



# Systemic Reforms for Equitable Education in Nepal: Bridging Policy Promises and Persistent Inequalities

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Manuscript Received: 28 May 2025

Accepted: 23 September 2025

Final Revision: 18 November 2025

## Abstract

This study integrates historical legacies and contemporary disparities to provide a comprehensive analysis of persistent educational inequality in Nepal. It uses a theoretical framework based on Rousseau, Marx, and Bourdieu, along with Subrahmanian's four-dimensional framework of access, learning process, outcomes, and external results. Guided by this framework, it uses a mixed-methods approach that integrates enrollment records, examination results, and NLSS IV survey data with qualitative analysis of policy documents and key informant interviews, collectively providing a robust lens to reveal the existing educational disparities. The results show that despite constitutional guarantees and various policy guidelines, Nepal's education system continues to perpetuate educational inequality. It also shows that public schools enroll 51.2% girls compared to 41.5% for private schools, reflecting economic stratification. Dalit girls in private schools and girls with disabilities in public schools have significantly lower grade transition ratios compared to others. Examination results reveal that private and urban students consistently outperform their public and rural counterparts. At the output level, education does not translate into equitable labor market returns, with female graduates earning substantially less than their male counterparts at all levels. The study concludes that progressive policies have been insufficient to overcome deep-rooted historical and structural barriers. Key policy recommendations include equitable funding mechanisms, stronger regulatory oversight of private providers, investment in inclusive infrastructure, and improved connections between education and labor markets.

**Keywords:** Educational inequality, structural disparities, policy-practice gap, privatization, intersectionality, public policy

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# नेपालमा समतामूलक शिक्षाको लागि प्रणालीगत सुधार: नीतिगत प्रतिबद्धता र निरन्तर असमानताहरू बिचको पुलेसा

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Manuscript Received: 28 May 2025

Accepted: 23 September 2025

Final Revision: 18 November 2025

## सार

यस अध्ययनले नेपालमा विद्यमान निरन्तर शैक्षिक असमानतालाई यसको ऐतिहासिक विरासतका साथ एकीकृत रूपमा विश्लेषण गरेको छ। सैद्धान्तिक व्याख्याको लागि सुब्रह्मण्यमको पहुँच, सिकाइ प्रक्रिया, नतिजा र बाह्य परिणामहरूका चार-आयामिक रूपरेखा तथा रुसो, मार्क्स र बोड्युका अवधारणाहरूलाई प्रयोग गरिएको छ। यस अध्ययनका लागि मिश्रित-विधि प्रयोग गरेर विद्यार्थी भर्ना, परीक्षा, र चौथो राष्ट्रिय जीवनस्तर सर्वेक्षण (NLSS IV) का तथ्याङ्कहरू एवम् नीति दस्तावेजहरू र प्रमुख सूचनादाता अन्तर्वाताहरूबाट प्राप्त सूचनाहरू संयोजन गरी विश्लेषण गरिएको छ। नेपालमा शिक्षाको अधिकारको संवैधानिक प्रत्याभूति र विभिन्न नीतिगत निर्देशिकाहरू भए पनि परिणामहरूले के देखाउँछन् भने नेपालको शिक्षा प्रणालीले शैक्षिक असमानताहरूलाई निरन्तरता दिइरहेको छ। विद्यार्थी भर्ना दर उल्लेखनीय रूपमा वृद्धि भएको भए पनि सार्वजनिक विद्यालयहरूमा ५१.२% छात्राहरूलाई भर्ना गर्नु र निजी विद्यालयहरूमा भने ४१.५% छात्राहरू भर्ना हुनुले आर्थिक तहकरणलाई प्रतिबिम्बित गर्दछ। निजी विद्यालयहरूमा दलित छात्राहरू र सार्वजनिक विद्यालयहरूमा अपाङ्गता भएका छात्राहरूको कक्षा सङ्क्रमण अनुपात अरूको तुलनामा उल्लेखनीय रूपमा कम छ। परीक्षाको नतिजाले के देखाउँछ भने निजी र शहरी विद्यालयका विद्यार्थीहरूले सार्वजनिक र ग्रामीण विद्यालयका समकक्षीभन्दा निरन्तर राम्रो प्रदर्शन गरिरहेका छन्। शिक्षाले समतामूलक श्रम बजार प्रतिफल दिएको देखिँदैन। महिला स्नातकहरूले सबै तहमा आफ्ना पुरुष समकक्षहरू भन्दा धेरै कम आर्जन गर्दछन्। अध्ययनले के निष्कर्ष निकालेको छ भने गहिरो जरा गाडेका ऐतिहासिक र संरचनात्मक अवरोधहरू पार गर्न प्रगतिशील नीतिहरू अपर्याप्त छन्। यस अध्ययनको प्रमुख नीति सिफारिसहरूमा समतामूलक लगानी संयन्त्र, निजी प्रदायकहरूमाथि बलियो नियामक निरीक्षण, समावेशी पूर्वाधारमा लगानी एवम् शिक्षा र श्रम बजारहरू बिचको सुधारिएको सम्बन्ध आदि समावेश छन्। यी उपायहरूले नेपालको शिक्षा प्रणालीलाई सामाजिक समानता र न्यायको संवाहकको रूपमा रूपान्तरण गर्ने लक्ष्य राखेका छन्।

**Keywords:** Educational inequality, structural disparities, policy-practice gap, privatization, intersectionality, public policy

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Education in Nepal has always been more than a means of personal development; it has been a site where historical legacies, structural inequalities, and political agendas interact. From the early *Vedic* period, when education emphasized knowledge, spirituality, and moral training, rulers restricted formal learning for women and so-called lower-caste groups. Over time, Nepal expanded its school system to include everyone, and today, 94.4% of primary school-aged children are enrolled (Center for Education and Human Resource Development [CEHRD], 2025a). Yet, this progress has not dismantled the exclusionary legacy. Despite near-universal enrollment, Nepal's education system continues to reproduce structural disparities, a manifestation of what Subrahmanian (2005) describes as inequalities in access, processes, outcomes, and external results.

In recent decades, neoliberal policies and the rapid expansion of private schools have created a dual education system in Nepal, introducing a new layer of inequality. Private schools mainly serve urban and wealthier families, providing opportunities that are inaccessible to most poor families. Evidence shows that 91 percent of students from poor families attend public schools, while 65 percent of students from the wealthiest families attend private schools (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2024). Similarly, Grade 10 national examination results reveal that students in private schools consistently outperform those in public schools by more than 40 percentage points (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology [MoEST], 2022). These disparities intersect with gender, caste/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geography, further reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Nepal's constitutional commitment (Article 31) to free and compulsory education, along with its obligations to international frameworks such as SDG 4 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, underscores an urgent need to address multiple disparities. Key national policy documents, including the Education Act (1971), Education Regulations, periodic Development Plans (1956 to 2024), and the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022-2032, also emphasize equity, inclusion, and quality. However, implementation remains fragmented and uneven, focusing only on short-term access rather than tackling the deeper structural and systemic causes of inequality that lie in the context of access, learning process, output, and external results.

