

Students' Attention and Engagement in Learning: A Challenge in Community Schools

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ABSTRACT

Student attention and engagement are hallmarks of academic achievement and meaningful learning that are well known. However, maintaining students' attention and active participation has become an increasing challenge in many community schools. This study was conducted to determine the students' level of attention and engagement in learning and to determine factors which affect classroom participation in community schools. Descriptive survey research design was used. Questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations were employed to gather data from students and teachers. The quantitative data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical technique, including frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation, while the qualitative data analysis was conducted by thematic analysis. The results revealed that a significant number of students showed moderate to low levels of attention and engagement in the classroom. Students' engagement was significantly influenced by traditional teaching methods, inadequate learning resources, overuse and addiction to mobile devices, family related challenges and lack of motivation. It concludes that, in order to boost student attention and engagement in community schools, it is vital to improve classroom interaction, implement learner-centred pedagogies, improve school resources, and improve school-parent engagement.

Keywords: Student attention, student engagement, community schools, classroom participation, learning outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Education has been acknowledged as a key enabler of each person's growth, social change, economic progress, and national development (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2021). However, in the 21st century, the quality of education is not solely determined by students' ability to attend school or their performance in exams, but also by their willingness to engage in and participate in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hattie, 2009). Learning takes place when students are able to focus, be motivated, and engage in classroom activities. Thus, the attention and engagement of students have become key factors in evaluating the quality of education and effectiveness of learning (Li & Xue, 2023).

Attention is the capacity of learners to sustain their attention to an instruction or information or to

learning activity for a long time (Shuwara et al., 2025). Engagement is a multi-faceted phenomenon that includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects of student involvement in learning activities (Fredricks et al., 2004). Behavioral engagement describes all academic and extracurricular activities in which students participate, emotional engagement reflects feelings, interests, and a sense of belonging of students within the school environment, and cognitive engagement is related to students' investment in understanding concepts, solving problems, and using higher order thinking skills (Fredricks et al., 2004). These dimensions together influence how active students are in their own learning process (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004).

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In recent years, student engagement has become a focal point of attention in educational research, policy, and practice due to the research findings that are linked to it (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Xue, 2023). A number of studies have found that highly engaged pupils tend to have higher attainment, positive attitudes to school, good critical thinking skills and lower incidence of school attrition (Patall, 2024, Roorda et al., 2011). On the other hand, students with low levels of attention and engagement have learning challenges, low achievement, behavioral challenges, and reduced learning goals (Shuwara et al., 2025; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

It is increasingly difficult to sustain students' attention and engagement in recent years in all education systems around the world (Shuwara et al., 2025). With the rapid development of technology, the widespread use of smartphones and social media, the change of family structure, the adjustment of family norms, and the high exposure of students to digital entertainment, students' learning behaviours and attention patterns have changed greatly (Wang et al., 2024). This new technology has brought in new opportunities to learn, but it has introduced some new distractions that can decrease students' focus and active engagement in the classroom (Wang et al., 2024). Teachers need, therefore, to develop learning-centred classrooms that can maintain students' motivation and interest (Hattie, 2009; Liem et al., 2025).

Community schools remain the main educational institutions for a significant number of children of school-age, especially in rural, marginalized and economically disadvantaged communities in Nepal (UNICEF Nepal, 2024). The contribution of community schools towards promoting education equity and accessibility of education for all is significant (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2023). Although the country has made a remarkable progress on school enrolment and school infrastructure provision over the last decades, there are concerns about students engagement in learning and participation in the classroom (UNICEF Nepal, 2024; Rawal, 2022). Low learning outcomes, lack of active involvement in the classroom, poor attendance rates and inadequate student motivation have been identified as challenges to education in many community schools in various national assessment reports and studies on education (Upadhyay, 2024).

Due to these factors, teachers in community schools often mention that students are unable to focus during lectures, engage in discussions in class to a lesser extent and lack motivation for academic tasks (Joshi & Rana, 2023; Rawal, 2022). In most classrooms, the teaching and learning process is still very teacher-led, with limited opportunities for interaction, cooperative learning, critical thinking, and student voice (Upadhyay, 2024). In addition, low class sizes, poor learning materials and limited technological facilities, as well as varied socio-economic issues, can be attributed to students' low involvement in learning (Bhattarai & Thapa, 2022; UNICEF Nepal, 2024).

