

School Level Students' Academic Achievement in Nepal: A Case Analysis

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Abstract

This article talks about school level students' academic achievement status in Nepal in general and the results reported by Education Review Office through NASA test in particular. It also discusses some of the fundamental factors associated with academic achievements of students. The author has incorporated many ideas from the research articles, theoretical or thematic literature to discuss about the students' low academic achievement in community schools of Nepal. Considering the facts, various literatures are consulted to justify the reasons behind this low academic achievement of the students and some suggestions are forwarded to improve the conditions.

Key words: NASA Test, NASA Report, Status of Community School, Supervision and Monitoring of community schools, Infrastructures and Learning Resources, Way forward

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I. Introduction

A nation's prosperity is closely linked to the stock of human capital, and its human capital depends on the quality of its educational system (Mathema & Bista, 2006). Quality education helps to make the students lives for comfortable living. Many scholars claim that students' academic performance is the overall net result of their cognitive and non-cognitive attributes as well as the socio-cultural context where the learning activities take place. Thus, students' performance is the level of proficiency attained in academic work and knowledge acquired in school subjects represented by the percentage of marks obtained by students in examinations. We cannot neglect the value of academic performance because it links with social value and means for a successful life in the future (Chapagain, 2020).

NASA Report Analysis

Education Review Office (ERO) has been established in 2010 with mandates for carrying out independent performance audit of the schools and institutions under Ministry of Education system and for assessing the level of student achievement in order to promote the accountability of the institutions and improve the quality of education (<https://www.ero.gov.np/>). One of the major objectives of ERO is to provide feedback for policy making in education through the periodical review of students' achievement level through diverse NASA tests (ERO: Summary Report, 2019).

Recently, the report of NASA is published by Education Review Office in 2017 that showed the status of students' academic achievement in three subjects: Mathematics, Science and Nepali. From the results, the achievement in Mathematics and Science was almost similar. 46% of the students in Mathematics and 56% in Science achieved below than the value 4. But, it was only 32% in Nepali. Comparing the result with NASA 2013, the result in Mathematics and Science was found poor. The data from NASA report 2017 showed that the students' achievement is not satisfactory.

A comparison is made between community schools and private schools for average achievement in three subjects' viz. Nepali, Mathematics and English. Students average achievement is less in Nepali, Mathematics and English by 24, 18 and 17 percent respectively in community schools in 2012 where as this gap is 18,16 and 35 percent in 2015. The gap is somewhat less in Nepali and Mathematics where as the gap is widening more in English (Summary Report, ERO, 2020, Page, 60). Some questions are set and kept in all three subjects as linking item in 2013 and 2017 and compares the achievement level of students based on their answers of the questions. The result shows increment of average 10 marks in Nepali where as decline of average 16 and 3 marks respectively in Mathematics and Science (Summary Report, ERO, 2020, Page, 94.). To analyze the facts, the status of the school, supervision and monitoring mechanism, infrastructures and learning resources, government initiative and its consequences and scenario of SLC/SEE results are reviewed through literatures and approach to the conclusion.

Status of Community School

According to ERO norm and standard 0.2 percent of the community schools fall into the category of outstanding school (Wholistic Report, ERO, 2020, Page, 53). Community schools are being now abandoned by those who can afford to send their children to private schools. These schools are left by professionals, businessmen, government bureaucrats, university professors and even school-teachers for their children. Community schools in Nepal are now attended by girls and children from poor backgrounds and those living in socially and economically vicious conditions. It is exactly for this reason that the problem of the massive failure of the SLC examination and the near collapse of the public school system are ignored and not seen as a national problem. The failure of the public education system may have a negative impact on the creation of a national culture and a cohesive society, among other things. It not only frustrates government plans for social integration and the empowerment of women, Dalits and ethnic groups but also forces the nation to enter the twenty first century insufficiently prepared to compete in the global standard. It is for this reason that an education reform in Nepal is far too urgent. It is being delayed by a few vested groups and short-term political gains for individuals in the political parties (Mathema, 2006). This clearly depicts the deteriorated conditions of the community schools.

Supervision and Monitoring Mechanism

The Education Act gives SMCs major responsibilities for governing and managing schools. However, the extended roles bestowed on local bodies by the new constitution make it necessary to realign SMCs' roles and responsibilities. Their roles also need realigning by reactivating and strengthening village education committees (VECs). While SMCs need to focus more on school level planning, head teachers will have an increased focus on instructional leadership including reviewing teacher performance, monitoring teachers' time on task and building the teacher capacity. SMCs and PTAs are responsible for the internal management and day-to-day functioning of schools while VDCs and municipalities are mostly responsible for 'external' administrative and logistical functions, including financing and accountability to provide access to quality education (Nepal Education Sector Analysis, 2016). The near collapse of the monitoring and supervision system is one major problem the community schools are currently facing (Mathema, 2006).