While earlier studies examined specific aspects of inequality, such as gender gaps, rural-urban divides, and private-public differences, limited research has integrated

historical legacies, policy-practice gaps, and the four-dimensional framework of inequalities, i.e., access, processes, outcomes, and external results, within a single analysis. The gap between progressive policy commitments and educational realities highlights the need for this study within a unified analytical framework.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

This study investigates educational inequalities in Nepal by examining their historical roots and present-day manifestations across multiple dimensions, including gender, caste/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and geography. It explores how privatization, policy reforms, and the public-private school structure have shaped these disparities and aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to support an equitable and inclusive education system in line with constitutional and international standards.

## **2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The study draws on classical and contemporary theories to explain how ideology, structures, and policy drive and sustain educational inequalities. It integrates foundational philosophical perspectives with critical social theory and empirical research to develop a framework that identifies the root causes and systemic perpetuation of educational inequality in Nepal.

### **2.1 Ideological Foundations of Inequality**

In his timeless classic, *The Second Discourse* (1755), Jean-Jacques Rousseau distinguishes between natural inequality, arising from differences in age, strengths, and intelligence, and moral inequality, which distinguishes people based on “wealth, nobility, or rank, power, and personal merit” (Rousseau, 1992). Moral inequality creates dependencies, exploits the underprivileged, oppresses marginalized groups, and creates various forms of educational barriers. Collado et al. (2023) support this view, stating that wealth distribution influences educational choices and reinforces intergenerational inequalities by creating financial barriers and funding disparities for marginalized populations. In Nepal, Dalits, indigenous communities, girls, and persons with disabilities face educational disadvantages not because of inherent limitations, but due to moral inequalities reinforced by social and institutional systems.

### **2.2 Structural Inequality and Class Reproduction**

Karl Marx’s class-based analysis shows how control over resources creates income and opportunity gaps, distinguishing the bourgeoisie, who control resources, from

the proletariat, who sell their labor (Marx et al., 2002). Nilsson (2020) states that this division perpetuates unequal resource distribution, as the bourgeoisie continues to accumulate capital while the proletariat struggles. In Nepal, the inequality is evident as privileged groups gain greater access to high-quality schools, while marginalized communities are left with underfunded public alternatives. Langthaler & Malik (2023) refer to this as societal reproduction of educational inequalities.

### **2.3 Education and Cultural Reproduction**

Bourdieu et al. (2000) note that education systems perpetuate social stratification and power imbalances through cultural capital. Schools, often unconsciously, support students from middle- and upper-caste backgrounds, leading to implicit discrimination and unequal educational trajectories (Langthaler & Malik, 2023). Other forms of inequalities also exist, such as school choices, school segregation, neighborhood gentrification, and streaming classes, which further support discrimination, leading to the sorting of children based on social background, gender, and other categories (Van Zanten, 2005). In Nepal, where caste-based and ethnic exclusion persist, these mechanisms prevent equitable participation and achievement, particularly for Dalits, girls, and students with disabilities.

### **2.4 Neoliberalism and its Byproducts**

Neoliberal ideology, which emerged in the 1930s, transformed education into a commodity, emphasizing deregulation, privatization, and market logic at the expense of equity and public welfare (Savage, 2017). In Nepal, the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) of the World Bank and the Standby Credit Arrangement of the International Monetary Fund forced the government to promote private investment across sectors, including education (Oxfam, 2019). This undermined public schools and created a dual education system characterized by multiple inequalities (Stein et al., 2019). Political interference in public schools through irregular teacher recruitment, cadre-based decisions, and corruption further compromised learning, while private schools largely remained insulated (Bhatta, 2009).

English-medium instruction in private schools added another advantage. Market competition and fee contributions allowed private schools to provide better English instruction, discipline, and examination results. Meanwhile, under-resourced public schools, receiving as little as NPR 25,000 per year for grade 12 operations (CEHRD, 2025b), are compelled to imitate private school practices, a phenomenon described as “neo-privatisation” (Ghimire & Koirala, 2019). The persistent gap of 40.84% vs. 4.31% in high GPA scores between private and public schools (MoEST, 2022)

shows structural limitations and inequalities between the two school types. This study uses both historical and contemporary lenses to highlight divergences between policy intentions and observed educational inequalities.

## **2.5 Integrated Framework for Analysis**

The integrated framework combines ideological, structural, and policy-focused explanations to understand how educational inequalities develop and persist. It reveals the dual nature of education: one that serves as a potential equalizer and another that functions as a site for contestation and the reproduction of societal inequalities. The framework includes intersectionality to show how gender, caste/ethnicity, and disability intersect to create exclusion in Nepal's education system. By connecting historical exclusions, contemporary stratification mechanisms, and policy gaps, this framework helps analyze educational inequalities across Nepal. It also applies Subrahmanian's (2005) four-dimensional framework to evaluate how well policy goals match actual educational results.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative field data with quantitative secondary data to examine educational disparities in Nepal. The quantitative component relies on nationally representative data, while the qualitative component draws from historical documents, policy analysis, and key informant interviews to show the field-based inequalities.

### **3.1 Quantitative Analysis**

The study uses the National Living Standards Survey (NLSS IV) 2022-23 and MoEST's educational datasets to highlight contemporary disparities. The analysis concentrates on the four dimensions of educational inequality conceptualized by Subrahmanian (2005): access, learning processes, outcomes, and external results.

- **Access-related inequalities** - examined through enrollment rates and transition ratios across gender, school types, and geographic regions.
- **Learning-process related inequalities** - assessed by tracking the grade progression of Dalit students and children with disabilities.
- **Outcome-related inequalities** - highlighted using Grade 8 examination results.
- **External results-related inequalities** - analyzed through income premiums, disaggregated by gender, poverty quintiles, and educational qualification.

Regression analysis, specifically a linear mixed-effects model including Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA), is applied to identify the association between demographic factors and educational outcomes. Inequality indices, such as the richest-poorest ratio, have also been used to quantify external result inequalities. Any other quantitative information has been provided in averages to summarize group disparities.

### 3.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative component systematically examines the historical development of education to contextualize structural disparities. Policy documents, including the Education Act (1971), Education Regulations, periodic Development Plans (1956 to 2024), and the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022-32, are analyzed to determine policy intentions, identify gaps, and evaluate their alignment with observed educational inequalities.

Primary qualitative data are collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders such as headteachers, parents, and job providers. These qualitative data are thematically analyzed under Subrahmanian's (2005) framework to highlight lived experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices.

The study combines qualitative findings with secondary quantitative data to offer a triangulated and comprehensive analysis of structural and contextual inequalities in Nepal. This integrated approach ensures both statistical trends and the lived experiences of stakeholders, enhancing the relevance and applicability of the study's conclusions.

