

## Perceptions of Scholarship and its Management among Stakeholders in Chepang Community Schools, Nepal

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### ABSTRACT

Chepang are marginalized ethnic minorities of Nepal deprived of educational opportunities. Their low educational accessibility and attainment are largely attributed to their difficult economic status, remote geographical dwelling, and linguistic minority status. Scholarships are provisioned to support the students. In this context, this study explored the perceptions of teachers, students, and other stakeholders regarding scholarship and its management for Chepang students, employing qualitative methods within an exploratory design. Two schools in the Chitwan district with a dominant number of Chepang community students were purposively selected as study sites. There were altogether 20 participants, split into 10 students, 2 teachers, 2 headteachers, 2 guardians, 2 Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) members, 1 social activist, and 1 political leader. The information was collected face-to-face using Key Informant Interview (KII) and In-Depth Interview (IDI) guidelines. The study reveals a dual reality: while the scholarship program positively supported school attendance and retention, particularly through hostel facilities and the day-meal program, significant implementation gaps persist. Guardians demonstrated limited knowledge of scholarship procedures and criteria, which, coupled with opaque selection processes, led to minimal engagement and a sense of exclusion from the program. This study highlights a critical disconnect between policy intent and grassroots practice. To bridge this gap, it recommends context-specific, community-driven strategies to strengthen parental participation and improve the scholarship program's overall effectiveness and equity.

**Keywords:** Scholarship, Management, Perception, Disadvantage group, Educational disparities

### Introduction

Since the world has witnessed disparities among the countries in terms of educational attainment, the global intellectual community has recognized it as an obstacle to the global development agendas. Academic disparities, both among the nations and within them, not only exacerbate economic inequalities but also perpetuate cycles of compounded underdevelopment. In this context, education is widely regarded as one of the most important equalizing force, leading academicians and policymakers to promote scholarship schemes as a strategic intervention to enhance educational participation among disadvantaged learners.

Students, particularly young learners, may devote less effort to pursuing education because such learners overly discount the future, have time-inconsistent preferences, or undermine the return of education (Gneezy et al., 2011). Similarly, the parents from economically difficult situations and with low levels of awareness see underachievement in the investment in education. Hence, they are less motivated to send their kids to academic institutions. In such cases, scholarships can provide immediate material benefits that may provide extra motivation to study for the students and create an environment for parents to keep their children learning.

The discourse surrounding scholarship or incentive awarded to the particular students has elicited diverse reactions from the scholars. One group of thought categorically opposes such incentives. In contrast, another group of scholars support the provision of such scholarship. However, there is a lack of unanimity among the supporters regarding its effectiveness. Kohn (1999, as cited in Gneezy et al., 2011) argued that incentives to students can undermine intrinsic motivation, as students display desired behavior as long as they are intervened with incentives; if stopped, they persist in the activities before the intervention. The author further argues that incentives with bribery, suggesting that such practices undermine intrinsic motivation. On the contrary, Adhikari

(2023) including the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT) points to the positive effect of incentives to achieve the desired outcomes among the learners. The study finds that the scholarship recipients demonstrate higher academic achievement compared to fee-paying students across different performance indicators. Levitt et al. (2011) view that matching the type of incentive and the level of student is an important effectiveness measure. They add the older the students are, the more responsive they are to financial incentives, and vice versa. Finally, the study concludes that the effectiveness of incentives is determined by age, gender, and the test subject.

Supporting this perspective, See et al. (2023), in their structured review, find that financial incentives to students are effective in the developing countries, and they seem to work less in the developed countries. Further, Grove and Hadsell (2012) educational psychologists and researchers have posited many theories to explain how individuals learn, i.e. how they acquire, organize and deploy knowledge and skills. The 20th century can be considered the century of psychology on learning and related fields of interest (such as motivation, cognition, metacognition etc. demonstrate that incentives on the completion of the inputs are more effective than on the outputs. Herranz-Zarzoso and Sabater-Grande (2023) further reveal the role of monetary and grade incentives and find that monetary incentives work better in improving the practice test performance, whereas their effect does not last long till the final exams. Regarding the quantity of incentives, Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) argue paying enough or not paying at all. Their study finds that individuals who receive minimal pay demonstrate poorer performance than those who are not paid at all. On the contrary, there is some literature that claims something is better than nothing. In addition to this, there is abundant literature available that certifies incentives to the teachers and guardians for better educational attainment of the children (Henry, 2024; Aber et al., 2016).