Some studies indicate that various factors in the school, teacher, family, and individual context interact with each other and impacts on students' attention and engagement (Li & Xue, 2023; Roorda et al., 2011). The quality of students' learning experience reflects the teacher's effectiveness, classroom climate, instructional methods, parental support, peer relationships, learning resources, and students' personal motivation (Hattie, 2009; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The comprehension of these influences on students' attention and engagement is critical to enhance the teaching-learning processes and enhance the educational outcomes in community schools (Fredricks et al., 2004; Liem et al., 2025).

As students' attention spans have been found to be short and concentration in their learning is limited in classrooms, there is a need for empirical study on what causes students' reduced participation and concentration at community schools (Shuwara et al., 2025; Rawal, 2022; Upadhyay, 2024). Discussions about these questions can help teachers, school leaders, policy makers, and others in the education sector to develop more engaging, inclusive, and effective learning spaces (Liem et al., 2025; UNESCO, 2022). Hence, this study is to see the condition of students' attention and participation in the learning process and determining the dominant factors that influence students' attention and participation in learning in community schools.

Student attention and engagement are essential features of the process of learning that directly influence academic outcomes, cognition, and long-term learning effects. Authentic learning demands mental engagement, emotional engagement

and active engagement: engaged students think at a higher level and have positive attitudes towards learning, whereas inactive students struggle with comprehending, completing and participating. The study conducted recently found that attention spans have shortened over the last 50 years, with almost half of students (49%) stating that the teaching methods and strategies caused them to lose concentration, and that they only pay attention for up to 45 minutes (Shuwara et al., 2025). This implies that there is a need to use effectively interactive and engaging teaching methods.

In Nepal this challenge is clearly exacerbated in the community schools of the remote Achham District. While there has been significant improvement in enrolment and infrastructure (UNICEF Nepal, 2024), classroom quality is fragile, since geographic isolation, socioeconomic divisions, seasonal migration and agricultural livelihoods force children to participate in household work, often limiting their preparedness to learn, with female students at particular risk of irregular attendance (UNICEF Nepal, 2024). Further, traditional teaching methods are still very teacher-centred, and collaboration and the use of real life situations are restricted (Rawal, 2022), and teachers face increasing digital distractions caused by uncontrolled mobiles usage. Essentially, engagement arises from a myriad of individual, family, school, and community factors, but empirical studies in Nepalese community schools, particularly in Achham, are limited, and those that exist focus more on access than classroom experience and only recently study teacher-student relations (Rawal, 2022). Considering this huge gap, the present research has been designed to examine systematically the level of students' attention and engagement in the community schools of Achham and to find out those influencing factors that could generate context specific evidence for effective pedagogical and policy interventions for better educational outcomes. The objectives of the Study are:

1. To assess students' level of attention during classroom instruction.
2. To identify factors affecting students' engagement in learning activities.
3. To examine students' participation in classroom learning.
4. To suggest measures for improving student attention and engagement in community schools.

The study was limited to three community schools in Mangalsen Municipality of Achham, as time, resources and accessibility were constraints, the findings are mainly applicable in similar educational context. The study was conducted with students of Grade 8, 9 and 10 and their secondary level teachers only to focus on adolescent learners. The scope was limited to the study of student attention and engagement in classroom instruction, and did not include a study of psychological, developmental, and academic achievement variables. The research design was descriptive survey and self-reported data was used in collecting data through questionnaires, interviews and observations but not experimental or longitudinal. Although the study is constrained to these, the resulting information is likely to provide a valuable contribution to the improvement of teaching-learning in community schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Engagement has become a significant construct in educational research as it has been shown to be strongly linked to learning outcomes, school achievement, and student well-being (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Xue, 2023). The concept has changed significantly from its initial behavioral conceptualizations to a more holistic definition that includes several aspects of student engagement in learning (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The three-component framework proposed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004) is the one most commonly cited in the engagement literature, with three dimensions of engagement: behavioral engagement (participation in academic and extra-curricular activities, including attendance, effort, and adherence to classroom rules); emotional engagement (feelings toward school, teachers, and peers, reflecting students' interests and sense of belonging); and cognitive engagement (psychological investment in learning, including using higher-order thinking and processing information). Engagement is taken as malleable and responsive to contextual characteristics, open to change in the environment (Fredricks et al., 2004). Combined, these dimensions reflect the level of student engagement in their learning (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Modern scholarship has widened the scope to include other aspects. Recent theoretical frameworks

