (6.57)	3.02	25.5	0.76	2.57	0.15

Note: Figures in the parentheses denote the standard deviation

Trend Analysis of the Variables Used in the Study

These graphs depict the trend of macroeconomic variables selected here from 1998/99 to 2022/23. The Balance of Payments (BOP) exhibited significant volatility over the years with notable peaks and troughs (Figure 2). It shows substantial deficits in the early and late years (like in 2010/11, 2018/19, and 2021/22) and surpluses in between. The trend line has a slight negative slope with low R² value suggesting no significant correlation with time. The exchange rate shows a clear upward trend indicating that the NPR has depreciated against the USD over time. Periods of BOP deficit coincide with years of higher exchange rates where the cost of imports increases negatively impacting the BOP. The consistent depreciation of the NPR against the

USD likely reflects underlying structural trade imbalances and growing dependence on imports.

Figure 2

Growing Trend of Balance of Payments and Exchange Rate from 1998/99 to 2022/23

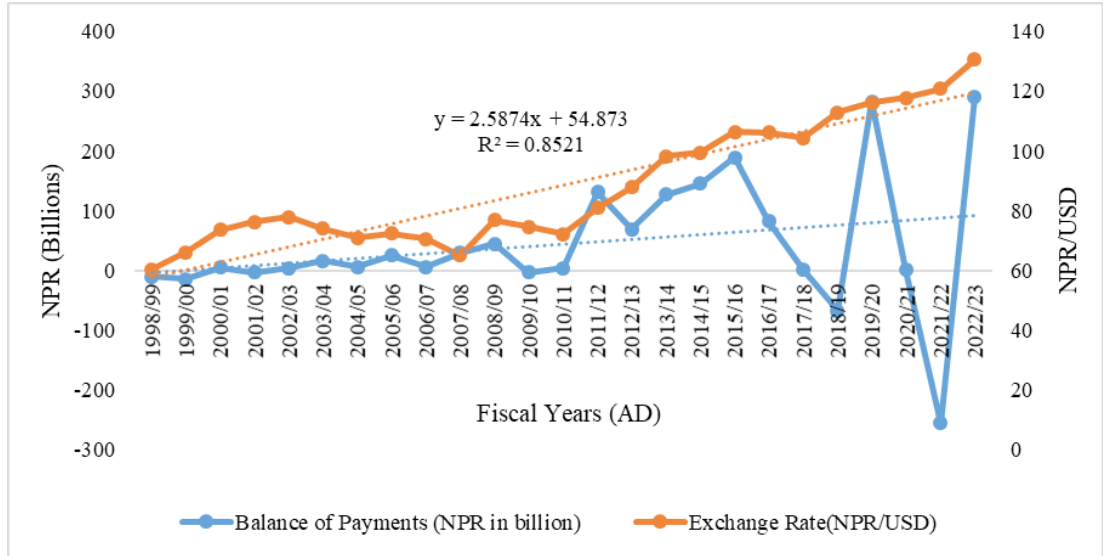
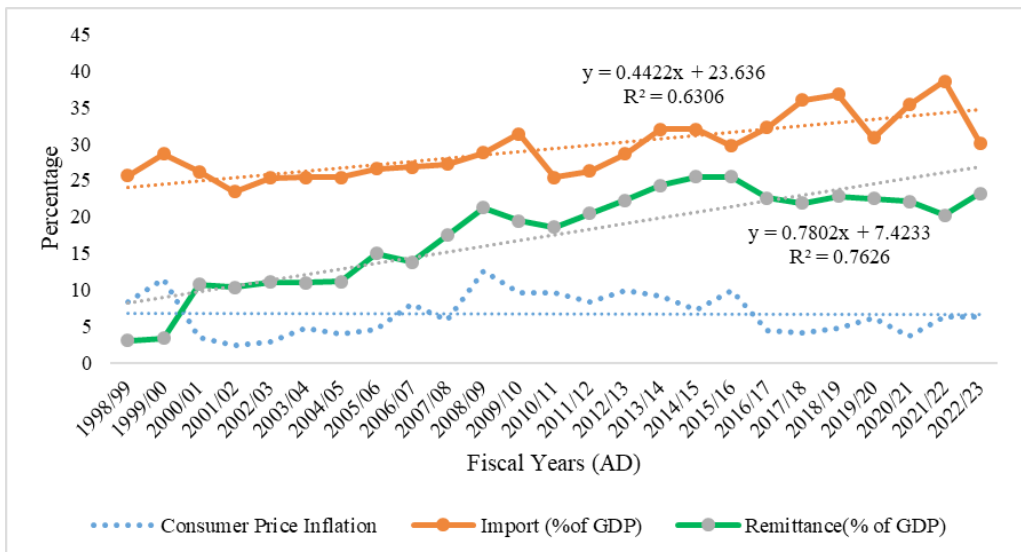