### 3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study has ensured anonymity of respondents, informed consent for interviews, and responsible use of secondary datasets, adhering to global research ethics standards.

## 4. Historical Context of Educational Inequalities

### 4.1 Education Before Modern History: Pre-Medieval and Medieval Period

In the pre-medieval (Pre 400 CE - 750 CE) and medieval periods (750 CE - 1200 CE), education in South Asia, including Nepal, was mostly informal, oral, and religious. Knowledge was transmitted through *Gurukuls*, *Gumbas*, and oral traditions, emphasizing religious practice, ethical conduct, and communal values. Initially, access was somewhat inclusive: women from elite communities participated

in artistic and cultural education, while women from low socio-economic backgrounds acquired vocational skills, such as weaving, spinning, and sewing, to support their families (Kumari, 2017). However, this inclusivity gradually eroded as rulers privileged upper-caste families and systematically excluded women from religious and sacred texts (Roy, 2017). Education thus transformed from a spiritually inclusive practice into a tightly controlled institution that maintained social stratification and elite control.

During the Malla period (1200 CE-1768 CE) and Shah's Unification Period (1768 CE-1846 CE), education remained closely linked with religion, language, and the arts. Temples and *Bahas* (courtyards) served as the primary educational institutions, with Sanskrit as the dominant medium for Hindu teachings, and Pali and Newari used in Buddhist instruction (Regmi, 1966). Education was largely limited to the so-called upper-caste and monastic elites, excluding the broader population. The hierarchical structuring of society into four Varnas and 64 castes and the introduction of the *Guthi* system further restricted access, systematically excluding women and the so-called lower caste groups (Kafle, 2021; Scott, 2019). Education primarily functioned to preserve culture, religion, and state authority; outcomes were confined to ritualistic roles for the privileged, and external results reinforced social stratification.

The Rana period (1846 CE-1951 CE) introduced a western-type secular school in Nepal, yet confined education to elites. Early schools, such as Durbar High School (1854), offered English and other courses but were limited only to the Rana family and other elites (Sharma, 1990; Wood, 1965, pp. 78-84). Around 1901, the rulers expanded schooling to the general public; however, opposition to widespread education persisted due to fears of anti-regime sentiment. Socio-culturally stigmatized low-caste families faced severe exclusion, with learning processes shaped by cultural and linguistic barriers (Bourdieu, 1986). Educational outcomes remained limited to administrative and religious roles for elites, while external results reinforced social hierarchies.

Across these periods, education was not a state priority. Rulers with little incentive to expand equitable access, improve learning processes, or generate inclusive outcomes. Education thus functioned as a cultural practice reproducing privilege, consistent with Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital: access was limited to elites, learning processes reinforced caste and gender divisions, outcomes were narrowly confined, and external results entrenched hierarchy.

## **4.2 Post Rana Period (1951-1990): Expanding Access and Structural Inequalities**

After 1951, expanding access became the major policy priority. By 1954, Nepal had only 1,200 primary schools, 83 high schools, and 14 new colleges (Wood, 1965, pp. 78-84). The Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (1954) developed language and curriculum policies, laying the background for a more structured system. By the early 1990s, the number of schools increased to approximately 18,000, with 2 million students, demonstrating clear improvement in access while structural inequalities persisted (National Planning Commission, 1992).

During this period, private schools were permitted to operate as for-profit entities. Offering English as a medium of instruction, these schools gained popularity among urban and wealthier families, creating a dual education system. In 1995/96, 23.54% of students in urban areas, 41.72% in the Kathmandu Valley, and only 4.87% in rural areas attended private schools (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 1996), highlighting access disparities. Private school students achieved better learning outcomes, while external results reinforced socioeconomic stratification, privileging wealthier families.

The Education Act (1971), the Nepal Education System Plan (1971-1976), curriculum revisions (1970s-1980s), All-Round National Education Committee (1961), and Nepal Education Advisory Board (1968) sought to standardize schooling and promote free and compulsory education. However, implementation largely targeted access, neglecting learning processes, outcomes, and external results. Twelve years after the Education Act, 20% of primary school-age boys and 67% of girls remained out of school (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2024b, 2024a). Moreover, 19.83% of the 6-24 year age population remained out of school due to financial constraints, demonstrating persistent gender and socioeconomic inequalities (CBS, 1996).

The ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 highlighted the importance of inclusive education; however, implementation remains inconsistent. Policies improved access but mostly upheld social hierarchies, privileging urban, upper-caste, and economically advantaged populations while limiting marginalized communities (Letchamanan & Dhar, 2018).

## **4.3 Post-1990 and Federal Nepal: Persistent Inequalities**

The restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990 and the 2015 federal constitution marked significant turning points. Mass education initiatives improved the adult

literacy rate unclear. probably means "15+ age group" as reported by census 2021 to 83.6% for males and 69.4% for females in 2021, compared to just 52.2% for males and 24.4% for females in 1995/96 (NSO, 2021; CBS, 1996). Primary net enrollment reached 94.4% in 2024 as reported by CEHRD (2025a), reflecting expanded access across diverse communities.

International frameworks like the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030) reinforced Nepal's focus on inclusive, equitable, and quality education. Policy initiatives such as Education for All (2001-2015), the School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2015), and the School Sector Development Plan (2016-2023) prioritized access and curriculum reform, but insufficient financing and weak implementation constrained impact. For instance, education's share of the national budget decreased from 13.92% in 2014/15 to 12.04% in 2015/16 (Department of Education [DoE], 2016), and the federal sector only received 10.98% of the total budget (CEHRD, 2023), falling short of the 20% target.

Despite these policy reforms, systemic issues still exist. Public schools remain underfunded, with 87% of families contributing financially despite the mandate of free and compulsory education (NSO, 2024). Wealthiest families spend 5.8 times more per child (NPR 35,682) than the poorest (NPR 6,145) in private schools, exacerbating inequalities (National Statistics Office, 2024). Regional disparities remain pronounced: Arnama Rural Municipality (the lowest political unit of the country) in Madhesh province has a 33.0% net enrollment in early childhood education, compared to 91.3% in Kathmandu Metropolitan City (CEHRD, 2025a).

Teaching and learning in public schools are impeded by insufficient facilities, reflecting Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital (UNICEF, 2021). Comparative assessments still favor private schools (Education Review Office [ERO], 2020). External results remain low: only 2% of youth from the poorest quintile have ICT skills, compared to 37% from the wealthiest quintile (UNICEF, 2021). These historical exclusion patterns show that inequalities persist across all four dimensions: access, learning processes, outcomes, and external results.

## **5. Quantitative Analysis**

### **5.1 Access-Related Inequalities: Unequal Pathways**

Nepal has made significant strides in expanding access to education. In 2008-09, net enrollment rates were 91.9% at the primary level and 80.1% at the lower

secondary level (DoE, 2009). Seventeen years later, these rates have increased to 94.4% and 93.6%, respectively, illustrating significant progress in both enrollment and retention (CEHRD, 2025a). Despite these gains, disparities in enrollment patterns persist, creating unequal pathways for boys and girls.

