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Research Article

Quality Education for Sustainable Development: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Schools of Pokhara

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the performance of two distinctly established education institutions, private and public schools and compare the quality of educational services provided by them in the perception of parents. The study has been carried out using the qualitative research design. With the use of relevant secondary data sourced from relevant literature reviews and official reports, the informants like parents, teachers and school administrators from the purposively sampled schools of Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward no. 13 were taken as the sources of primary data. The analysis of the data followed a dual approach. Initially, responses from the participants were systematically organized and quantitatively summarized. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data. This comprehensive analysis aimed to derive meaningful insights and an understanding of the research questions. The study has tried to investigate the reasons behind school's selection by the parents and to assess whether the deviation in enrollment in private and public schools is due to differences in quality between them. Although, Nepal is among the leading countries in South Asia in term of accessibility to education, there are numerous challenges when it comes to quality. It concludes that private and public schools should not be seen as competitors of each other; rather they should be regarded as the supplements as both of provide equal contribution in education sector of the country.

Keywords: Quality education, nation building, parents' perception, private schools, public schools, schools' performance

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an indispensable element for sustainable development of a nation as its improvements evidently support in poverty reduction, economic growth and holistic progress of a country. According to constitution of Nepal 2015, equitable access to quality education has been declared as the fundamental human rights and the government of Nepal has developed policy to provide free, quality, and inclusive education to its citizens. Regarding the importance of quality education, Ghimere et al. (2019), in their article mentioned that quality education can develop expected performance in students as stipulated in the curriculum. It focuses on the social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development of each student regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or geographic location (Agnihotri, 2017). It promotes sustainable development of a nation by providing quality learning opportunities for all individuals that enables individuals to live responsible lives in harmony with nature and society. However, there is a lack of perception and framework to ensure quality school education in Nepal' ((Bhandari & Abe, 2003) where quality education is judged just on the basis of pass rate of any institution.

After the establishment of democracy in 1950, a dramatic expansion of educational facilities occurred in Nepal along with the rise of private schools. Although, a few private schools existed before, privatization became the component of liberalism policy applicable to public schools since the 1990s (Ghimire & Koirala, 2019). Education in Nepal is organized under the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for managing all the educational activities in Nepal. Presently, due to lack of clear framework and policy regarding school operation, nation is witnessing clearly visible dual education system in Nepal. Community schools are directly supported and administered by the Government whereas private schools operate in independent way both financially and administratively. This study is an attempt to explore the parents' perception in selecting the schools along with conducting comparative study of the performance between private and public schools of Pokhara Metropolitan City Ward No 13.

The process of parents making decisions about school selection is influenced by various factors, and this phenomenon is explored through several pertinent theories. Social networking theory, rational choice theory and institutional theory are discussed here as they directly relate to understanding the dynamics of parental decision-making in this context.

Social networking theory suggests that individuals are influenced by their social networks. According to Tokas et al., (2023) "Social network plays the influential role that

existing interpersonal connections and relationships play in the decision making process”. In the context of school selection, parents may rely on the recommendations and experiences of their peers, friends, or family members. Positive reviews and discussions within their social networks can significantly impact the decision-making process. Rational Choice Theory suggests individuals analyze costs and benefits when making decisions. Burns and Roszkowska (2016), define it as finding optimal means for desired ends, involving evaluating alternatives, assigning consequences, and making optimal choices. Applied to school selection, parents consider financial costs versus benefits like smaller class sizes. Analyzing choices through this theory sheds light on the educational investment trade-offs. It also helps understand parents’ information-seeking behavior, aligning with the rational choice perspective.

Another relevant theory that that can be relates to evaluate the performance of an organization can be Institutional theory. It says, “Organizations adopt the practices that they do to look like other organizations and signal their legitimacy”(Burch, 2007). Institutional theory focuses on the impact of organizational structures, norms, and values on behavior. In the context of school quality evaluation, this theory can help analyze how institutional factors shape the practices and outcomes of both private and public schools.