Collectively, these body of literature suggests that incentives basically function as short-term motivator, and monetary incentives tend to be less effective in the smaller grades than the higher ones. Similarly, monetary incentives result better in economically deprived context while it does not yield expected outcomes in the affluent societies. It even tends to backfire in the sectors such as altruism and philanthropy. This knowledge is crucial for strategic scholarship policy formulation.

Nepal is a country of diversity in terms of language, religion, culture, and ethnicity. These diversities have affected the approach to resources and opportunities. Hence, diversities created disparities among the citizens. Some groups of people have high educational attainment, whereas some lag behind. More importantly, those who belong to ethnic minority groups have very fragile academic attainment, and at the same time, they make up the majority of the population in Nepal. Consequently, without mainstreaming those minority groups in education, the dream of a prosperous Nepal becomes a utopia. Therefore, to materialize this goal, the primary condition is to ensure that all children are brought into schools, and for this purpose, scholarships can serve as one of the most effective instruments. Aligning with this conviction, the state has provisioned scholarship schemes in different heads for motivating the students. Among these, one of the most remarkable form of scholarship is targeted at children from marginalized communities. The Chepang are one of the marginalized groups in Nepal. They live in the hilly areas of Chitwan, Makwanpur, Dhading, and Gorkha in considerable numbers and sparsely in the Tanahau and Lamjung districts of Nepal. They make a total of 84364 populations in the Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2021). Since they are a marginalized group they are backward in terms of education, politics, and economy. Consequently, they deserved the attention of the state, and the state launched scholarship programs in 1975 for their better educational attainment. In recent times the state has managed scholarships of different forms as cash incentives, day meal programs, and provision of school uniforms and hostel facilities for the Chepang pupils. In addition to this, there are many organizations within and outside the nation assisting the children so as to motivate them in education.

Despite these sustained intervention, educational exclusion remains substantial. National data indicate that approximately 6% of primary-level, 4% of lower secondary-level, and 15% of secondary-level students remain out of school, and the highest number of children belong to the poorest section of the society (UNICEF, 2022). Similarly repetition, dropout, and non-transition rate remains high, at 7%, 6%, and 3% respectively (MoEST, 2023). Further, 44% students, the highest in number in the entire nation, from disadvantage communities live in the Bagmati province, followed by the Koshi province. Chepang belong to the same group, and Chepang children constitute a remarkable portion of the out-of-school population, low performers at schools, high school dropouts, and low participants in classroom activities. Such evidences indicate that existing scholarship programs have not fully realized their intended objectives and continue to exhibit significant implementation gaps.

Although extensive literature has investigated the effectiveness of scholarships on student outcomes. However, limited studies invested their time and effort in assessing how the stakeholders from marginalized in-

digenous communities perceive the procedure and management of scholarships. In the Nepali context, scientific evidence pertaining to Chepang community schools remain rare. Therefore, this study aims to assess the perception of the stakeholders of the scholarship program in Chepang community schools. The research output would provide guidelines in reviewing the scholarship policy to the concerned authority and increase the effectiveness of the scholarship programs for equitable educational opportunities of the target community.

### Research Methods

This study used a qualitative exploratory research design with an interpretivist paradigm. Guided by an interpretivist stance, this study believes that social realities are situated in the perceptions and subjective experiences of the stakeholders who experience the scholarship management. This approach allows us to capture multiple perspectives and voices of the stakeholders. This study was taken in the two schools of Chitwan district situated in Kalika municipality and its catchment area which have a dominant population of Chepang community. The researcher justifies the selection of the research site, as the site is populated with the targeted pupils.

### Sample and sampling design

This study utilized purposive sampling. Twenty informants were purposively selected in the study from two different schools' community. Among them were 10 the students, representing grades 8, 9, and 10, 4 teachers (including two headteachers from each school); 2 Parents Teachers Association (PTA) members; 2 guardians; 1 social activist; and 1 Chepang leader. Participants were equally represented from both of the selected schools. The informants comprise 12 males and 8 females.