Table 1. Enrollment of Grade 1-5 Students by Year and School Type

Year	Public - Girls	Public - Boys	% Girls	Private -Girls	Private - Boys	% Girls
2023-24	1119547	1067902	51.2	550596	776883	41.5
2022-23	1212551	1157212	51.2	477568	671883	41.5
2021-22	1290293	1238826	51.0	449851	631633	41.6
2020-21	1248010	1206339	50.8	410344	575087	41.6
2019-20	1387444	1240764	52.8	362621	531348	40.6
2018-19	1316431	1171955	52.9	446110	609366	42.3
2017-18	1477900	1315242	52.9	377292	560168	40.2

Source: (CEHRD, 2019-2025a)

Public schools consistently enroll a high proportion of girls compared to private schools. For example, in 2022/23 and 2023/24, girls accounted for 51.2% of public-school enrollment, compared to just 41.5% in private schools. This pattern suggests that girls from lower-income households rely heavily on public education, whereas boys primarily attend private schools, serving high-income families. Consequently, economic disparities intersect with gender, raising concerns about both equitable access and the quality of education for girls in public schools. Qualitative evidence reinforces this pattern. An interview with two guardians from a private school illustrates the trade-offs families face. One female guardian mentioned:

“मैले मेरो छोरोलाई यो निजीमा हालेको हुँ, तर छोरीलाई चाहिँ सरकारी विद्यालयमा हालेको छु । हाम्रो ल्याकतले दुवैलाई निजीमा राख्न भ्याउँदैनौ ।”  
*I have enrolled my son in this private school, while I have enrolled my daughter in the public school, as our family cannot afford both to be enrolled in private schools.”*

In contrast, another guardian, despite financial strain, had enrolled both children in a private school, stating that they prioritize education over their economic status.

These contrasting accounts highlight how household decisions are shaped by both structural constraints and cultural values, reinforcing unequal pathways within and across families.

### 5.1.1 Statistical Evidence of Inequality

Seven years of grade 1-5 enrollment data (2017-2024) were analyzed using a linear mixed-effects model, which included gender, school type, year, and a gender \* school type interaction, with local governments (LGs) treated as random effects. The key findings include:

- Gender effect: (F (1, 20340) = 6.29, p = .012) -- enrollment differs significantly between boys and girls.
- School type effect: (F (1, 6262) = 47.61, p < .001) -- enrollment differs significantly between public and private schools.
- Gender × school type interaction: (F (1, 20340) = 139.15, p < .001) -- the gender gap depends strongly on school type.
- Geographic variation: Random effect variance = 1,747,888, indicating substantial differences across LGs.

**Table 2. Predicted Student Enrollment by Gender and School Type**

School Type	Gender	Predicted Number	Difference (Girl - Boy)
Public	Girl	1825	+137
Public	Boy	1688	-
Private	Girl	487	-210
Private	Boy	698	-

*Source: Author’s own calculations based on student enrollment data (2017/18-2023/2024)*

These findings reiterate that public schools favor girls, with enrollment exceeding boys by approximately 137 students, while private schools favor boys, who outnumber girls by 210. The gender \* school type interaction highlights that gender disparities are specific to each context: public schools reduce gender gaps, whereas private schools increase them.

Viewed through Subrahmanian’s (2005) “unequal pathways” framework, these findings show that enrollment inequalities are rooted in social and economic hierarchies. Despite constitutional guarantees of free and compulsory education (Article 31) and SESP 2022-32 commitments, targeted strategies are needed to address persistent access disparities.

## 5.2 Learning Process Inequalities: Gender Disparities in Grade Transition Ratio

The transition ratio, representing the proportion of students moving from one grade to the next, serves as an important indicator of equality in the learning process. Low ratios highlight bottlenecks caused by systemic barriers, inadequate teaching, or socioeconomic constraints. Using Dalit enrollment data (2022-2024), this study estimated a linear mixed-effects model with grade, gender, school type, year, and their interactions (grade \* gender, grade \* type, gender \* type) as fixed effects and LGs as random effects.

Table 3. Grade-to-Grade Transition of Dalit Students by Gender and School Type

Grade	Public Girls	Public Boys	Private Girls	Private Boys	p-value (gender gap, private)
G1	0.913	0.894	0.629	0.651	0.128 (not significant)
G2	1.048	1.048	0.648	0.690	0.004 (girls < boys by 0.042, significant)
G3	1.037	1.031	0.611	0.646	0.011 (girls < boys by 0.035, significant)
G4	1.013	0.992	0.581	0.602	0.087 (not significant)
G5	0.957	0.944	0.474	0.503	0.018 (girls < boys by 0.029, significant)
G6	0.980	0.979	0.427	0.467	0.007 (girls < boys by 0.040, significant)
G7	1.019	1.007	0.396	0.425	0.075 (not significant)
G8	0.864	0.860	0.301	0.337	0.009 (girls < boys by 0.036, significant)
G9	0.936	0.929	0.359	0.393	0.092 (not significant)
G10	0.587	0.562	0.215	0.230	0.115 (not significant)
G11	1.214	1.155	0.206	0.189	0.134 (not significant)

Source: Author's own calculations based on Dalit student enrollment data (2021/22-2023/2024)

The results show that gender inequalities in learning are concentrated in private schools, with girls consistently having lower transition rates in grades 2, 3, 5, 6, and 8. For example, in grade 2 private schools, girls' transition rate (0.648) is significantly lower than boys' (0.690,  $p = 0.004$ ), indicating an early emergence of gender disparity. These disadvantages continue into later grades, highlighting that learning process inequalities are cumulative and vary by school type.

Table 4. Pairwise Comparison: Gender Differences in Transition Ratios (Private Schools)

Item	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11
Value (G - B)	-.022	-.042	-.036	-.020	-.029	-.040	-.029	-.037	-.034	-.016	.018
Sig.	.125	.004	.013	.154	.047	.005	.045	.010	.018	.273	.214

Source: Author's own calculations based on Dalit student enrollment data (2021/22-2023/2024)

These comparisons confirm that Dalit girls in private schools face significant barriers during key transition points. An interview with two school headteachers, one from a public school and one from a private school, identified caste-based hierarchies as a primary reason for dropout rates among vulnerable groups. The private school headteacher remarked:

“सानो कक्षामा समस्या थिएन । ठुलो कक्षामा बाहुन/क्षेत्री घटन थाले । किन रहेछ खोजी गर्‍यो । छोराछोरीले दलित विद्यार्थीलाई घर ल्याउलान् भनेर अभिभावकले आफ्ना छोराछोरीलाई अन्त लिएर गए ।”

*“There was no issue in the lower grades. In upper grades, Brahman/Chhetri students suddenly started leaving the schools. We found out that parents intentionally transferred their children to other schools so they wouldn’t bring their Dalit friends home.”*

Another headteacher from a public school explained that although their classrooms include students from different groups, and he hasn’t witnessed overt withdrawals, caste-based discrimination still occurs inside the classroom.