Parents are regarded as the first teachers of any child, further when the children get enrolled in schools they become the major judges of quality education of any educational institution. They evaluate the educational institutions on the basis of the academic progress their children achieve. As per Bandura (1997) as cited by Nabavi (2012), social learning theory, people learn by observing and imitating the behavior of others to shape their attitude. In the context of school selection, this could mean that parents observe the choices of other families and use that information to make their own decisions about which schools to consider. Together with other numbers of factors, the students’ achievement equally relies on parents’ involvement as well. Getting parents involved, as a key element to improve children’s literacy development. We must validate parents as the first contributors to learning processes and remind them that, instead of depending solely in schools and teachers, they need to work alongside them at all stages (Njeru, 2015). Parental involvement can take many forms, and some home-based activities, such as help with homework and discussions about school events, are especially likely to be associated with students’ achievement (Juvonen et al., 2023). These activities of parent not only uplift the children’s performance but also help to know schools’ activities and assess their children progress continuously. Generally, once the children enter the school, many parents get detached from the formal learning that takes place in the classroom

and the relationship between the parents and the school becomes largely unclear and non-existent in many cases (Njeru, 2015). That's the reason why parents get shocked when they visit schools to collect progress report during result publication day only. In fact, the study indicates that parental involvement in schools is strongly linked to better student outcomes related to academic, social and cognitive development (Schultz et al., 2023). Therefore, parents should likely to analyze their personal responsibilities towards their children's academic situations.

Along with the parents, the role of the teachers and school administrators play a vital role in the education delivery system. The quality of education depends upon the quality of those who impart it. In this sense, the teacher being a sculptor to build student, has to play multidimensional role to inculcate the nuances of subjects to the heterogeneous cult of students (Nagoba & Mantri, 2015). Thus, the teachers, for overall development of students, have to inspire students to show interest in their studies and to maintain the standard of education.

Similarly, administrators in education do have crucial involvement in ensuring the students and institutional success. They are regarded as the key personalities to improve teaching learning activities and boost performance at educational institutions. They are the responsible persons for reformation of any school as per the change in environment. School administrators that have high emotional intelligence will not only have stronger relationships with their colleagues, teachers, parents and students, but may also be more effective in leading change and initiating school (Moore, 2022). When it comes to school reforms, a school leader may face various difficulties and conflicts could arise. The reform is indeed incompatible with the reality of their teaching context, or it could be because they have not had the same amount of time as the reformer to integrate the proposed change into their philosophy: it just happened to them (Margolis & Nagel, 2023). Despite the challenges, leaders are obliged to generate innovative ideas following principles of management and lead the institution towards its goal. Undoubtedly, there should be an inseparable triangular interrelationship among students, parents and academic institutions for generating quality education. When the issue of quality education arises, it often centers on the debate of public versus private provision of education. Privatizing approach is increasingly being questioned by some educationalists regarding the quality of education. Despite this, expensive private schools are still in parents' preference although they do not need to pay educational charges in public schools.

DATA AND METHODS

The study has been conducted within the bounds of Pokhara Metropolitan City, Ward-13, targeting a varied landscape of schools encompassing both rural and urban settings. Employing a qualitative research design, the study focused on understanding the particulars of educational quality for sustainable development. Out of five public and seven private schools of Pokhara ward no.13, three each from both categories are sampled purposively considering proper representation. The study has used both primary and secondary sources of data. For the collection of primary data, in-depth interviews have been carried out with proportionately selected 30 parents, 12 teachers and 6 school administrators of respective schools using semi structured interview questions. This inclusive representation of these stakeholders was incorporated to provide a holistic view of the educational scenario. Secondary data, sourced from relevant literature reviews and official reports, complemented the primary data, enriching the contextual understanding.

The analysis of the data followed a dual approach. Initially, responses were systematically organized and quantitatively summarized. Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data. This comprehensive analysis aimed to derive meaningful insights and an understanding of the research questions. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed and confidentiality is maintained throughout the study. Participants were adequately informed about the research objectives, and consent was obtained prior to their involvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parents Perception about Quality Education and School Selection

As three private and three public schools were observed in the field, it is found that enrolment rate is comparatively higher in private schools than in public schools. The finding supports Taranath Sharma's (2023) statement public schools in spite of getting huge investment by government, evaluated to be weaker in terms of its academic achievement than the private schools.