Figure 3

Growing Trend of Consumer Price Inflation, Remittance and Imports from 1998/99 to 2022/23



Inflation is highly variable with sharp peaks around the early 2000s and late 2000s, followed by fluctuations in the subsequent years (Figure 3). The overall trend shows a slight upward pressure on prices but with considerable short-term volatility. Imports as a percentage of GDP show a generally increasing trend ($R^2 = 0.63$) over the years, although the growth is moderate. Similarly, Remittance as a percentage of GDP shows a stronger upward trajectory with an R^2 value of 0.76, possibly driven by increased reliance on foreign income source. The increasing share of imports and remittances in GDP reflects Nepal's growing integration with the global economy. While remittances have helped cushion the economy and support household consumption, the rising import-dependence may undermine domestic production and widen trade deficits.

Unit Root Test

The Augmented Dickey-Fuller (ADF) or unit root test results are reported in Table 2. It reveals that the Balance of Payment and Import (% of GDP) series is stationary at a level with an order of integration $I(0)$. In contrast, the Exchange Rate, Consumer Price Inflation, and Remittance series are non-stationary at their levels but become stationary after first differencing with order of integration $I(1)$. This combination of $I(0)$ and $I(1)$ variables confirms the suitability of the ARDL model which is specifically designed to handle regressors with mixed integration orders, provided none are integrated of order two [$I(2)$].

Table 2

Augmented Dickey-Fuller (Unit Root) Test at Level and First Difference

Variables	Level		First Difference		Order of Integration
	Test Statistic	p-value	Test Statistic	p-value	
Balance of Payment (NPR in billions)	-4.57	0.000			I (0)
Exchange Rate (INR/USD)	-1.34	0.876	-3.93	0.001	I (1)
Consumer Price Inflation (%)	-2.29	0.441	-3.84	0.001	I (1)
Import (% of GDP)	-4.81	0.000			I (0)
Remittance (% of GDP)	-2.11	0.541	-4.50	0.000	I (1)

ARDL Model Estimation Results

To address multicollinearity concerns in the model, the Exchange Rate (NPR/USD) and Consumer Price Inflation (%) variables were excluded. This decision stems from the NPR's exchange rate pegging to the Indian Rupee (INR), which inherently ties its valuation to the INR/USD exchange rate rather than independent economic factors. Given the near-perfect positive correlation between NPR/USD and INR/USD

($r = 0.988$), retaining both would introduce redundancy and distort model accuracy. Consequently, INR/USD was prioritized as the explanatory variable. Table 3 reports the results of ARDL with an R-squared value of 0.93, meaning the model explains approximately 93 % of the variation in the dependent variable. The adjusted R-squared value of 0.84 reflects a good explanatory power of predictor variables. The model is significant at a 1 % level as indicated by an F-statistic of 10 and a p-value of 0.0003. ARDL results reliability is further validated by the Durbin-Watson (Durbin & Watson, 1992) statistic of 2.18 suggesting no significant autocorrelation in the residuals of the model.

Table 3
Results of ARDL

Statistics	Values
R-squared	0.93
Adjusted R-squared	0.84
F-statistics	10.00
p-value	0.000
Durbin-Watson statistics	2.18

The ARDL (2 2 3 2) bounds test is used to determine the existence of a long-run relationship among variables with mixed integration orders, where the Balance of Payments (BOP) and Import series is $I(0)$ and the other variables are $I(1)$. This test has the null hypothesis (H_0) of no co-integration or long-run relationship between the variables. The F-statistic of 9.48 (Table 4) exceeds the critical value of 5.61 at the 1% significance level for $I(1)$, leading to rejecting the null hypothesis and indicating a long-run relationship among the variables. Similarly, the t-statistic of -5.62 is more negative than the critical value of -4.37 at the 1% significance level for $I(1)$, further supporting the conclusion of co-integration. Thus, the results confirm the existence of a significant long-run relationship between the variables.