**Table 1: Participants of the study**

Participants	Male	Female	Total	Tools administered
Students	5	5	10	IDI guideline
Guardians	1	1	2	IDI guideline
Headteachers	2	-	2	KII guideline
Teachers	1	1	2	IDI guideline
Social activist	1	-	1	KII guideline
Chepang leader	1	-	1	KII guideline
PTA members	1	1	2	IDI guideline
Total	12	8	20	

### Ethical Consideration

The written consent was obtained from school authorities to get permission for the study. In the same way, written consent was obtained from all participants and students who were more than 18 years of age. For those students who were under 18 years of age, assent was received from the school headteacher as she/he is the legal guardian while students are at the school. Participants were not offered any incentives, i.e., money or any goods. Only those participants who agreed to participate in this study as a volunteer were interviewed. They were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. In the interview, confidentiality was maintained by providing a unique code to each participant instead of maintaining their actual identity.

### Data Analysis Procedure

The study used the thematic approach inductively to analyze the responses obtained from KIIs and IDIs. The qualitative data analysis process involved carefully listening to recorded information and transcribing language interviews into the English language. Initially, the researchers carefully listened to each participant's recorded interviews and transcribe them into the English language. The transcriptions were carefully inspected in several rounds to reduce the duplications, missingness, and neatness (Sharma et al., 2021). The data were manually coded, categorized, and thematized from the transcriptions of interviews. Finally, the generated themes were redefined and made final themes for analysis purposes.

### Results

Participants were asked the questions regarding the procedure, form, source, need, effect, and parties involved in the distribution of scholarships. The results are mentioned in this study based on the participants' perception regarding the study issues. The result section is presented in four thematic domains, such as a) procedure of scholarship distribution, b) form of scholarship, c) need of providing scholarship, and d) impact on the

target group. In doing so, researchers have tried to mention participants' verbatim quotes and memos, which they expressed during the interview.

### Procedure of scholarship distribution

This theme explores stakeholders' understanding and responses pertaining to the statutory procedure of scholarship allocation to the beneficiaries. Participants expressed their understandings of this issue, focusing on the process involved, actors responsible, mandatory eligibility, and discrepancies. In this regard a student participant (S1) from school A expressed:

*I know very few things about the process of distribution of scholarships. The only thing I know is that one has to get admission in the time given by the school. We have to bring our father or mother in the school to get scholarship.*

In the understanding of the student respondent, admission and parental presence are basic conditions to be fulfilled for receiving the scholarship. The perception of student (S2) is entirely different than the previous one. The student added,

*There is partiality in the distribution of scholarship. A student from another community got the scholarship last year, but I could not because I had to stay at home for a month for some emergency.*

From the verbatim of the student, it is disclosed that some students from communities other than Chepang community also seem to benefit from the Chepang scholarship. The student could not get benefit from the scholarship as she attended a month later, the school started the new session. The teachers, head teacher, and the school management committee members have similar knowledge in this regard. One of the teachers (T1) expressed:

*The government has made the scholarship distribution directives for its effective implementation. To become the qualified recipient of the program, the student has to get admission to the schools in the prescribed time frame. The school administration has to forward the eligible record to the higher authority within the last week of the first month of the year for releasing the fund. Those who do not fulfill the criteria are unable to get benefit from it. The school organizes a program for the distribution of the scholarship with all the stakeholders' presence. The students who are liable to benefit from the program have to attend school along with the guardian.*

Head teacher (HT1) further added

*We sometimes face difficulty in the distribution of scholarships. Last year a student from the Chepang community came to school two months after the session started. We could not restrict him from enrollment in the school since the student might had some genuine cause. After the admission, the student started to demand the scholarship. Since the school is not the final authority for the approval of scholarship, we could not award it. The student complained all the time that he could not get the scholarships he deserved.*

The headteacher is the apex administrative authority within the school. So, the headteacher comes across different contradictions with the beneficiaries. Those who benefit always aspire despite some discrepancies. However, the headteacher has to abide by the directives. The guardians of the Chepang community have different views about the procedure. One of them (G1) said:

*I am an uneducated person. I only know how to work in the field rare animals and carrying loads (I mean physical work). It is the duty of the teachers and political leaders. Our duty is to cast vote. They (the teachers) know everything, don't they?*

The parent displayed ignorance in this matter. Mostly the parents from the Chepang community are from low economic, social, and academic status, so they have meager knowledge of the process of the distribution of the scholarships.