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have incorporated the concept of student agency by encouraging students to positively participate in learning by actively influencing the learning environment or asking questions, expressing preferences, and requesting explanations from the teacher (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). More recent studies have taken a multidimensional perspective on student engagement, with emotional, behavioral, cognitive and agentic dimensions identified as key aspects of student engagement (Li & Xue, 2023). Attention has also been paid to the role of sociocultural factors and to the fact that engagement is not a standalone process, but takes place within a "multiple nested social, structural, and cultural systems that play a crucial role in engagement processes and outcomes" (Liem et al., 2025). The current literature states that the notion of student engagement is determined by several sociocultural, contextual and personal factors, including students' motivation, and that it is a key to obtaining a number of positive student outcomes, such as academic achievement and well-being (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Xue, 2023). A major objective of recent scholarship has been to respond to this gap, and has attempted to focus on the role of the family, community, and culture on a dimension of student engagement: student engagement (Liem et al, 2025).

Attention, characterized as the capability of students to concentrate their efforts in learning activities, ability to process information, and the capacity to persist in learning activities has been recognized as a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful involvement and learning achievement (Shuwara et al., 2025). A concerning trend has been observed over the last 50 years, which is a decrease in the attention span of students (Shuwara et al., 2025). This is due to external distractions (Mobile phones) and the way lectures are delivered which can have dire consequences on student engagement (Shuwara et al., 2025).

In a recent study that examined how to improve student engagement, empirical evidence showed that 49% of students lost attention to the teaching approach being delivered, while 42% of the students wanted to see more problem-based learning to increase their engagement (Shuwara et al., 2025). Importantly, 49% of students could concentrate for no more than 45 minutes and it would appear that a different approach to the way in which the subject is delivered needs to be adopted, moving away from the

traditional didactic lecture model to a more interactive and engaging one (Shuwara et al., 2025). The studies on technology mediated learning highlight that human attention span is about 8 seconds, and following the video is an increase to 120 seconds (Shuwara et al., 2025). Based on the global data, students' attention span in 2023-2024 is 10-15 minutes on average (Shuwara et al., 2025).

Studies based on the principles of cognitive load theory and spaced learning have emphasized the need to consider attention spans in classrooms (Shuwara et al., 2025). Micro-breaks within instructional time are recommended as a way to increase student engagement and achievement (Shuwara et al., 2025). According to the "10-Minute Rule", adults' attention span does not exceed 10–15 minutes when listening to passive information, so lessons should be delivered in blocks followed by active student processing after direct teaching (Shuwara et al., 2025).

There is significant empirical research that has investigated the factors that influence student engagement. Based on the data of 93,188 students and 148 effects, a systematic review and meta-analysis were conducted, which revealed fourteen factors that promote or hinder student engagement (Li & Xue, 2023). Promoting factors include students' positive emotion, positive learning behavior, positive teacher behavior, the teacher-student relationship, learning resources support, and teaching factors (Li & Xue, 2023). Factors that hinder include the absence of environmental support, negative behaviors of students and teachers (Li & Xue, 2023).

Teacher-Student Relationships: One of the most effective predictors in student engagement is the teacher-student relationship (Roorda et al., 2011). After analyzing 99 studies, Roorda and colleagues (2011) found that relationships between teachers and students, whether positive or negative, were medium to large with students' engagement; they were small to medium with students' achievement. In general, the higher grades had more significant effects (Roorda et al., 2011). Twenty-six meta-analyses representing over 70 years of research were found in a systematic review by Roorda et al. (2011), and were all related to important outcomes for students such as academic achievement, emotions, motivation, and appropriate behavior. Overall, there were 165 correlational studies

yielding 191 samples that were analyzed in a meta-analysis, which found statistically significant relationships between classroom structure and engagement ($r = 0.28$) (Patall, 2024). In an extensive meta-analysis, student engagement was found to have a large average correlation with academic achievement ($r = 0.33$) and subjective well-being ($r = 0.35$) (Patall, 2024).