### 5.2.1 Learning Process Inequalities: Students with Disabilities and their Transition Ratio

Using a similar linear mixed-effects model (2022-2024), four patterns emerged for students with disabilities (SwDs): public schools account for most documented transitions; gender differences are consistent across grades; transition probabilities decline with grade; and pairwise comparisons reveal statistically significant gender differences within public schools.

Table 5. Pairwise Comparison: Gender Differences in Transition Ratios for SwDs (Public vs. Private Schools)

Item	G1	G2	G3	G4	G5	G6	G7	G8	G9	G10	G11
Public (G - B)	-.085	-.080	-.068	-.075	-.077	-.066	-.051	-.032	-.043	-.032	-.018
Sig.	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	.001	.033	.004	.033	.231
Private (G - B)	-.052	-.047	-.035	-.042	-.044	-.033	-.017	.001	-.010	.001	.015
Sig.	.001	.002	.020	.006	.004	.029	.251	.922	.511	.928	.305

Source: Author’s own calculations based on SwDs enrollment data (2021/22-2023/2024)

In public schools, girls with disabilities consistently exhibit lower transition ratios than boys, reflecting persistent barriers in access, support, and learning opportunities. Private schools show smaller and less consistent gender gaps, indicating that exclusion is intersectional: female SwDs in public schools face the greatest disadvantage.

### 5.2.2 Structural and Social Barriers

Infrastructure deficits exacerbate learning process inequality. Approximately 20% of public schools lack improved water and sanitation, and 19% lack separate toilets for girls and boys (UNICEF, 2021). Around 22% of rural girls miss school due to menstrual taboos (Ranabhat et al., 2019), while adolescent girls with menstrual stress miss school 1.4 times than their peers (World Vision, 2021). About 90% of adolescent girls experience mobility restrictions during their menstrual period (G. Gautam, 2018), and 58% face inadequate privacy in school toilets (O. P. Gautam, 2009). Additionally, school bullying affects 55.7% of boys and 46.2% of girls (Neupane et al., 2020), with verbal bullying prevalence ranging from 35.7% to 87.0% (M. Maharjan & Shrestha, 2022; Prajapati et al., 2022; Yakha et al., 2020).

### 5.2.3 Leadership Inequality in Schools

Headteachers influence the overall quality of schools through instructional leadership, teacher supervision, resource allocation, and creating an environment conducive to learning. Analysis of school headteacher qualifications reveals significant differences between public and private schools. Public schools predominantly depend on headteachers with intermediate or bachelor's degrees, while most private school headteachers hold a Master's degree or higher.

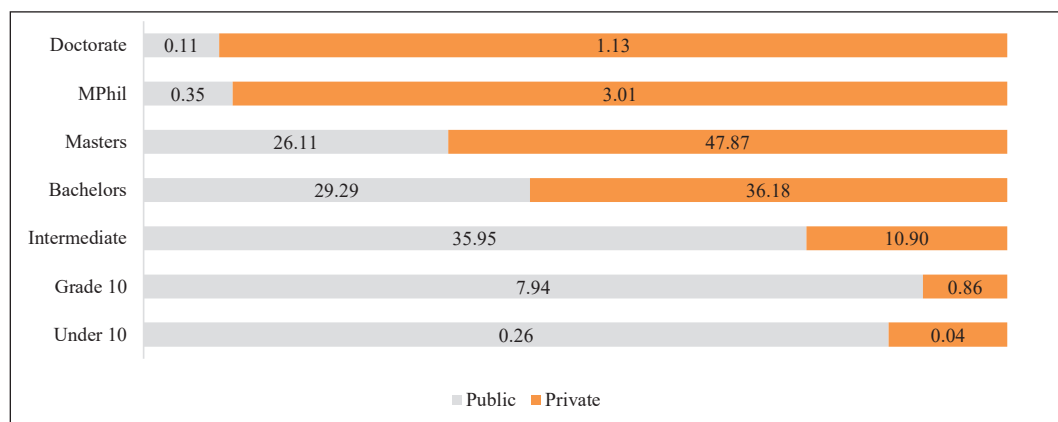


Figure 1. Share of Headteacher Qualifications by School Types Source: (CEHRD, 2025a)

The chart indicates structural inequality in educational leadership, where the qualifications of headteachers are unevenly distributed across school types. Private school headteachers are disproportionately represented at higher qualification levels, Master's and above, while public schools dominate at lower levels, such as Intermediate and below. Such disparities have significant implications for learning processes, as headteachers directly impact teacher performance, resource allocation, and overall school governance.

Public schools' relative disadvantage in leadership qualifications undermines teaching quality and student learning opportunities, reinforcing pre-existing educational inequalities. Although SESP 2022-2032 emphasizes qualified headteachers in public schools, persistent disparities show the need for targeted financing, particularly in headteacher leadership training.

### **5.3 Educational Outcome Inequalities: Widening Disparities**

Nepal's education system shows increasing diversity, mainly due to parents preferring private schools, which are seen as offering higher-quality education, better discipline, and improved learning environments. This trend has led to growing differences in student learning outcomes among different school types and socioeconomic groups (UNESCO, 2021).

To examine these outcome-related inequalities, this study analyzed Grade 8 examination data from 4,114 students across three LGs: Suryabinayak Municipality, Uttargaya Rural Municipality, and Aarughat Rural Municipality. These LGs were purposefully selected to illustrate geographic disparities. Suryabinayak, part of Kathmandu Valley, represents an urban setting; Uttargaya, in Rasuwa district, experiences migration-driven demographic changes; Aarughat, in Gorkha district, reflects a more remote rural environment.

#### **5.3.1 Data and Variables**

The sample included 4,114 students: 2,091 boys (50.8%) and 2,023 girls (49.2%). Native Nepali speakers made up 73.2% (N=3,012), while 26.8% (N=1,102) were non-Nepali speakers. Rural students accounted for 60.8% (N=2,501), and urban students for 39.2% (N=1,613). Public school students represented 57.1% (N=2,347), and private school students 42.9% (N=1,767). Achievement scores in six subjects- Nepali, English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Health- were treated as continuous dependent variables ranging from 1 to 100.

### 5.3.2 Analytical Approach

A General Linear Model (GLM) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine mean differences across groups. The multivariate approach allowed for simultaneous analysis of correlated subject scores, reducing the likelihood of Type I errors. Post-hoc comparisons used Bonferroni corrections to adjust for multiple testing.

The GLM included gender, mother tongue, location, and school type as fixed effects. Two-way interaction terms were initially tested (for example, Gender  $\times$  Mother Tongue and Mother Tongue  $\times$  School Type), with non-significant higher-order interactions removed for parsimony. Effect sizes were reported using partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ), with thresholds of .01, .06, and .14 indicating small, moderate, and large effects, respectively.