### Forms of scholarship

The theme deals with the forms of scholarship provisioned by the state in the understanding of the stakeholders. Participants described different forms of scholarship for different intended outcomes. In this issue (S3) from the school B, expressed:

*We do not get scholarships every year. And it is not the same thing every year. Sometimes we are given cash, and sometimes we are given stationery. For me scholarship means cash and stationery. But some of my friends from other schools said they got school bags and dresses. I think it is anything that is given by the government to the poor for attending schools.*

From the conscience of this student, the researcher gained the knowledge that scholarship could mean different things, like cash, stationery, bags, school uniforms. In addition to it, the student (S2) from school A said: *Scholarship means so many things, like bicycles for schools, hostel facilities, stationery, school uniforms, and day meals and. I live in a hostel nearby the school. The hostel facility has helped me more than any-*

*thing else. I had to walk for four hours to school and four hours to return. It was almost impossible for me to continue my study. I was about to quit my study. However, I got a chance to study while living in a hostel.*

For this student, the hostel facility helped with the continuation of study, so it is a form of scholarship. And it is of immense help since the student's home is far away from the school. As the student who received one type of scholarship is not liable to another type, it is natural for them to have little understanding of the other types. The understanding of another student (S5) from school B is somehow expanded as added:

*Scholarships can be cash or things like stationery, dresses, and uniform. Day meal is also a kind of scholarship. There are others like bicycles, extra classes, and hostels.*

The student perceived cash and non-cash and other fringe benefits as scholarships. Coinciding to the knowledge of the student a School Management Committee (SMC) member from school A explained:

*I think there are different types of scholarships given by the state to the students. The most successful scholarship program the state awarded to Chepang children is a hostel with boarding facilities. Sometimes the fund is heard to have been released late. If it is regulated, it works. In some places the local level of organizations, NGOs, and INGOs also provide books, bags, dresses, hostel facilities, payment of hostel fees. Some Chepang activists, such as K.P. Kiran of Ratnanagar, Chitwan, have through private initiatives, managed to arrange accommodation for hundreds of Chepang students.*

The expression of the SMC member added to the existing knowledge from the other stakeholders that, in addition to the state-funded scholarship and scholarships by other institutions, there are privately initiated scholarship programs like hostels for the students of the Chepang community. The expression of the headteacher (HT2 from school B) is much similar to the SMC member. He added:

*There are other types like, the ones awarded to the conflict victim, martyr family, disabled and many more. However, none of the students can be beneficiaries of more than one type.*

The headteacher expressed that students entertaining one type of scholarship cannot benefit from additional type of scholarship.

### **Need for scholarship**

Realizing the need, the students of the Chepang community were provided with some kind of aid from the year 1975 through the Chepang Development Program (Praja Bikash Karyakram) in the initiation of the then late King Mahindra Shah. This theme centres around the need of scholarship. The expression of the informant in this theme is collected in this section. In this issue a student (S4 from school B) stated:

*See, we live in hills. We have a small cottage to live in. Only a single room in the house. We have a kitchen, a bed, and some foodstuffs in the same room. Our parents have no education, no jobs, and schools are very far from homes. To study in the above five classes, we have to live in the rented rooms. So, we need a scholarship. At least we can buy stationery with the amount.*

The student understood the need for scholarships, as the students from the Chepang community are poverty-stricken. The scholarship, to some extent, would help them financially. Parallely, another student (S4 in school B) expressed:

*The day meal is very effective for us. Many of us come to school without food in the morning. Our parents go to work early in the morning; they only return home in the evening with foodstuff. I would have cooked if there had been something to cook. This is real; many of my friends hesitate to admit that we are very poor.*

The student disclosed the inevitability of scholarships like the day meal program to help students from the Chepang community. On the contrary, a student (S2 in school B) responded:

*Scholarship is not my need. My father is a businessman. We have plenty of land that yields more than enough food grains for our family. We sell the surplus stuff. Though I received the scholarship amount, why leave what the government have given? People sometimes mistakenly perceive that all the Chepang are poor. It is not true. Instead of giving a little amount to all, it's better to give a bigger amount to the needy ones.*

The student expressed a very remarkable idea. Generally, people believe that Chepang is synonymous with poverty. It is not always like that. From the expression of the informant, a new insight is reflected, highlighting that Chepang should not be viewed as homogeneous group. Adding to the expression of the student informant, the headteacher (HT1) said:

*With some exception, almost all Chepangs are in extreme poverty. Because of the education and political awareness, some Chepangs have improved their economic status. The scholarship has been very useful for retaining them in school, decreasing dropout rates, and minimizing out-of-school children. Some*

years ago, there had been very few School Education Examination (SEE) students from the community. Now we have more than 50 percent of them. More interestingly, many of our students who graduated from our schools some years ago have been teachers in the basic schools in their own community. I have seen this as an inspiration to the upcoming generation. They rarely have had role models in the past; now there are many.