Table 4
Bounds Test for Co-integration

Test Statistic	Value	Critical Values (1% Level)	Significance Level	Conclusion
F-statistic	9.48	$I(0)$: 4.29, $I(1)$: 5.61	1%	Reject H_0
t-statistic	-5.62	$I(0)$: -3.43, $I(1)$: -4.37	1%	Reject H_0

In the long run, estimated results (Table 5) revealed that the exchange rate, imports and remittance significantly impact the balance of payments. A sustained

depreciation of the Indian Rupee (INR) against the USD (e.g., INR weakening) is linked to a long-term improvement in Nepal's BOP by 6.32 billion NPR per unit increase in the exchange rate. Since the Nepalese Rupee (NPR) is pegged to the Indian Rupee (INR) at a fixed rate (1.6 NPR = 1 INR), Nepal's trade competitiveness is directly tied to INR fluctuations (Nepal & Pokharel, 2016). This likely reflects Nepal's currency peg to the INR: a weaker INR makes Nepalese exports cheaper globally boosting the trade surpluses (World Bank, 2022). However, Nepal's limited export diversification primarily agricultural and low-value manufactured goods restricts the full benefits of depreciation (ADB, 2020).

A unit increase in Imports (% of GDP) corresponds to a 27.47 billion NPR decrease in the BOP signifying higher imports could worsen BOP. Higher import dependency (as a % of GDP) reduces BOP in the long run. The adverse effect of rising imports (% of GDP) on BOP reflects Nepal's chronic trade deficit, which reached \$10.80 billion in 2024 (NRB, 2024). Over 60% of Nepal's imports are from India, including essential goods like fuel and machinery, creating inelastic demand (Taneja et al., 2020). This dependency drains foreign reserves, worsening the BOP.

Remittances significantly strengthen BOP, adding 15.22 billion NPR for every unit percentage rise on GDP by remittance inflows. This underscores remittances' role in stabilizing Nepal's economy by injecting foreign currency. This aligns with the studies showing potential of remittance for sustainable economic development of Nepal. They are with short-run benefits and never be relied upon to solve economic challenges in the long run (Karki et al., 2024). The error correction term (-2.64, $p < 0.001$) is negative and significant, confirming long-run equilibrium adjustment.

Table 5

Estimated Long-run and Short-run Coefficients of the ARDL Models

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-statistic	p-value
Long Run (LR)				
ECT _{t-1}	-2.64	0.47	-5.62	0.000
Exchange Rate (INR/USD)	6.32	1.14	5.56	0.000
Import (% of GDP)	- 27.47	4.32	-6.34	0.000
Remittance (% of GDP)	15.22	2.13	7.15	0.000
Short Run (SR)				
BOP _{t-1}	0.83	0.29	2.81	0.020
Exchange Rate (INR/USD)	-20.64	8.01	-2.58	0.030
Import (% of GDP)	51.31	15.30	3.35	0.008
Remittance (% of GDP)	-19.35	12.51	-1.55	0.156

Constant	589.95	192.89	3.06	0.014
R-squared	0.97			
Adjusted R-squared	0.93			
Log likelihood	- 105.97			

A notable difference was observed in short-run dynamics from the long-run trends. The lagged BOP is positive and significant (0.83, $p < 0.05$) suggesting that past BOP trends influence current BOP movements. A unit change in Exchange rate (INR/USD) have a significant negative short-run impact on BOP as it is deducted by 20.64 billion NPR implying that sudden fluctuations in INR/USD can temporarily deteriorate the BOP before long-term adjustments occur. This could reflect immediate costs like pricier imported goods (e.g., fuel, machinery) before export benefits materialize (IMF, 2020). This short-term pain is common in pegged regimes with limited monetary autonomy (Bordo & Siklos, 2023). A spike in imports temporarily boosts BOP by 51.31 billion NPR which may reflect inventory buildup or speculative imports ahead of anticipated price hikes possibly (Chhetri, 2021). However, lagged effects are weak or unclear. Remittance inflows are often channeled into consumption (e.g., housing, education) rather than productive investments delaying their macroeconomic benefits due to which short-term remittance changes show no clear impact on BOP (Yin et al., 2022). These findings highlight the need for short-term buffer mechanisms like maintaining foreign exchange reserves and coordinated fiscal-monetary responses to manage exchange rate shocks. Long-term stability hinges on managing the INR/USD exchange rate, curbing excessive imports, and encouraging remittances.