Supervisory capacity refers to the reporting and monitoring systems in place. It is also about the extent to which there are clear lines of accountability that designate (1) who is responsible for what, (2) what are the sanctions or rewards in place to ensure action, compliance, and performance, and (3) the extent to which the mechanisms for reward and sanction are enforceable and effective (Nepal Education Sector Analysis, 2016). But the real supervision and monitoring of the schools is totally nil.

Infrastructures and Learning Resources

People expect the government to improve the quality of community schools by taking private schools as an example. In the government schools of rural areas, classrooms, required resources and materials are not available, teachers are not qualified and trained, less school opening days in comparison to private schools, teachers are not responsible towards their duties and responsibilities and there's no teaching-learning environment in the schools because of the unfair politics (Kadel, 2006). But Mathema (2006) states it is not just the lack of physical, instructional, and human resources. Even when resources are available, there is no teaching and learning. Courses are not completed in time. Teacher absenteeism is high. Even if the teachers are present in schools, teachers do not teach. This shows aching condition of the community schools.

Government Initiative and its Consequences

Government initiative to transfer ownership of schools to local community did not yield much fruits in meeting state's goal of improving the governance of schools mainly, "because of the lack of institutionalization of these initiatives and also because of the lack of capacity building exercise at the lower level" (Research Center for Education Innovation and Development, 2009). On the contrary, it provided an opportunity for local elites to capture or 'play with the rules of the game' of school governance where local elites "capture the distribution of resources, project implementation and decision making which negatively impacts non-elites or the target population or is deemed to be corrupt under the law" (Musgrave & Wong, 2016). The prevailing system of education works well for the elites and those sectors of society which do not have to rely on public education for their children. 'Trust', 'political ties' and 'capital' of an individual and the way they are exercised seem to have played a dominant role in the continuation of the prolonged one-upmanship in the selected schools and these characteristics of a person have contributed to the 'inverted capture' as well (Hamal, 2019). Real parents of the children at school are far from the representation, planning and decision making.

Scenario of SLC/SEE Result

Failure is more common than success in SLC examinations too. An analysis of the SLC results for the past ten years reveals a failure rate of over 55 percent on average, indicating a huge wastage of the public and private resources invested in education. The situation is not improve till the date. Even more serious is the great social cost this high failure rate places on the nation as most failures occur among students from socially and economically disadvantaged communities studying in public schools in rural areas (Bhatta, 2005). Expectation of the parents, influence of the group, socio-economic status, structure of the family, involvement of the parents in their children's schooling, behavior of the children, academic self-concept, and environment of the school are some of the major factors which can affect the achievement and learning activities of the students (Neupane, D. & Gurung S.K.,2021).

Several studies carried out in Nepal and elsewhere have revealed a strong association between spending per student and school performance, implying that schools with high expenditure per-child do a better job in terms of their students' achievements (Mathema, 2006). In this regards, the insufficient funding at school cause the low academic achievement on students' performance. But some of the public schools are doing best and being accountable to local people. Teachers were seen as responsive, friendly and dedicated to improving quality. No bad behavior towards students was reported. The school management believes child friendly environment rather than punishing students. The school is creating a friendlier environment for students to grow. The SMC has played a key role in maintaining accountability of the schools towards the people and overall results of the school seems best (Tandukar. et al. (2015). This shows there is some serious gaps in implementation level.

Way Forward

To improve in the scenario of academic achievement of the students in the community schools, following suggestions can be forwarded:

1. There is need to redefining the roles and responsibilities of each level and education line agencies more specifically and succinctly. Appointing the required human resources in the local level is urgent. The federal, provincial and local education policies should be promulgated at the earliest. Parents should be empowered and trusted (Kafle, B.S., 2019).
2. The local level unit should be made more responsible for supporting the activities related to teachers' work. Provision need to be made for monitoring the educational activities. Job Induction training need to be organized in the beginning of teachers' carrier. Monitoring and supervision of support activities must be ensured at all levels. Adopt culture of tolerance and promote conducive working environment for teachers (Dhakal, R.K. et al., 2019)
3. Apply culture friendly evaluation system. Use local knowledge in classroom-based student's assessment. Avoids rote memorization. Applying continuous assessment system. Provide appropriate feedback and pursue the comprehensive assessment. Workshops on items writing, development of varieties of assessment tools and designing assessment activities seem inevitable for teachers (Khatiwada, S.P. 2018).
4. Sufficient administrative and managerial fund need to be disbursed by the authorities.
5. The government needs to make a special effort to attract to school the very poor, girls and children from underprivileged communities by adopting various strategies such as increasing the number of female teachers in order to increase girls' attendance. Currently only 25% of teachers are women (Mathema, 2006).

Note: Considering the problem for the topic, I will use post positivistic quantitative research design to carry out the research in my future study. This study will have to go through numerical analysis of students' academic achievement. I will have to use parametric and non-parametric statistical tools for data analysis.

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