Interviews were conducted with parents from both public and private schools to know their perception about the schools and the factors influenced their decision. On the basis of parents' response, while investigating the drivers behind the selection of private schools, they were asked about their reasons for enrolling their children in private school. The interview

question was: ‘Why did you enroll your child in private school?’ Multiple responses in this question included:

Response 1: I enrolled my child in private school because; I am not satisfied with the system and quality of education provided by the public schools in our area.

Response 2: I wanted my child to have access to more resources, extracurricular activities and English environment that are not available at the local public schools.

Response 3: I have chosen a private school because of the smaller class sizes and individualized attention that our child receives from the teachers.

Parents enrolled their children in private school for a variety of reasons. It is found that the medium of teaching i.e. English language is the main attraction. Most of the respondents selected private schools thinking that their children will comparatively weaker in English language if enrolled in public schools, which ultimately will make them incompetent in competitive market. Secondly, the facilities that the private schools provide are also considered as an important element in parents’ perception. Parents are more concern about the additional facilities like tiffin and transportation. About 30% of parents expressed that they can see off their children from their home and get them back in home at the right time safely which make them feel secure while using the transportation facilities provided by private schools. Similarly, the tiffin facilities provided by the private schools have made 70% of the parents feel happy as they can be ensured that their children are given hygienic food in time rather than children preferred junk foods. The response from parents also indicates that they have enrolled their children in private schools because of distance factor. The number of public schools are limited and comparatively lower in number than private schools. Parents prefer to enroll their children in nearby private schools than distanced public schools. This can be because of security reason as they can manage their time to drop or receive their children from school nearby. Further, most of the parents are found to be job holders. Few job holder’s parents among the respondents preferred off time caring facilities provided by the private schools, so that they can receive their children from the school after their regular office time. Beside all these the most important factor that many of the parents feel better about private school is their satisfaction in their children’s academic progress. Providing regular assignments and feedback, notifying the weakness of the children to their parents, involvement in co-curricular activities and accountable staff are some of the activities that insist the parents to enroll their children in private school. Parents selecting schools on the basis of gender of their children is found to be negligible.

The major cause of selecting public schools by the parents supports the finding of Shrestha (2014) which states “Public schools are scattered all over the country, serving students from low-income families in urban areas, and providing the only option available for the majority of the families in the rural areas irrespective of family income”. On the basis of research, it is found that some of the public school locating in urban territory have good number of students whereas in rural territory have extremely low. In response of some interview questions related to reasons behind selecting the public school for their children various response are presented by the parents such as:

Response 1: I enrolled my child in public school because it is affordable and accessible.

Response 2: I wanted my child to have the opportunity to learn and interact with children from diverse backgrounds.

Response 3: I enrolled my child in public school because he is smart in study and I want him not to be deprived from government scholarship in higher studies.

Analyzing the responses, one of the major reasons of that most of the parents expressed about enrolling their children in public school is low fees. Few of the parents have different opinion about the reason behind selecting public schools, according to them students studying in private school may get better marks but they are comparatively weaker in practical aspects of life. They further emphasize that, the students from public schools are limited within the course knowledge only which may be probably the strict rules the students have to bind with in private schools. To explore the causes of shifting the children from private to public few parents shared their opinions. According to 20% of parents of public schools, they want their children to get graduates from public schools to grasp scholarships from the Nepal government in higher and professional education. Supporting their decision, they further stated that their children become independent after grown up need not require much care of private schools’ security and learning issues. That may be the reason that almost all of the private schools have comparative lower ratio of student in senior classes than up to primary level.