### 5.3.3 Assumption Checks

Levene's Test and Box's M Test were used to evaluate the homogeneity of variances and equality of covariance matrices. Minor violations were observed, but GLM is robust with large samples. Conservative Bonferroni adjustments were applied to post-hoc comparisons.

### 5.3.4 Results

The data showed clear disparities, with urban students in Suryabinayak Municipality consistently outperforming peers in rural municipalities in most subjects.

Table 6. Grade 8 Average Scores by Year, Subject, and Local Government

Local Governments	Year	Nepali	English	Math	Science	Social	Health
Aarughat Rural Municipality (N=783)	2024	46.3	44.1	40.9	42.9	41.2	55.9
	2023	52.3	40.4	40.6	47.2	52.2	61.7
Suryabinayak Municipality (N=3141)	2024	66.6	66.0	69.1	63.5	64.3	70.0
	2023	63.4	67.3	56.4	65.3	57.0	66.8
Uttargaya Rural Municipality (N=190)	2024	54.3	48.1	49.2	51.6	56.4	58.6
	2023	49.7	50.1	49.2	49.9	48.8	51.4

Source: Author's own calculations based on Grade 8 Examination Data collected in 3 LGs (2023-2024)

Multivariate tests (Wilks' Lambda) further indicated that school type, location, and mother tongue significantly affected achievement across subjects, while gender effects were smaller but significant in selected subjects. Univariate analyses

highlighted school type as the strongest predictor, with private school students outperforming public school peers in all subjects. Mother tongue effects were pronounced in Nepali and English, where Nepali-speaking students scored higher. Urban students outperformed rural students in Science and English, while gender differences were modest: girls scored higher in English and Health, whereas boys excelled in Math and Science.

Table 7. Significant MANOVA Findings

Subject	Factor	F-value	Partial $\eta^2$	Mean Difference	Direction
Nepali	Mother Tongue	32.11	.008	7.1	Nepali > Non - Nepali
English	Gender	22.65	.006	4.4	Girls > Boys
English	School Type	206.86	.048	8.6	Private > Public
Math	Gender	17.38	.004	3.2	Boys > Girls
Math	School Type	125.28	.030	9.5	Private > Public
Science	Location	28.86	.007	5.5	Urban > Rural
Social	School Type	13.78	.003	4.5	Private > Public
Health	Location	12.73	.003	3.6	Urban > Rural

Note:  $p < 0.001$  in all subjects. Source: Author's own calculations based on Grade 8 Examination Data collected in 3 LGs (2023-2024)

These findings show that structural and linguistic factors, especially school type, urban versus rural location, and mother tongue, are the main causes of educational outcome gaps, while gender effects are smaller but still significant in some subjects. Qualitative evidence supports and contextualizes these patterns. During a telephone conversation with two local government officials, both shared the same opinion.

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*“सबैले घोकाउने हुन् । त्यही भएर केही फरक नदेखिएको होला । जसले सम्झन र लेख्न सक्यो, उसको राम्रो देखियो, जसले सकेन उसको कमजोर देखियो ।”*  
*“Both types of schools use rote learning. That is why it is hard to find differences. Whoever can recall and write got the better score, whoever cannot recall and write got the worse score”.*

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The consistent advantage of private schools in getting better results reflects increasing stratification, while mother tongue disparities indicate the limited efficacy of multilingual education policies. Despite policy frameworks such as the Consolidated Equity Strategy (2014) and the SSDP (2016-23), these findings suggest that policy intent has not fully translated into equitable learning outcomes.

## 5.4 External Results Inequalities: Unequal Labor Market Outcomes

Education provides individuals with knowledge and skills that lead to higher earnings, expanded professional networks, and better access to economic opportunities. Using the NLSS IV dataset, this study analyzed how educational attainment translates into annual earnings across gender and household wealth quintiles. The figures before and after the slash represent male and female incomes, respectively.

Table 8. Annual Income by Education Level, Gender, and Wealth Quintile (NRs)

Education	Poorest	Poor	Medium	Rich	Richest
Primary	93889/33825	102404/27346	123916/41863	149572/73717	143194/75368
Lsec	94931/25065	111923/36534	148150/47026	148939/40007	200978/80609
Sec	86271/36113	124221/47625	132963/60484	191150/63144	234448/127510
Hsec	99313/57128	142584/121467	191563/120093	239503/139098	313412/184830
Bachelor	252770	276482/215650	379990/214970	372530/254999	422639/302473
Masters	-	154667/185100	334134/219817	429821/338021	602016/540855

Source: Author's own calculations based on NLSS IV Data (2021/22)

Income distributions reveal persistent gender disparities at all educational levels. For example, at the secondary level, females in the wealthiest quintile earn only 54% of male income, while those in the poorest quintile earn just 42%. Even at the bachelor's level, female graduates in the richest quintile earn 28% less than their male counterparts, underscoring persistent structural barriers in translating education into labor market returns. Qualitative evidence corroborates these patterns. During an interview, a job provider noted:

“जागिरको इन्ट्रीमा यदि १०+२ भनिएको छ भने सोही अनुसार हामीले मान्छे छान्ने गर्छौं । त्यो छानिएको व्यक्तिले काम सँगै मास्टर सक्यो भने पनि हाम्रो आफ्नो तरिकाबाट उसको तलब र भत्ता निर्धारण हुन्छ ।”

*“We select people based on the qualifications needed for the job entry position. Even if that person completes a master's degree while working, we determine the salary and grades using our own method.”*

This viewpoint shows how formal qualifications alone do not ensure fair earnings.

Table 9. Gender Income Gap and Richest-Poorest Inequality Index

Education	Poverty Quintiles					Inequality Index	
	Poorest	Poor	Medium	Rich	Richest	Male	Female
Primary	0.64	0.73	0.66	0.51	0.47	1.52	2.23
Lsec	0.74	0.67	0.68	0.73	0.60	2.12	3.22
Sec	0.58	0.62	0.55	0.67	0.46	2.72	3.53
Hsec	0.43	0.15	0.37	0.42	0.41	3.16	3.24
Bachelor	-	0.22	0.43	0.32	0.28	1.67	-
Masters	-	-0.22	0.34	0.21	0.10	-	-

Source: Author's own calculations based on NLSS IV Data (2021/22)

The richest-poorest gap is particularly pronounced for females. For secondary graduates, the richest earn 3.53 times more than the poorest, compared to just 2.72 times for males. These disparities indicate that the economic benefits of education are highly conditional on gender and socioeconomic background.

Overall, these findings show that education in Nepal does not lead to equitable labor market outcomes. The interaction of gender and socioeconomic status systematically shapes earnings, undermining inclusive growth objectives outlined in the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-2032). Labor market reforms, better access to capital, and expanded professional networks are needed to support educational growth and address structural inequalities.

