Bridging Gaps and Building Futures of Policy and Practices: The Shift Towards Research-Driven University Education in Nepal

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Abstract

Background: This study explores the paradigm shift in Nepal's university education, focusing on reinventing policies and practices to address challenges like outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to quality education. It aims to identify strategies for fostering innovation, inclusivity, and global competitiveness.

Methods: A qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's six-step process has been used. Data has been collected from stakeholders, including faculty, students, and administrators.

Results: Key findings highlight the need for policy reforms, equitable grant allocation, industrial collaboration, capacity building, and student-centric approaches. Challenges include

resource constraints, regional disparities, and bureaucratic resistance. Opportunities lie in digital transformation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and internationalization.

Conclusion: Nepal's higher education requires comprehensive reforms to align with global standards and national development goals. Addressing barriers while leveraging emerging opportunities can create a dynamic, research-driven academic ecosystem.

Novelty: This study uniquely integrates policy reinvention, institutional restructuring, and digital transformation to address systemic challenges in Nepal's higher education. Unlike previous research, it employs Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to synthesize multi-stakeholder perspectives, emphasizing equitable grant allocation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and student-centric policies. By advocating for marginalized institutional inclusivity and industry-academia partnerships, it offers a comprehensive, forward-looking framework for fostering global competitiveness and academic excellence.

Keywords: Digital transformation, higher education reform, industrial collaboration, inclusivity and equity, policy innovation.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of higher educational institutions in Nepal, particularly after the adoption of the federal system, reflects growing national awareness of the value of higher education. With 19 universities across various provinces, this trend aligns with global patterns. However, concerns about quality, relevance, and significance persist. As Kirby (2022) notes, India leads with "1,043 universities and 42,343 colleges," followed by the U.S. with "nearly 4,000 degree-granting institutions" and China with "3,012 higher education institutions" (p. 1). These figures highlight not only the scale of growth but also the obsolescence of outdated education systems that fail to meet modern demands.

Over the past few decades, education delivery has undergone a significant transformation, particularly in administration, structure, and mode of instruction. Transnational education exemplifies this shift, with Australia leading its expansion since the mid-1990s (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013, p. xii). Justifying the expansion of higher education and evolving delivery models remains challenging for governments, educators, and academics, with quality regulation being a key concern. Kirby (2022) emphasizes that "no criterion is more important than the quality of governance" (p. 5), which he defines as a university's autonomy in administration, academics, and organization, free from political influence. In transnational education, ensuring accountability and "consumer protection" (Chapman & Pyvis, 2013, p. xiii) is crucial to safeguarding students from substandard programs and maintaining educational integrity.

Education is increasingly measured in terms of market value and output. Urciuoli (2018) identifies two dimensions: an "organic, subjectively distinct experience" for students and its commodification as a marketable product (p. 1). Higher education is undergoing a massive transformation, raising concerns about quality control, organizational structures, and market relevance. Nepal is not immune to these global changes. The decentralization of higher education has expanded accessibility, with institutions like Nepal Open University offering

online education. However, preparing students for international competition requires further reforms.

This study examines ongoing efforts to reform university education in Nepal by addressing outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, limited access, and mismatched academic programs. It explores policy changes and innovative teaching models that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and interdisciplinarity. The study looks at these changes and finds both opportunities and challenges in changing higher education. The goal is to find ways for Nepalese universities to adapt to modern needs and promote social progress and sustainable development.

Literature Review

1. The Need for Reform: It effectively argues the necessity of reassessing university policies in light of technological and societal changes (Andreev, 2023; Maassen & Stensaker, 2010). This transformation is fueled by technological advancements, changing societal expectations, and the necessity for lifelong learning. Universities must adopt innovative teaching strategies to enhance their contribution to economic and national development.

2. Digital Integration: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed disparities in access to digital learning, making it crucial for universities to address digital inequalities. Discussions on the role of digital literacy and technological integration are relevant, particularly post-pandemic (Laufer et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2023). Changing to new tools isn't enough, though. Teachers need to learn how to use digital environments well (Siminto et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024) or the way they teach will need to change fundamentally. Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering these cultural and technological changes within academic institutions (Schophuizen & Kalz, 2020; Katasanovas et al., 2017).