Teacher’s Performance for Quality Education

On the basis of response by the teachers, it is found that both the private and public schools go through certain formal procedure in recruitment process of teachers. The reason may match the statement presented by Alghanim (1990) who states “The academic qualification of the teacher plays vital role in performance of the school leading to economic and social development of the nation”. While discussing with teachers working on both private and public schools, it is found that teachers in private schools have comparatively more work load than

the public school's teacher. They are teaching five to six periods, whereas a full time teacher from public school has to teach four to five periods per day. In regard to interview question about additional duties they are supposed to perform besides teaching, the responses of private school teachers were:

Response 1: I am also responsible for monitoring the progress and development of my students outside of the classroom.

Response 2: In addition to teaching, I am also expected to conduct bus duty and interval duty in my turn

Response 3: We are supposed to look after poor students providing extra time after regular classes

For the same interview question for the teachers of public schools it is observed that they have significantly lower work load than the teachers of private school. Major of the responses involved:

Response 1: Our primary duty is teaching and ensuring that students achieve their academic goals and other duties are not specific.

Response 2: As a teacher in a public school, my primary responsibility is to teach and assess students based on curriculum.

The result discloses that teachers in private schools perform the various additional duties like bus duties, interval duties and so on, which is seemed to be not regular in case of public schools' teachers. These findings can be useful for school administrators and policymakers to better understand the workload of private school teachers and to ensure that they are provided with the necessary resources and support to fulfill their roles effectively. The conducting practical classes, assignment providing, checking and giving feedback pattern of both private and public schools are found to be similar. However, according to the teachers of private schools, there is regular follow up of these tasks from administrative side in case of private school which is infrequently found in public schools. On the basis of teachers as the respondents, it is observed that the teachers of private schools are comparatively more result oriented than in public schools. Most of teachers of private school said "We have to face the parents and principal if student get failed in our subjects". Because of this reason they are spending more time with their students.

Job satisfaction level of public schools on the perception of teachers is found the higher than of Private schools' teachers. Unlike public school, Major of the private school's teachers are not seemed to be satisfied with the remuneration and workload provided to them. With the

condition of not disclosing his name, one of the teacher from private school said that the salary he is getting from his school is not enough even for the petrol in his motorbike. However, most of them feel neutral and satisfy, about indicators like relation with management, students' achievement and motivational program conducted by the schools.

School Administrators for Quality Education

Administrators in education play vital role in ensuring student and institutional success. They are regarded as the key personnel to improve teaching learning activities and boost performance at educational institutions. On the basis of information received from school administrators, it is observed that the average number of students accumulated in a class in public schools is higher than of private schools. However, some of the public schools have very low number of students. The private schools have average of 35 to 40 students in every class where as the students' number in classes of different public schools of studied region ranges from ten to fifty-five. On the basis of Basic Level Examination of grade 8 and Secondary Education Examination of grade 10 of past 3 years, the success rate of sampled public schools varies from 60% to 75% which is lower than private school by around 20%.

The recruitment process of the both private and public sector are almost similar. It involves receiving application, written test, class observations and interview. But the process is highly influenced by politics in public school. In this context one of the principal of public school said that,

Sometimes they have to appoint the candidate with overall lower performance as a teacher due to pressure groups or political interference.

It is found that none of the schools follow systematic performance appraisal system of employees. However, they keep record of every teacher's activities and reward their staff on the basis the result the students achieve in their respective subjects. Private schools organize 'Parents interaction' programs comparatively more than the public schools. Most of the schools have given certain responsibilities to class teachers regarding follow up the causes of absenteeism of the students and sharing the general academic and disciplinary problems to their parents. It is observed that private school conduct 'Human Resource Development' and 'staff motivation programs' likely to be more than the public schools. They use both positive (rewarding, praising, monetary incentives) and negative (Warning, threatening, comparing with others performance) technique to motivate their staff.