Taken together, these findings show that Nepal's education system continues to reproduce structural disparities across all four dimensions. Access remains stratified by economic status, gender, and school types. Learning processes are disjointed, as students from disadvantaged communities are more likely to drop out, indicating a lower grade transition rate. Outcomes remain unequal, with private schools in urban areas consistently achieving better results than public schools. Finally, external outcomes reveal persistent labor market segmentation and an education system that does not ensure equitable income distribution. These interconnected gaps highlight a growing divide between progressive policy commitments and actual realities, emphasizing the urgent need for policy improvements.

## 6. Major Findings

Inequality in Nepal's education system has deep historical roots. Education during the Vedic and Rana periods was largely reserved for elites, with women, Dalits, and marginalized groups denied access. Democratic reforms after 1951 and liberalization policies in the 1990s expanded access to schools, but opportunities remained

uneven, resulting in persistent educational stratification. Over time, access improved; however, disparities based on gender, caste/ethnicity, school type, and geographic factors still influence current education, affecting access, learning, outcomes, and external results. This addresses the first objective of this study and aligns with the theoretical framework of structural inequalities and intersectionality.

Contemporary patterns of inequality, evaluated through the four-dimensional framework of access, learning processes, outcomes, and external results, expose persistent and systemic gaps, explaining the second objective.

- **Access:** Despite significant gains, access remains unequal. Public schools primarily enroll girls, while private schools are mostly attended by boys, reinforcing gender and socioeconomic disparities. Statistical analysis shows significant differences in enrollment based on gender, school type, and location, reflecting social and economic inequalities. These trends indicate that wealthier households often bypass the intended fairness of the Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018), directing girls and marginalized students toward public schools.
- **Learning processes:** Dalit girls consistently show lower grade-to-grade transition rates, with disparities seen in private schools and for girls with disabilities in public schools. Qualification gaps between headteachers of public and private schools are also evident. Structural barriers, including poor WASH facilities, menstrual restrictions, and school bullying, further disrupt girls' learning progress. These findings demonstrate that inequalities in the learning process are cumulative, intersectional, and heavily influenced by school type, revealing gaps in the implementation of the SESP (2022-32) and the Consolidated Equity Strategy (2014). This highlights how social and structural hierarchies affect the educational experiences of marginalized students.
- **Outcomes:** Grade 8 achievement scores reveal significant disparities in learning outcomes across school type, location, and mother tongue. Private schools outperform public schools, and urban students achieve higher scores than rural students. Nepali-speaking students score better in language subjects. Gender differences are modest but significant in English, Math, and Health. These findings indicate that current policies have not fully addressed the structural, linguistic, and socioeconomic factors affecting learning outcomes.
- **External results:** Education does not translate into equitable earnings. Female graduates earn significantly less than their male counterparts at all levels. For instance, secondary-level females in the richest quintile earn only 54% of what

males earn, while those in the poorest quintile earn 42%. These patterns call into question the effectiveness of the TVET sector strategic plan (2023-2032) in fostering equitable economic outcomes. It also highlights the intersectional disadvantages of gender and wealth in worsening educational inequalities.

Despite instruments like the Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018), the School Education Sector Plan (SESP 2022-2032), the Consolidated Equity Strategy (2014), and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Sector Strategic Plan (2023-2032), empirical evidence reveals persistent gaps between policy intent and practice. Parents continue to invest in private schools, leaving girls and marginalized groups in public schools, which undermines the objectives of the Free and Compulsory Education Act. Disparities in learning processes and outcomes remain unresolved, and unequal economic returns continue. Budget shortcomings further worsen these gaps: education's share of the national budget decreased from 13.92% in 2014/15 to 12.04% in 2015/16, and the federal sector received only 10.98% of the total budget, falling short of the 20% target. These findings demonstrate that progressive policies, without adequate funding, targeted implementation, and proper monitoring, are insufficient to achieve equitable and inclusive education in Nepal, addressing the third objective of this study.

Overall, the evidence shows that although Nepal has expanded access to education, inequalities remain deeply rooted across historical, structural, and contemporary factors. Sustainable change requires long-term systemic reforms that ensure education acts as a catalyst for equity and social justice rather than a tool for maintaining privilege.

## **7. Discussion and Conclusion**

Nepal's historical pattern of educational inequality reflects both Rousseau's idea of moral inequality and Marx's perspective of education as a tool for maintaining social hierarchies. Social norms and institutional practices have historically justified unequal access, privileged elite families and systematically excluded women, Dalits, and marginalized groups. This legacy persists in today's education system, where caste hierarchies, gendered norms, and geographic disparities continue to reinforce unequal access and outcomes. Evidence from this study shows that Dalit girls, students with disabilities, and rural learners remain disproportionately disadvantaged, confirming that education still serves as a mechanism for reproducing social and economic privilege. Additionally, public schools need alternative

strategies to enable headteachers to upgrade their qualifications so they can compete with their private counterparts.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital resonates with educational disparities in Nepal. Families with higher socioeconomic status leverage resources, networks, and knowledge to secure educational advantages in private schools. This unequal distribution of capital affects learning processes, academic outcomes, and later economic returns, perpetuating intergenerational inequities.

Neoliberal reforms and the dual public-private system exacerbate educational inequalities in Nepal. Private schools mainly serve children from wealthy families, while public schools educate marginalized communities. Budget allocations reflect this structural imbalance, with education's share of the national budget remaining below the global benchmark of 20% of educational funding.

The findings of this study support the theoretical framework of Rousseau, Marx, and Bourdieu. Rousseau explains the moral and social justification of inequality. Marx accounts for the reproduction of class hierarchies, and Bourdieu shows how cultural capital perpetuates advantages. Evidence largely aligns with these theories, though access-related improvements suggest that policy interventions can moderate, but cannot fully overcome structural inequities. This discussion, therefore, underscores the need for targeted, well-resourced, and monitored interventions to translate policy intentions into equitable educational outcomes. Finally, this study concludes by bringing Rousseau's understanding of moral and social justice of inequality in education. Moral justice is a subject to be taken into consideration and social justice is a subject to implement for ensuring equitable quality education to the children of different caste, gender, ethnicity, topography, income, and orientations.

## **8. Policy Recommendations**

Educational inequality in Nepal is not just caused by individual disadvantages. Instead, it stems from historical hierarchies, structural barriers, and gaps in policy implementation. The matrix below offers a set of recommendations, organized by objectives, key findings, existing policy gaps, and proposed responses, addressing the final objective of this study.

These recommendations are based on the evidence presented in this study and their logical extensions, framed within the theoretical insights of Rousseau, Marx, and Bourdieu. The analysis confirms that without regulating private schools and

ensuring resource allocation based on equity, progressive policies risk remaining largely symbolic.