The headteacher further added:

*Before the commencement of the day meal program, there used to be very few students in the classes after the recess. They used to move to their homes because of hunger and the distance; otherwise, they could not reach home before dusk since the days in the winter are shorter. Most of them used to come to school on an empty stomach.*

The headteacher expressed an immense need for scholarship programs for the students of the Chepang community. The program is beneficial for sustaining students in the school, which is the prerequisite for educational attainment. The first condition is numeric increment, then quality, the subsequent. The head teacher also disclosed that scholarship is inevitable for the development of role models. On the contrary, one the PTA member (from school B) communicated:

*Chepangs need scholarship, for they are in the vicious circle of poverty and cannot afford education for their students. The state should bear the guardianship of the weaker sections of the society. The theory of social justice has guided our constitution. Education is taken as an equalizer to human-created disparities.*

The opinion of the PTA member shows scholarships can be an immediate remedy to the economic difficulties. It can also be helpful to initiate the mission of making the society egalitarian.

### **Impact on target group**

This theme collected the understandings of the stakeholders focusing on the impact of scholarship program. The impact of scholarship, as experienced by the stakeholders, is expressed in their own words in the following ways. One of the guardians from school B said:

*During the school days, they (students) used to make different excuses not to go to school. Now they regularly go to school. They get many things from schools, like books, bags, copies, and day meals. My first child left school, as he repeatedly failed the same grade thrice, because of being teased at. But the younger has been upgraded every year. He comes home with different things given by the schools.*

The guardian finds a positive reaction to the scholarship on the child as the child upgraded to the higher classes every year; this progress is linked by the guardian with the positive effect of the scholarship. In a similar vein, student S2 (from school B), among hostel users said:

*Day meal and hostel facilities are of immense help for us. The hostel is on the premises of the school. We could get timely food. The hostel is better than our home for us. We don't have to worry about household work and food. Last year 10 students from the hostel passed SEE. However, our seniors used to tell us that they had to face some difficulty in the regulation of the hostel, and sometimes there used to be no teachers in the hostel. But now it has become more systematic.*

This student perceives the effectiveness of the hostel and day meal program. From his words it is perceived that the hostel facility has become more systematic than the previous days. Coining in the same line with some addition, the headteacher (H2) expressed:

*Good effect without some exception cases. There are some students who come to school when the session starts, and after the accumulation of the scholarships, they leave the schools. Again, the next year, they turn out in the schools for admissions. However, hostel facilities and complimentary classes seem much effective in the context of Chepang students. In contrast to it, cash distribution is less effective. However, the directives tell us to provide it in cash. Parents as well as students receive cash and spend it at their own will.*

The headteacher expressed his compulsion to adhere to the directive for the distribution of scholarships. However, the headteacher finds non-cash and hostel facilities of prime importance for the effectiveness of the scholarship program. Furthermore, a social activist expressed opinions in terms of amount. He articulated:

*We have seen many positive effects of scholarship. However, the amount provided is too little. The days are very expensive. With the amount, the students can hardly get some stationery that lasts just for a month. However, there are many other organizations that provide different items to the students. Some years there used to be assistances as frequently as once a month.*

The activist clearly claimed that the amount provided is too little. However, the Chepang community schools

have been able to garner the support of many organizations, as well as individuals.

## Discussion

This qualitative study was undertaken to reveal the perceptions of the stakeholders of a Chepang community school in Chitwan district, focusing on their experiences and knowledge pertaining to scholarship and its management. The findings of the study showed that the guardians possess minimal understanding of organizational procedures of scholarship distribution and are therefore less involved. Unanimity among the stakeholders was found in terms of the positive effect and need of scholarship. More importantly, day meal programs and hostel facilities were perceived as more effective forms of scholarship by the respondents. These findings are triangulated with the broader literature for deeper scholarly insights. To meaningfully interpret these findings, the discussion section is organized in accordance with the themes in the result section.