Classroom Environment, Instructional Quality and Feedback: Hattie's (2009) important research highlighted the impact of the classroom climate, quality of instruction, and feedback on student engagement. Active participation and positive learning outcomes are promoted through effective teaching practices, collaborative learning activities and ongoing assessment (Hattie, 2009). The investigation of classroom participation indicates that in traditional teacher-centered teaching, students may exhibit passive learning habits, while interactive and learner-centered teaching methods can stimulate students' active participation (Upadhyay, 2024).

Technology and Digital Distractions: The influence of technology on student engagement – Opportunities and Challenges. In recent research, there are many layers that can be seen between students' academic engagement, digital competency and digital informal learning experiences (Wang et al., 2024). Digital competency and informal learning are mediating factors between the use of their smartphone and academic engagement; uncontrolled use of smartphones and social media can lead to academic distraction and poor attention (Wang et al., 2024). Research has focused on the impact of learning contexts and instructional design on engagement (Fredricks et al., 2004).

In Nepalese context, community schools remain the primary education institutions for a significant percentage of school-age children, especially for children from the rural, marginalized and economically poor communities (UNICEF Nepal, 2024). Although the enrolment rate and educational facilities have improved, issues related to student engagement in learning and participation in classrooms are prevalent across the country (UNICEF Nepal, 2024; Rawal, 2022).

Some research has started to emerge on student engagement in community schools in Nepal.

In the Kathmandu Valley, a study on formative assessment practices in English secondary classrooms revealed that most teachers used classwork and homework as formative assessment tools, and the most common strategies to involve students were peer correction, group correction, teacher correction, and self-correction (Sharma & Budhathoki, 2024). Most of the students were found positive to these strategies indicating that use of different formative assessment strategies can be effective in engaging students and promoting positive attitude towards learning (Sharma & Budhathoki, 2024).

The qualitative study of teachers' perceptions and experience of student engagement in secondary EFL classrooms in Kanchanpur district revealed that many students are not motivated to participate in the classroom as they are afraid of making mistakes and some are unengaged during the class and remain passive during the process of learning (Joshi & Rana, 2023). The effects of teachers' practical knowledge on instructional practices, decision making and strategies for engagement in Secondary Schools in Nepal has also been studied (Joshi & Rana, 2023).

Research shows that the gap between the community and community schools has led to problems including poor attendance at school and parents' low expectations of education (Bhattarai & Thapa, 2022). However, poverty has been identified as one of the factors that impact on class engagement and many of the students in community schools don't have access to better learning resources (Bhattarai & Thapa, 2022).

The reviewed literatures show that student engagement is a multi-faceted phenomenon that is shaped by the interaction between various individual, instructional, social, and environmental factors (Fredricks et al., 2004; Li & Xue, 2023). There has been considerable international research on these connections, but little empirical work on student engagement in community schools in Nepal, especially in remote districts like Achham (Rawal, 2022). The majority of studies on student engagement have been done in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) environments, which has resulted in a limited understanding of the generalizability of previous models on student engagement to students outside of WEIRD contexts (Liem et al., 2025). To meet this need, recent

scholarship has focused on the cultural specificity of student engagement processes and the promotion of engagement across a variety of sociocultural contexts and student populations, and on the consideration of the role of culture in student engagement processes (Liem et al., 2025).

Previous research in Nepal has been predominantly on the quantitative aspects of access, enrolment and educational infrastructure, but not the qualitative aspects of classroom engagement (UNICEF Nepal, 2024). The existing study on NCCs has been carried out mostly in urban or semi-urban areas of Kathmandu Valley with limited studies conducted in rural and remote areas, leaving that two regions poorly represented (Upadhyay, 2024). Moreover, previous research has focused on student engagement in specific content areas and/or with specific pedagogical approaches, without taking a comprehensive view of the multiple factors that influence student attention and engagement in their community school classrooms (Upadhyay, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to systematically investigate the current status of students' attention and engagement and the influencing factors within community schools, chosen for its ability to collect and interpret existing conditions in natural settings without variable manipulation. To ensure triangulation, both primary and secondary data were utilized; primary data were gathered through a structured five-point Likert-scale student questionnaire, a semi-structured teacher interview schedule, and a classroom observation checklist, while secondary data from scholarly articles, SESP, Ministry of Education reports, and UNESCO/World Bank publications provided theoretical grounding. The research was conducted in selected community schools of Mangalsen Municipality, Achham District, selected for its representation of rural and semi-urban educational challenges—including geographic isolation, socioeconomic disparities, and infrastructural constraints. The target population comprised secondary-level students (Grades 8, 9, and 10) and their teachers, as this stage demands greater academic responsibility and active participation. A multistage sampling procedure was applied: three schools were purposively selected, students were chosen via simple

random sampling from class registers to minimize bias, and teachers were purposively included for their instructional insights, resulting in a final sample of 165 respondents (150 students and 15 teachers) across grade levels.