3. The Knowledge Triangle (Education, Research, and Innovation): The knowledge triangle—which emphasizes the interconnectedness of education, research, and innovation—is instrumental in shaping university policies (Maassen & Stensaker, 2010; Al-Husseini et al., 2019). This model promotes collaboration between universities, industry, and government, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship (Magalhães & Veiga, 2019; Romanovskyi et al., 2020). By strengthening these partnerships, universities can enhance their relevance to market needs, ensuring economic sustainability (Kumari et al., 2019; Cai, 2017).

4. Cultivating an Innovation Culture in Higher Education: Universities must encourage creativity and critical thinking among students and faculty while integrating new technologies (Chang-jiang, 2024; Fuad et al., 2020). Building problem-solving and entrepreneurial skills within curricula prepares graduates for rapidly evolving job markets (Hasanefendic et al., 2017; Ferreras-Garcia et al., 2021). Prioritizing competency-based learning can equip students to contribute meaningfully to their respective fields (Pardo-García & Barac, 2020; Avvisati et al., 2014).

5. Globalization and Its Impact on Higher Education: The global student mobility trend, where 3.3 million students study abroad (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011), presents both opportunities and challenges. Universities must compete internationally while maintaining local relevance

(Zgaga et al., 2014). The commodification of education raises concerns about privatization, deregulation, and inequality (Giroux, 2014).

6. Challenges of Internationalization and Sustainability in Universities: Giroux (2014) criticizes corporatization and militarization in universities, arguing they hinder authentic knowledge production. Gervais et al. (2017) stress protecting natural resources for community ties, while Brazdauskas & Zirrale (2018) advocate preserving traditional production methods amid entrepreneurial shifts. Triawan et al. (2019) highlight Indonesian students' willingness to study abroad, emphasizing strategies for global education in STEM fields. Fuchs et al. (2020) emphasize green marketing as crucial for sustainable universities, advocating balanced scorecards for strategic management. Meanwhile, Hoinle (2021) explores how regional university collaborations face resource access challenges. Lane and Forrungia (2022) highlight that over five million tertiary students studied abroad annually before COVID-19.

7. Political and Economic Factors Affecting University Education: Kirby (2022) links higher education to international influence, citing China's rise in global rankings and increasing student influx. Shanto et al., (2023) emphasize ethical AI integration, enhancing peer learning and academic integrity. Arasaratham & Deardorff (2023) stress intercultural competence for international students. Longkumar (2024) highlights India's National Education Policy 2020, which promotes inclusive and diversified curricula.

8. Digital Transformation and Online Education in Nepal: The shift to online education was accelerated by COVID-19, with institutions like Tribhuvan University adopting digital learning strategies (Lamichhane, 2023; Paudyal, 2020). However, digital disparities affected accessibility, especially for students from remote areas (Adhikari et al., 2020; Devkota, 2021; Upadhyaya, 2021). While online platforms expanded learning opportunities, they also exacerbated inequalities (Acharya et al., 2022; Devkota, 2021). A blended learning approach—combining online and in-person instruction—has been proposed to enhance educational outcomes (Paudel, 2020; Acharya et al., 2021). This aligns with education, which integrates technology-driven curricula to prepare students for modern workforce demands (Adhikari et al., 2020; Acharya et al., 2021).

9. Policy Recommendations for Digital Learning Initiatives: Educational policymakers must develop comprehensive strategies to support digital learning and bridge the digital divide (Acharya et al., 2022; Rawal, 2024). This includes infrastructure investment. This also involves providing educators with training in digital pedagogy. Ensuring equitable technology access (Lamichhane, 2023; Gautam & Gautam, 2021; Paudyal, 2020)

10. Shifting Pedagogical Practices in Higher Education: The transition to digital learning necessitates a learner-centered approach to foster critical thinking and problem-solving. Traditional, teacher-centered methods must evolve to interactive and competency-driven models (Mičiulienė & Čiučiulkienė, 2021; Kunwar et al., 2022). Such pedagogical innovations are crucial for cultivating an adaptable workforce in a rapidly changing economy (Acharya et al., 2021; Nepal & Rogerson, 2020).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives and suggestions of stakeholders, including research scholars, faculty members, and university administrators. The responses have been systematically compiled and analyzed to identify recurring themes and actionable insights. Thematic analysis has been employed to identify key themes, trends, and areas requiring policy intervention (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015; Guest et al., 2012).