The current study found that the understanding of the procedure of the distribution of scholarships is different for different stakeholders. However, the understanding of the guardians and the students is minimal. More importantly, guardians from the Chepang community lack basic knowledge and information regarding the process, eligibility, and their role in the program. This gap can be attributed to persistent structural inequalities, lack of inclusive practices in the formulation of the policies, and a communication gap between the school system and the guardians. The findings of the study, from the theoretical perspectives, align with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) argues that insufficient knowledge in the parents does not reveal indifference to their children's education but rather a lack of embodied cultural capital that the education system inherits. Studies find similar conclusions for missing active participation of the guardians from indigenous communities, posing a remarkable challenge for the intended outcomes of the program (Gomez et al., 2025; Bonilla et al., 2025). This informs strategic and policy intervention for their meaningful participation in school governance.

In the second theme, forms of scholarship, the respondents perceived cash, learning materials and school accessories, hostel facilities, and day meals as scholarships. This understanding reflects the broader meaning of scholarship in the indigenous community, particularly in the marginalized context. The insights might have emerged from the hardship they have endured because of remote housing location, economic difficulty, and the context of educational deprivation. The community expects and requires multiple forms of scholarship that can enhance school access, participation, and retention. Financial-only assistance possesses limitation, as such support may not always be utilized for educational purposes. Theoretically, the result of the study dovetails with Maslow's theory of motivation (Maslow 1943, as cited in McLeod, 2014). Maslow proclaimed people aspire for physiological and safety needs primarily. Only after fulfilling the needs of people they are motivated for higher needs such as education. Consistent with the findings, studies maintained both non-cash and cash incentives are imperative in the marginalized social context (Bundy et al., 2018; See et al., 2023). Conclusively, scholarship policy design should adhere to the holistic system.

Regarding the need for the scholarships, the result of the study reveals that students from marginalized communities are able to come across economic, social, and structural barriers for school attendance and performance. These challenges highlight the crucial need of support mechanism for their school participation. Almost all students from the Chepang community struggle with their lives aligning with their parents' poverty, which forces them to be involve in household chores, leaving schools. Furthermore, the school distance and top priority for survival measures deprived their educational attainment. Therefore, scholarship may lessen their burden of financial stress for continuing education. The need of scholarship in this aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital. Students from marginalized communities' economic deprivation, low parental education, and school systems that are foreign to their life experiences affect school participation, and they thrive less. Scholarship mechanisms enable bridging such gaps. Studies coin concurrent findings on the need of scholarship, such as remarkable increases in educational time use, achievement outcomes, and strategies to combat financial challenges for equitable access (Aber et al., 2016; East & Ralte, 2024). Overall, scholarship schemes that supports mitigating structural inequalities are warranted in Chepang community schools.

The impact of scholarship as expressed by the informants positively increased students' school participation, such as regular attendance, retention, and performance. Students residing in the hostel expressed that the effect of accommodation facilities is of more immense help than cash. This perception probably emanates from the inaccessible distance between the school and their home, lack of food security in the community, and related economic constraints. The findings of Ganem and Manasse (2011) collide with this study's findings, as the authors asserted scholarship as the strongest determinant for students' persistence and progression. Similarly, Timilsana (2017) highlights the increased accessibility aspects of the scholarship. This finding underscores the need for input-based scholarship schemes for awarding benefits to the students of marginalized communities.

Finally, the emphasis of findings prioritizes context-specific, holistic, and equity-focused scholarship policy for enhancing access, participation, and educational outputs among students for marginalized communities like Chepang.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the perception of the stakeholders regarding the scholarship program and its management in the Chepang community. Findings reveal remarkable gaps in the understanding of the guardians regarding the bureaucratic organizational procedures related to scholarship distribution. Nonetheless, all the stakeholders acknowledged the positive impact of scholarships on school attendance, retention, and academic achievements. Notably, the day meal program and hostel facilities were perceived as particularly effective in positively impacting the children of the Chepang community. Given the community's widespread poverty, scholarship functioned as an immediate mechanism for alleviating financial hardship and promoting academic participation. The study underscores the need for context-specific, inclusive, and equity-oriented policy frameworks integrating holistic support systems. The findings hold important implications for school leaders, academicians, and policymakers, highlighting the need for targeted intervention to minimize disparities and promote equitable learning opportunities across diverse strata of the society.

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