Diagnostic Tests of the Model

The diagnostic tests for normality, autocorrelation, and heteroscedasticity of the model, as reported in Table 6 confirm the reliability of the ARDL model. This validation allows for meaningful interpretation as the residuals are normally distributed, free from autocorrelation, and homoscedastic. These results indicate that the model is statistically well-specified and robust for inference.

Table 6

Normality, Auto-correlation, and Heteroscedasticity Tests of Residuals

Test	Test Statistic	p-value
Jarque-Bera test (Normality)	JB = 3.18	0.203
Breusch-Godfrey LM Test (Auto-correlation)	Chi ² (1) = 0.98	0.322
Breusch-Pagan-Godfrey Test (Heteroscedasticity)	Chi ² (1) = 1.10	0.294

Stability tests

The cumulative sum (CUSUM) of recursive residuals and the CUSUM of Squares (CUSUMSQ) test were conducted to find out the model's parameter stability. Table 7 presents the test result and Figure 3 plots the CUSUM and CUSUMSQ square results. The test statistic value of 0.26 is lower than all the critical values at the 1%, 5%, and 10% significance levels indicating no evidence of structural instability in the model.

Table 7

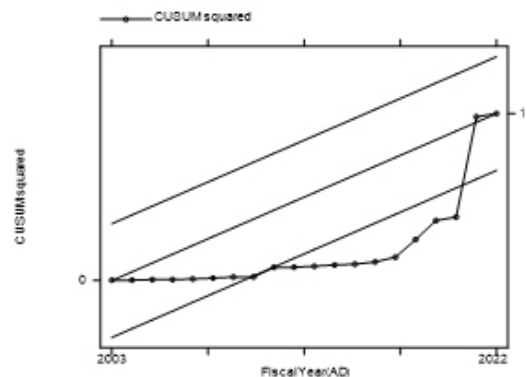
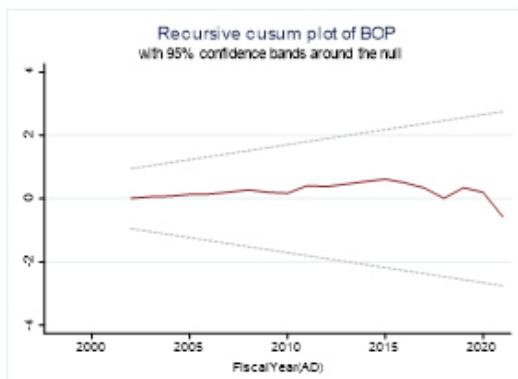
CUSUM Test for Recursive Residuals

Test Type	Statistic	1% Critical Value	5% Critical Value	10% Critical Value
Recursive	0.26	1.14	0.948	0.850

The CUSUM test plots the cumulative sum of recursive residuals and compares them with critical bounds to assess the systematic changes in the regression coefficient whereas the CUSUM of Squares test detects the sudden shifts in residual variance. The CUSUM test shows stability throughout the entire period, but the CUSUM of Squares test indicates potential instability or a structural break in the model parameters in the final years (close to 2022). This suggests that the model's coefficients may have remained stable for most of the analyzed period but could have experienced changes more recently. This recent instability might be due to events like the COVID-19 pandemic, rising global inflation, or political and economic changes in Nepal. More study is needed to see if these changes have permanently affected the model's relationships.

Figure 4

CUSUM and CUSUMSQ Test for the Model's Parameter Stability



Conclusion

This study reveals that Nepal's Balance of Payments is shaped by long-term structural factors: depreciation of Indian Rupee improves competitiveness, high imports strain foreign reserves and remittance supports financial stability. While short term volatility stems from exchange rate shocks and temporary increase of import. The ARDL model highlights that Nepal's fixed exchange rate with Indian Rupee provides stability in the long run but expose the economy to immediate currency risks. Nepal's Balance of Payments improves over time with a weaker INR, controlled imports, and steady remittances but faces short-term pains from currency swings and import surges.

To enhance Balance of Payments resilience, Nepal should diversify exports beyond low-value goods, regulate non-essential imports, and channel remittances into productive investments. Strengthening forex reserves, diversifying trade partners to reduce INR dependency, and improving monetary policy coordination with India are critical. Addressing structural bottlenecks, such as political instability and landlocked geography will further mitigate external vulnerabilities.

However, this study has some limitations. The analysis excludes capital account variables which may also significantly impact the Balance of Payments. Potential structural breaks, especially in recent years were identified but not explicitly modeled. Future research could explore sectoral Balance of Payments dynamics or apply regime-switching models to better capture structural changes and policy shifts over time.

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