Sampling Data

Data has gathered using a convenience sampling approach from a diverse group of respondents, including scholars, faculty members, relevant stakeholders, and administrative personnel. The participants have selected from constituent campuses, community campuses, and affiliated campuses of Tribhuvan University. The sample specifically included individuals who had successfully completed their master's coursework but were still in the process of working on their thesis.

Analytical Framework

The study employs thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, to systematically analyze qualitative data. This framework ensures a structured and transparent approach to identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns (themes) within the dataset. The six phases include:

i. The first step is familiarization with the data, where the entire dataset is read multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content.

ii. The second step, initial coding, involves breaking the data into discrete parts and assigning descriptive codes to meaningful segments.

iii. The third step, generating themes, involves grouping related codes into policy reforms for research promotion, research grants and financial support, and industrial collaboration.

iv. The fourth step further refines these themes by reviewing them and assessing their accuracy, coherence, and distinctiveness. Any themes that overlap are merged or improved.

v. The fifth step—defining and naming themes—involves clearly articulating the meaning of each theme and providing a concise and informative title.

vi. The final step, writing the result, presents the findings in a structured narrative format, supported by relevant quotes and examples from the dataset.

Tools and Techniques

The study utilizes multiple tools and techniques to ensure a comprehensive and structured analysis of the data. Manual coding has been the main way to get close to the dataset and get a full picture of how different stakeholders see things (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Flick, 2018; Taylor et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

Transparency has been ensured through thorough documentation of coding and theme generation. Bias has been minimized using systematic methodologies. While stakeholder representation limitations have been addressed, future research should further enhance inclusivity for a more comprehensive perspective.

Limitations

The thematic analysis in this study involves an inherent degree of subjectivity in interpreting the data, which may influence the findings. Additionally, the analysis is constrained by the perspectives of the stakeholders represented in the dataset, meaning it may not fully capture the views of all stakeholders within Nepalese universities.

Analysis and Discussion

The six thematic coding criteria of data using eight different tables guide the study of these analysis and discussion parts.

Table 1

Theme 1: Policy Reforms for Research Promotion

Theme/Sub-theme	Overview	Key Points	Challenges	Discussion
Theme 1.1: Policy Reforms for Research Promotion	Emphasizes the need for universities in Nepal to reform policies for research enhancement, improving education quality and national development.	- Early exposure to research - Compulsory research requirements for students and faculty - Building a strong research culture	- Resistance due to resource constraints - Faculty expertise limitations - Infrastructure inadequacies	Implementing policy reforms requires a collaborative approach involving administrators, faculty, and students. Universities must balance compulsory research with adequate support systems. Training, funding, and incentives can help mitigate resistance. A long-term vision is needed to foster a sustainable research culture (Cai, 2017; Paudel, 2020).
Sub-theme 1.2: Incentivizing Faculty Research	Focuses on structured policies to encourage faculty research through incentives linked to quality and impact.	- Faculty research enhances academic growth and institutional reputation. - Incentives (monetary and non-monetary) should prioritize quality over quantity. - Establishing annual research	- Limited funding and access to research resources - Workload balance concerns - Unequal access to research facilities	Faculty motivation plays a crucial role in research productivity. While incentives can drive engagement, a well-balanced policy must ensure that faculty are not overburdened. Universities should explore alternative support systems like research collaboration, flexible deadlines, and mentorship programs to encourage quality

		publication policies for faculty.	outside major cities	research output (Siminto et al., 2023; Yang, 2024).
Sub-theme 1.3: Feedback-Driven Policy Revisions	Highlights the importance of incorporating stakeholder feedback into policy revisions to address challenges and drive innovation.	- Inclusive stakeholder engagement (faculty, students, research scholars). - Addressing faculty inactivity through policy accountability and support. - Establishing structured feedback collection mechanisms.	- Resistance to change among faculty and administrators - Information overload from multiple feedback sources - Additional resource requirements for implementation	A structured feedback system is necessary to ensure that policy revisions are practical and widely accepted. Transparency in decision-making fosters trust and engagement. Pilot-testing new policies before full implementation can help universities identify potential issues and make necessary adjustments. Encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration can further enhance policy effectiveness (Rawal, 2024; Siminto et al., 2023).