Following formal permissions, data collection involved administering questionnaires during school hours, conducting private teacher interviews, and performing non-intrusive classroom observations during regular sessions. Ethical protocols were rigorously observed: participants received full disclosure of the study's purpose, provided informed consent, were assured of voluntary participation and the right to withdraw, while confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed by excluding personal identifiers. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics—frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation—to summarize engagement levels and response variability. Concurrently, qualitative data from interviews and observations were subjected to thematic analysis, involving systematic coding and categorization of recurring patterns into meaningful themes aligned with the research objectives. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings through data triangulation ultimately enhanced the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the results, offering a holistic understanding of the multifaceted factors affecting student attention and engagement to inform improved teaching-learning practices and policy interventions in Achham's community schools.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained from the analysis of data collected from students, teachers, and classroom observations. The results are presented using tables and descriptive statistics to provide a clear picture of students' attention and engagement in learning in community schools of Mangalsen Municipality, Achham. In accordance with the principles of quantitative research reporting, the results section focuses on the presentation of facts and statistical findings without interpretation.

Table 1
Distribution of Respondents by Gender (n = 150)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	78	52.0
Female	72	48.0
Total	150	100.0

Table 1 shows that out of 150 student respondents, 78 (52.0%) were male and 72 (48.0%) were female. The distribution indicates a relatively balanced representation of both genders in the study sample.

Table 2
Students' Level of Attention During Classroom Instruction

Level of Attention	Frequency	Percentage
High	38	25.3
Moderate	72	48.0
Low	40	26.7
Total	150	100.0

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that 72 students (48.0%) reported a moderate level of attention during classroom instruction. Similarly, 40 students (26.7%) reported a low level of attention, whereas 38 students (25.3%) reported a high level of attention.

Table 3
Students' Participation in Classroom Activities

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage
Active	45	30.0
Moderate	70	46.7
Passive	35	23.3
Total	150	100.0

Table 3 shows that 70 students (46.7%) demonstrated moderate participation in classroom activities. Active participation was reported by 45 students (30.0%), while 35 students (23.3%) were categorized as passive participants.

Table 4
Factors Affecting Students' Attention and Engagement

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Mobile phone use	92	61.3
Lack of motivation	84	56.0
Traditional teaching methods	78	52.0
Family-related issues	65	43.3
Inadequate learning resources	58	38.7

The data in Table 4 indicate that mobile phone use was reported by 92 students (61.3%) as the most frequently cited factor affecting attention and engagement. Likewise, lack of motivation was identified by 84 students (56.0%), traditional teaching methods by 78 students (52.0%), family-related issues by 65 students (43.3%), and inadequate learning resources by 58 students (38.7%).

Classroom Observation Findings

Classroom observations were conducted in selected community schools to obtain firsthand information regarding students' attention and engagement during instructional activities. The observations revealed that students generally demonstrated moderate levels of attention throughout classroom instruction. In several observed classes, students remained attentive during the initial stages of lessons; however, attention levels gradually declined as lessons progressed. This observation aligns with Shuwara et al. (2025), who found that students can concentrate for no more than 45 minutes during passive instruction.

The observations further indicated that teacher-centered instructional approaches remained dominant in many classrooms. Most lessons relied heavily on lectures, textbook reading, and question-answer sessions led by teachers. Opportunities for collaborative learning, project-based activities, and student-led discussions were comparatively limited. This finding is consistent with Rawal (2022), who reported that instructional practices in Nepalese community schools remain predominantly teacher-centered.

Student participation varied across classrooms. While some students actively responded to teachers' questions and participated in discussions,

a considerable number remained passive observers during instructional activities. Classroom observations also revealed that students demonstrated greater enthusiasm and participation when teachers incorporated interactive teaching methods, group work, educational games, and practical activities. During such activities, students appeared more motivated, attentive, and willing to contribute to the learning process, consistent with constructivist learning theory (Hattie, 2009).