Table 10. Policy Recommendation Matrix: Addressing Educational Inequalities in Nepal

Objective	Key Findings	Policy/Implementation Gaps	Policy Recommendations
Equitable access	Historical exclusion of women, Dalits, and marginalized groups; public schools serve 51.2% girls vs. private 41.5% (2023/24).	Enforcement of the <i>Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018)</i> is weak.	Expand targeted scholarships and stipends; monitor enrollment by gender, caste, and location.
	Urban families increasingly opt for private schools, while rural areas remain underserved.	<i>School Education Sector Plan 2022–32</i> emphasizes inclusion but lacks mechanisms to regulate private schools.	Regulate private school fees and quotas; urban campaigns to promote public schooling.
Learning Process Equity	Dalit girls, students with disabilities, and rural learners face lower grade-to-grade transition.	<i>School Education Sector Plan 2022-32</i> does not adequately address the quality of learning processes.	Strengthen teacher training on gender and disability sensitivity; provide inclusive curricula.
	Inadequate teaching and learning resources in public schools.	WASH and inclusive infrastructure are insufficient.	Ensure WASH and MHM infrastructure; expand digital learning access in rural areas.
	Public schools rely on intermediate or bachelor-level headteachers compared to highly qualified headteachers in private schools.	Policies emphasize teacher capacity but pay limited attention to headteacher qualifications and leadership development.	Introduce minimum qualification standards for headteachers, expand professional development programs, and incentivize leadership capacity-building in public schools.
Improved Learning Outcomes	Private schools outperform public; urban students outperform rural.	<i>Consolidated Equity Strategy (2014)</i> and SSDP reforms were weakly implemented.	Standardize teacher quality across school types; invest in multilingual pedagogy;
	Language barriers affect learning in Nepali and English.	Bilingual/multilingual education is underfunded.	Incentivize collaboration between private and public schools.

Objective	Key Findings	Policy/Implementation Gaps	Policy Recommendations
Equitable External Results	Wealthier males earn higher returns than females and poor households.	The <i>TVET Strategic Plan (2023–2032)</i> is insufficiently linked to marginalized communities	Expand vocational and entrepreneurial training; strengthen career guidance; Link schools with markets.
	Marginalized graduates face weaker labor market returns.	TVET has weak career guidance.	Provide microcredit and employment support.
Structural and Cultural Barriers	Menstrual taboos, lack of toilets, poverty, and low parental engagement.	Policies recognize WASH and gender, but weak enforcement; cultural barriers remain unaddressed.	Ensure MHM/WASH in all schools; enforce codes of conduct; incentivize local government monitoring.
Urban-Rural Equity	Rural municipalities like Arnama Rural Municipality report an ECD net enrollment rate of 33%, while Kathmandu exceeds 90%.	Urban-rural disparities are not equally addressed; policies fail to regulate urban private education.	Allocate funds equitably; regulate the private sector; improve urban public-school quality.
	Urban reliance on private schools undermines free education.	Rural allocation remains inadequate.	Expand ICT for rural learning delivery.
Sustainable Policy	Education budget share fell from 13.92% (2014/15) to 10.98% (federal allocation).	Lack of accountability and consistent evaluation.	Increase education budget toward the 20% target; implement equity-focused monitoring and evaluation;
	Below the global 20% benchmark. Monitoring weak.	Top-down planning misses local contexts.	Ensure decentralized planning aligned with federalism.

Source: Author's own observations based on findings

The policy recommendations have been further expanded into a suggested course of action, which includes a roadmap linking research findings with practical policy solutions. This suggestion is made as an exercise to generate practical steps based

on the points of policy recommendations and the author’s assumptions about action, responsible agencies, and time frames for implementation. These need to be further refined and validated by the responsible agencies. Nonetheless, the overall message of the log-frame is that achieving equitable education in Nepal requires coordinated efforts among multiple actors. If implemented with additional validation, accountability, and sufficient resources, these actions can be expected to transform Nepal’s education system to promote equity and opportunity for all learners.

Table 11. Suggested Course of Action for Addressing Educational Inequalities in Nepal

Policy Gap	Recommendation	Responsible Actor	Timeline	Modality
Weak enforcement of the Free and Compulsory Education Act	Regulate private school fees and quotas expand targeted scholarships	Local Governments Private School Associations	1–3 years	Enforce fee regulations Urban campaigns to promote public schools
Inadequate learning process equity for Dalit girls, students with disabilities, and rural learners	Strengthen teacher training on inclusive pedagogy Ensure WASH/MHM facilities Expand rural digital learning	Provincial Governments Teacher Training Centers Local Governments	1–2 years	Develop mandatory training modules Allocate earmarked grants Expand ICT infrastructure
Leadership disparities between public and private schools	Introduce minimum qualification standards for headteachers Expand professional development and leadership training for public school headteachers	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Provincial Education Directorates Education Training Centers	2–4 years	Develop mandatory headteacher qualification frameworks Incentivize continuous professional development Monitor and support leadership capacity-building programs in public schools

Policy Gap	Recommendation	Responsible Actor	Timeline	Modality
Poor learning outcomes due to language barriers and uneven quality between public and private schools	Introduce bilingual/multilingual education Standardize teacher quality across school types	Curriculum Development Center (CDC) Teacher Service Commission Provincial Governments	3–5 years	Revise curriculum, fund multilingual textbooks Enforce teacher qualification standards
Inequitable labor market outcomes for marginalized graduates	Expand vocational and entrepreneurial training Strengthen career guidance Link schools with markets	Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Ministry of Labor Private Sector	3–5 years	Establish school-industry partnerships Scale up TVET programs in marginalized areas Provide microcredit for graduates
Cultural barriers (menstrual taboos, parental disengagement, political interference)	Ensure MHM/WASH in schools Enforce codes of conduct Community awareness campaigns	Local Governments School Management Committees (SMCs) NGOs/CSOs	1–5 years	Fund school toilets, launch local awareness programs Codes of conduct against political interference
Urban–rural disparities in access and quality	Equitable fund allocation Strengthen urban public schools while expanding ICT for rural schools	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology National Planning Commission Provincial & Local Governments	3–5 years	Formula-based budget allocation ICT rollout plans, performance-based monitoring

Policy Gap	Recommendation	Responsible Actor	Timeline	Modality
Insufficient and declining education budget (10.98% vs. global 20% benchmark)	Increase education budget to 20% Strengthen decentralized planning and monitoring	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Ministry of Finance Provincial & Local Governments	5–10 years	Allocate a higher share of the national budget Implement equity-focused M&E Adopt decentralized planning with local input

Source: Author’s own observations based on findings

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest. The views expressed in this study are solely those of the author.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the *Nepal Public Policy Review* for providing editorial support during the pre-review and post-review stages of the manuscript. My sincere thanks go to Deepak Kumar Khadka, Executive Editor, for his valuable research assistance and encouragement. This article greatly benefited from the constructive feedback of anonymous peer reviewers, to whom I am deeply indebted. I am equally thankful to Aarughat Rural Municipality, Suryabinayak Municipality, and Uttargaya Rural Municipality, along with key interview informants, for their time, information, and insights.

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