Table 1 highlights the need for policy reforms in Nepal's universities to strengthen research promotion, emphasizing early exposure, compulsory research involvement, and fostering a strong research culture. Key challenges include resource constraints, faculty expertise limitations, and inadequate infrastructure, requiring a collaborative approach with training, funding, and incentives. Promoting faculty research is important for the growth of academia and the reputation of the institution. This calls for policies that put quality over quantity while also dealing with issues like uneven workloads and limited funding. Feedback-driven policy revisions are essential for continuous improvement, ensuring inclusivity and accountability while managing resistance to change. Transparent decision-making, structured feedback collection, and interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance policy effectiveness and sustainability.

Table 2

Theme 2: Research Grants and Financial Support

Theme/ Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Research	Discussion
Theme 2: Research Grants and Financial Support	**Importance of Equitable Grant Allocation** - Fairness and trust through transparent funding - Merit-based funding	- Influence of personal connections ("halo effect") - Regional disparities - Lack of transpare	- Encourages high-quality research - Promotes broader participation - Improves	A transparent and equitable grant allocation process fosters trust among researchers, encouraging them to engage in meaningful research. A merit-based system ensures that funding is directed to the most capable researchers rather than those with personal connections or institutional prestige. However, issues like favoritism and regional disparities hinder fair access to funding. Addressing these concerns requires an institutional commitment to transparency and fairness. Inclusivity must also be emphasized, particularly for researchers

	system - Inclusivity for public campuses and rural faculty	ncy in criteria	research outputs and societal impact	from public campuses and less-developed regions, to ensure diversity in research perspectives (Pardo-García & Barac, 2020; Maassen & Stensaker, 2010).
Sub-theme 2.2: Regional Accessibility	**Expanding Access Beyond Urban Centers** - Inclusivity in research opportunities - Equity for rural faculty - Addressing regional development challenges	- Urban bias in funding allocation - Limited infrastructure in rural areas - Reduced visibility of researchers outside urban centers	- Diversifies research topics and knowledge - Empowers local researchers - Enhances balanced national development	The accessibility of research grants remains largely concentrated in urban centers, particularly in Kathmandu Valley, which creates systemic inequalities. Faculty members in rural areas face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to academic resources, and fewer opportunities to collaborate with established researchers. This results in lower participation from these regions, limiting the scope and diversity of research in Nepal. Expanding grant allocation to rural areas is essential to bridge regional disparities and foster research that addresses local challenges. By increasing funding opportunities for rural faculty and developing supportive research infrastructure, universities can encourage meaningful contributions from diverse academic communities (Kunwar et al., 2022).
Sub-theme 2.3: Transparency and Accountability	**Ensuring Fair and Efficient Grant Allocation** - Building trust through transparent financial practices - Reducing favoritism and bias - Optimizing resource utilization	- Lack of oversight in financial decisions - Insufficient publication support for researchers - Resistance to transparency reforms	- Leads to higher-quality research - Increases researcher participation - Strengthens institutional credibility	Transparency in grant allocation is crucial for maintaining trust among researchers and ensuring that financial resources are used effectively. The absence of clear guidelines and oversight can lead to biases, reducing the credibility of the funding process. Furthermore, many researchers struggle with high publication costs and limited institutional support, which affects the dissemination of their work. Universities must address these challenges by improving financial oversight, offering consistent publication support, and fostering a research environment where all faculty members have equal opportunities. Strengthening accountability mechanisms through independent review committees and feedback systems can help mitigate favoritism and ensure that research grants are utilized efficiently (Fuad et al., 2020; Paudyal, 2020).

Table 2 emphasizes the need for equitable and transparent research grant allocation in Nepal to foster trust, inclusivity, and high-quality research. A merit-based funding system can ensure fairness, but challenges such as favoritism, regional disparities, and a lack of transparency hinder accessibility, particularly for rural faculty. Expanding funding beyond urban centers can diversify research topics and empower local researchers, contributing to balanced national

development. However, inadequate infrastructure and reduced visibility of rural researchers remain significant obstacles. Transparency and accountability in financial decisions are crucial to ensuring effective resource utilization and institutional credibility. Strengthening oversight mechanisms, providing publication support, and promoting fairness in grant distribution can enhance researcher participation and improve overall research quality.