The analysis of quantitative and qualitative data revealed the following major findings: Nearly half (48.0%) of the respondents reported a moderate level of attention during classroom instruction. Approximately one-fourth (26.7%) of students reported low attention levels. A majority of students (46.7%) demonstrated moderate participation in classroom activities. Mobile phone use emerged as the most frequently reported factor affecting attention and engagement (61.3%). Lack of motivation (56.0%) and traditional teaching methods (52.0%) were identified as major barriers to effective engagement. Classroom observations indicated a predominance of teacher-centered instructional practices. Student participation increased noticeably during interactive and activity-based learning sessions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide important insights into the current status of students' attention in community schools of Mangalsen Municipality, Achham. The results indicate that a substantial proportion of students (48.0%) demonstrate moderate levels of attention during classroom instruction, while 26.7% exhibit low attention levels. This finding raises concerns regarding the overall effectiveness of teaching-learning processes and the quality of educational experiences provided in community schools.

The finding that a majority of students exhibited moderate to low attention levels is consistent with the conceptual framework proposed by Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who argued that student engagement is a multidimensional construct involving behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The moderate attention levels observed suggest that while students attend classes, their involvement may not be sufficiently deep to promote meaningful learning and

long-term academic success. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which indicate that students often remain physically present in classrooms while exhibiting varying degrees of psychological and cognitive engagement (Shuwara et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the finding that 26.7% of students reported low attention levels is concerning and aligns with recent research by Shuwara et al. (2025), which revealed that nearly half of students (49%) lost focus due to teaching approaches and could concentrate for no more than 45 minutes. This suggests that the traditional lecture-based instruction prevalent in many community schools may be inadequate for sustaining student attention. The gradual decline in attention observed during classroom observations—where students remained attentive during initial lesson stages but lost focus as lessons progressed—supports the "10-Minute Rule" suggesting that passive listening maxes out at approximately 10-15 minutes (Shuwara et al., 2025).
Students' Participation in Classroom Activities

The study found that 46.7% of students demonstrated moderate participation, while 23.3% were passive participants in classroom activities. This finding suggests that active participation remains a significant challenge in community schools. The predominance of passive learning behaviors is consistent with the sociocultural perspective articulated by Liem, Fredricks, and Wong (2025), who emphasized that engagement is shaped by various sociocultural, contextual, and personal factors including motivation.

The finding that only 30.0% of students actively participated in classroom activities is particularly concerning given the strong association between participation and learning outcomes documented in the literature. A comprehensive meta-analysis found that student engagement has a large average correlation with academic achievement ($r = 0.33$) (Patall, 2024). This suggests that the limited active participation observed may have significant implications for student achievement in community schools.

Classroom observations revealed that student participation increased noticeably when teachers employed interactive methods such as group work, educational games, and practical activities. This

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finding is consistent with Upadhyay (2024), who reported that interactive and learner-centered pedagogies promote active engagement, while traditional teacher-centered instruction often results in passive learning behaviors. This observation also aligns with constructivist learning theory (Hattie, 2009), which emphasizes active learner participation in the construction of knowledge.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the influence of mobile phone use on students' attention and engagement, with 61.3% of respondents identifying mobile phones as a major source of distraction. This finding aligns with contemporary research highlighting the impact of digital technologies on students' concentration and learning behaviors (Wang et al., 2024). Although technology can serve as a valuable educational resource, uncontrolled use of smartphones, social media platforms, and online entertainment may reduce students' ability to maintain sustained attention during classroom instruction.

This finding is consistent with the meta-analysis by Li and Xue (2023), which identified positive student learning behavior and positive teacher behavior as promoting factors for engagement, and lack of environmental support and negative student behaviors as hindering factors. The increasing prevalence of digital distractions presents a growing challenge for teachers and educational institutions seeking to maintain students' focus on learning activities. As Shuwara et al. (2025) noted, human attention span is approximately 8 seconds, increasing to 120 seconds when watching a video, highlighting how digital content consumption patterns may be rewiring students' attention capacities.

The study identified lack of motivation as a major factor influencing student engagement, with 56.0% of respondents reporting it as a significant barrier. Motivation plays a central role in determining students' willingness to participate actively in learning activities, complete academic tasks, and persist in the face of learning challenges. Students who lack intrinsic or extrinsic motivation often demonstrate lower levels of classroom participation and reduced commitment to academic work.