From the response of head teachers of public schools, it is realized that the attraction and people's perception towards the English language have made them to switch towards English

medium similar to findings of Gyawali & Khadka, (2016) which states “Public Schools in Nepal have started to switch their medium of instruction to English language to convince parents that they too can deliver “quality” education just by making that switch”. But it is to be understood that language is just a medium to deliver knowledge. Many countries in the world have achieved an incredible achievement without having compulsory English in their formal education system. One of the principal from public school in the interview highlighting the present situation said

Unlike the public schools we have to manage fund ourselves for all the administrative expenses. Therefore, to attract students and the parents we always try to present our schools better in every aspects and we reforming our schools and work accordingly.

Whereas in the issue of ‘school’s reformation’ almost all the principals of public school expressed that the management function of public school is relatively difficult than the private schools as they do have limited rights. Besides, decision making process is longer in public schools and they have to consult with school management committee for almost every decision they make.

Privatizing approach is increasingly being questioned by some educationalists regarding the quality of education, equality of educational opportunities and the availability of free education. When the issue of quality education arises, it often centers on the debate of public versus private provision of education. Nepal government has adopted the policy of free education up to secondary level education, however this free education system is limited up to public schools only and private schools are charging significant amounts as fees. Despite government’s attempt, there is remarkable flow of students in private school. This might be the result of clearly noticeable difference which can be felt in the aspect of performance and output. On the basis of the research there are different factors the parents consider while choosing the schools. Some of the major factors include physical facilities, transportation facilities, tiffin facilities, distance, off time caring facilities, medium of teaching, extra classes’ facilities and their children’s achievement in examinations. But simple comparison of the average student’s score on a standardized test is generally not a fair evaluation of the difference between public and private schools. Students achievement equally rely on students’ inherent capacity and their family background also matters as Jimenez et al., (1991) said, “The backgrounds of public and private school students are generally different, and this may affect the results”. The study stressed that parents’ involvement in learning process of a child is equally important in children’s academic development. For example, private school students may do better, not

because of the school only but because their parents provide an encouraging environment as they have realization that private school shows greater accountability to their students. One of the important reasons of private schools being much accountable can be because they have to manage their every expense from the fund they collect from students as fees. 'Because of this reason private schools directly raise the quality of through competitive pressure in almost every part of world' (Sander, 1999). The key fact on the basis of study is similar to Talance's (2020), conclusion which states "Dissatisfaction with public schooling partly explains why children are sent to private institutions".

The teachers of private schools feel comparatively more pressure than of public schools. The reasons behind strict supervision toward the teachers and working staff by private school might be based on survival theory. To survive in this competitive market, they have to prove themselves than the public schools and probably because of that they are achieving better result than the public schools in aggregate. Because of the fact the private schools are able to contribute the academic sector of the country as Taranath Sharma (2023) says "A large number of students were sent annually to different cities of India in quest of quality education investing a huge amount of money. Private schools put a stop to this tremendous national loss by providing equally good or in many ways better schooling to Nepalese children right inside the country. Further, leadership in education plays crucial role in creating a positive school culture. School heads being the manager of school, are supposed to perform managerial functions effectively. It is found they seem to be comparatively less conscious in other managerial functions like organizing, staffing, directing and controlling. Importantly, political intervention while recruiting and decision making can be the important cause this comparatively weaker situation of public school.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings suggest that the poor quality of the public sector may explain the growth of private education. More specifically, it is not only the objective quality of schools is important but also how parents perceive this quality matters significantly. As findings show, public schools suffer from lesser preference by parents because of comparatively better varieties of services offered by private schools. The study concluded that score of private school's students are better than the same levels in public schools and these outcomes in private schools are because of the performance of teachers, administration and parents' involvement practiced in private schools.

A better understanding of, what contributes to better quality in private schools and why parents are not satisfied with public education would help design policies to increase the attractiveness of public schools. Similarly, political interventions needed to be reduced significantly and the school leaders should be provided the environment to work autonomously by playing parenting role by concern authority of the country. Besides, teachers being the backbone of every schools, fair performance appraisal and rewarding systems is recommended in both the private and public educational institution to motivate the employees. Concluding, that private and public schools should not be seen as competitors of each other, rather they should be regarded as the supplements as both of them have provided equal contribution in education sector of the country.

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