Table 3

Theme 3: Industrial Collaboration

Theme/ Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Research & Education	Discussion
Theme 3: Industrial Collaboration	Bridging the Gap Between Academia and Industry - Enhancing employability through industry partnerships - Promoting innovation and economic growth - Addressing national development needs through skill-based education	- Limited industry-academia linkages - Bureaucratic resistance to curriculum changes - Mismatched expectations between academia and industry	- Aligns education with market demands - Strengthens research impact through practical applications - Contributes to national development	Effective industrial collaboration requires a strategic framework that integrates universities and industries in mutually beneficial partnerships. Industries seek skilled graduates, while universities aim to provide high-quality education that aligns with real-world needs. However, institutional inertia and a lack of structured engagement mechanisms often hinder collaboration. To foster stronger ties, both academia and industry must engage in ongoing dialogue, ensuring that academic programs remain dynamic and responsive to the evolving job market (Siminto et al., 2023; Nepal and Rogerson, 2020).
Sub-theme 3.1: Curriculum Alignment with Industry Needs	**Enhancing Employability and Economic Contribution** - Tailoring curricula to meet industry requirements - Integrating practical training and internships	- Resistance to curriculum changes in universities - Regional disparities in industry accessibility - Differing priorities between	- Reduces the skills gap and increases job placement - Supports economic development through industry-ready graduates - Strengthens	Aligning university curricula with industry requirements remains a crucial factor in reducing unemployment and equipping students with marketable skills. However, the slow adaptability of academic institutions, combined with an emphasis on traditional pedagogical approaches, often results in outdated course content. Universities must establish industry advisory boards to provide real-time insights into sectoral needs. Additionally, periodic curriculum reviews, informed by employer feedback, can ensure that graduates

Theme/Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Research & Education	Discussion
	- Regular updates to academic content based on industry input	academia and industry	industry-academia relationships	remain competitive. Regional disparities in industry accessibility can be addressed by promoting digital learning and fostering collaboration with local enterprises (Laufer et al., 2021).
Sub-theme 3.2: Practical Application of Research	**Encouraging Innovation and Entrepreneurship** - Translating research into real-world solutions - Supporting startups and local production - Promoting indigenous technology and small-scale enterprises	- Limited funding for applied research - Lack of infrastructure, especially in rural areas - Market access challenges for startups	- Enhances innovation and economic self-reliance - Supports local economies through small-scale production - Encourages entrepreneurial mindset among students	Universities play a pivotal role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship through research that addresses societal needs. However, practical application is often constrained by limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and the absence of structured support for commercialization. Establishing research incubation centers can bridge this gap, providing researchers with access to mentorship, funding, and business development resources. Additionally, partnerships with industries and government bodies can enhance market accessibility for startups, ensuring that innovative ideas translate into viable businesses (Kunwar et al., 2022).

Table 3 highlights the importance of industrial collaboration in bridging academia and industry to enhance employability, drive innovation, and support national development. Despite its potential, weak industry-academia linkages, bureaucratic resistance, and mismatched expectations hinder progress. Aligning curricula with industry needs can reduce the skills gap and improve job placement, but universities must overcome resistance to change and regional disparities. Similarly, the practical application of research is crucial for fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, yet limited funding, infrastructure challenges, and market accessibility remain obstacles. Strengthening partnerships through industry advisory boards, research incubation centers, and government support can help universities produce industry-ready graduates and facilitate the commercialization of research-driven innovations.

Table 4

Theme 4: Capacity Building and Training

Theme/Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Research & Education	Discussion
Theme 4: Capacity Building and Training	**Enhancing Faculty and Institutional Competitiveness** - Investing in	- Resource limitations for training programs	- Increases research funding potential	Capacity-building initiatives are crucial for maintaining the academic competitiveness of universities. By continuously