This finding supports motivational theories of learning, which emphasize that students are more

likely to engage when they perceive learning activities as meaningful, relevant, and personally rewarding (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). The teacher-student relationship, which has emerged as one of the most powerful predictors of student engagement (Roorda et al., 2011), may play a crucial role in fostering motivation. As Rawal (2022) found in the Nepalese context, supportive teacher-student relationships significantly contribute to student motivation and engagement.

Another important finding relates to the influence of traditional teaching methods on student engagement, with 52.0% of respondents reporting that teacher-centered instructional practices negatively affect their participation. Classroom observations further confirmed that lecture-based teaching remained prevalent in many classrooms, with lessons relying heavily on lectures, textbook reading, and teacher-led question-answer sessions.

These findings are consistent with previous Nepalese and international studies suggesting that passive instructional approaches often limit opportunities for student interaction, collaboration, and active learning (Upadhyay, 2024). A systematic review and meta-analysis by Li and Xue (2023) identified teaching factors and positive teacher behavior as promoting factors for student engagement. Modern educational theories emphasize learner-centered approaches that encourage exploration, inquiry, discussion, and problem-solving (Hattie, 2009). When students are provided with opportunities to engage actively in the learning process, they are more likely to maintain attention and develop deeper understanding of academic content.

The predominance of teacher-centered instruction in community schools may be attributed to limited teacher professional development opportunities, large class sizes, inadequate learning resources, and traditional educational norms (Rawal, 2022). As Sharma and Budhathoki (2024) found in their study of Nepalese secondary classrooms, incorporating diverse formative assessment approaches and interactive strategies can effectively engage students and foster positive attitudes toward learning.

Family-related issues (43.3%) and inadequate learning resources (38.7%) were also identified as

factors affecting students' engagement. The socioeconomic realities of many families in Achham District may create challenges that extend beyond the classroom. Household responsibilities, economic hardships, parental migration, and limited educational support at home may influence students' ability to focus on academic activities. This finding aligns with research by Bhattarai and Thapa (2022), who found that the connection gap between local communities and community schools has resulted in inconsistent attendance among students and low educational expectations among parents.

Likewise, shortages of instructional materials, library resources, technological facilities, and conducive learning environments may further limit students' opportunities for meaningful engagement. Li and Xue (2023) identified learning resources support as a promoting factor for student engagement, indicating that inadequate resources can hinder engagement. This is particularly relevant in the Nepalese context, where UNICEF Nepal (2024) has noted that despite improvements in enrollment and infrastructure, classroom quality remains precarious.

CONCLUSION

This study examined students' attention and engagement in learning in selected community schools of Mangalsen Municipality, Achham District. The findings revealed that student attention and engagement remain significant educational concerns, with the majority demonstrating moderate levels while a considerable proportion exhibited low concentration and passive learning behaviors. This suggests that physical presence in classrooms does not guarantee meaningful cognitive or emotional engagement necessary for optimal academic achievement.

The study identified multiple interconnected factors influencing student engagement at individual, classroom, school, family, and community levels. Mobile phone use emerged as the most prominent challenge, followed by lack of motivation, teacher-centered instructional practices, family-related issues, and inadequate learning resources. Classroom observations confirmed that traditional lecture-based approaches remain prevalent, limiting opportunities for active learning, collaboration, and critical thinking. The multidimensional nature of student engagement requires comprehensive, coordinated approaches

rather than single interventions. Teachers must adopt learner-centered, interactive strategies; schools must create supportive environments promoting curiosity and meaningful teacher-student interactions; and parents and communities must be actively involved. School administrators and policymakers should ensure adequate learning materials, strengthen teacher professional development, and address digital distractions. Ultimately, educational quality should be measured not solely by enrollment or examination results but by the extent of student engagement in the learning process.

The findings have important practical implications for educational stakeholders. Schools should promote learner-centered pedagogical approaches that encourage active participation, collaboration, and experiential learning. Teachers should receive continuous professional development in engagement strategies, classroom management, and interactive instructional techniques. Schools should strengthen partnerships with parents and communities to create supportive learning environments. Clear guidelines regarding responsible digital technology use should be developed to enhance rather than hinder learning engagement. Improving attention and participation requires comprehensive, coordinated approaches involving teachers, school leaders, parents, communities, and policymakers.

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