	continuous training and skill development - Strengthening universities' research capabilities - Ensuring faculty remain updated on emerging trends	- Resistance to change among faculty - Unequal access to professional development opportunities	- Enhances teaching methodologies - Strengthens university reputation globally	enhancing faculty skills, institutions can improve research output, attract funding, and deliver high-quality education. However, implementation barriers such as funding constraints and resistance to change must be addressed through strategic partnerships, flexible training formats, and strong institutional support (Acharya et al., 2021).
Sub-theme 4.1: Skill Enhancement Programs	**Developing Faculty Expertise for Research and Teaching** - Training in research methodologies, grant writing, and pedagogy - Promoting innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration - Encouraging faculty professional growth	- Limited funding and institutional support for skill development - Faculty workload pressures hindering participation - Disparities in training access, especially in rural areas	- Enhances global research competitiveness - Strengthens interdisciplinary collaboration - Improves the quality of teaching and student engagement	Skill enhancement programs are instrumental in equipping faculty with the competencies required to compete for research grants and adopt innovative teaching methods. While such programs can elevate a university's standing, their success depends on institutional commitment and faculty engagement. Offering incentives, such as career progression opportunities or financial rewards, can encourage participation. Additionally, digital platforms can help bridge regional disparities by providing remote access to training resources (Creswell and Poth, 2016).
Sub-theme 4.2: Updating Knowledge	**Ensuring Faculty Stay Current with Emerging Trends** - Regular participation in workshops, seminars, and conferences - Adapting teaching and research methodologies to industry changes - Encouraging a lifelong learning culture	- Time constraints due to academic and administrative workload - Outdated or irrelevant training content - Limited accessibility in remote institutions	- Ensures faculty expertise remains relevant - Enhances the quality and impact of research - Improves student learning experiences through updated teaching methods	Keeping faculty knowledge updated is vital for maintaining academic excellence and aligning education with market needs. Universities must ensure that workshops and seminars provide relevant, high-quality content that addresses real-world challenges. Digital and hybrid learning models can offer greater accessibility, while structured feedback mechanisms can help refine training programs to meet evolving faculty needs (Ferreras-Garcia et al., 2021; Guest et al., 2011).

Table 4 shows how important training and building up people's skills are for making universities more competitive and improving the quality of research, teaching, and the university's reputation around the world. Continuous skill enhancement through research training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and professional development is essential, but challenges such as funding limitations, faculty workload, and regional disparities hinder progress. Updating faculty knowledge through workshops, seminars, and conferences ensures that academic programs remain aligned with industry trends, though time constraints and accessibility issues persist. Universities can overcome these barriers by leveraging digital platforms, offering flexible training formats, and providing incentives for participation. A strategic commitment to lifelong learning and institutional support is crucial for fostering a dynamic and competitive academic environment.

Table 5

Theme 5: Conference Participation

Sub-theme	Insight	Analysis	Challenges	Discussion
5.1 Conference Participation	Knowledge and skill enhancement through academic exposure.	Importance: - Faculty Development: Participation in national and international conferences expands faculty knowledge. - Global Collaboration: Engaging with renowned professors enhances research quality. Impact on Universities: - Institutional Growth: Exposure to new research trends improves academic standards. - Networking Opportunities: Facilitates partnerships with global institutions.	- Financial Constraints: Limited funding for conference participation. - Administrative Barriers: Lengthy approval processes for travel and participation.	Encouraging faculty to participate in conferences contributes to institutional growth and professional development. Overcoming financial and bureaucratic barriers through structured funding and policy support will enhance global engagement (Maassen & Stensaker, 2010; Schophuizen & Kalz, 2020).

Table 5 highlights the importance of conference participation in enhancing faculty expertise, fostering global collaboration, and improving institutional academic standards. By engaging with international scholars, faculty can gain exposure to emerging research trends, strengthen networking opportunities, and elevate their universities' reputation. However, financial constraints and administrative hurdles often limit participation, restricting access to valuable academic experiences. To maximize the benefits, universities must implement structured funding mechanisms and streamline approval processes, ensuring broader faculty engagement in global academic discourse.

Table 6

Theme 6: Community College Support

Theme/Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Higher Education	Discussion
Theme 6: Community College Support	**Addressing Disparities in Resources and Inclusion** - Ensuring equitable access to academic resources - Supporting marginalized campuses and faculty - Promoting diversity, inclusivity, and national development	- Resource shortages in community colleges - Policy gaps that overlook marginalized institutions - Resistance to change from centralized institutions	- Strengthens national higher education system - Bridges inequality gaps in education - Enhances research and student outcomes in underserved areas	Supporting community colleges is crucial for a fair and inclusive higher education system. By addressing disparities, universities can enhance national education standards, encourage participation from underrepresented groups, and foster innovation in research and teaching. However, existing challenges such as limited funding, outdated policies, and centralized resource control require strategic interventions, including digital infrastructure investment and policy reforms (Yang, 2024).
Sub-theme 6.1: Equal Opportunities	**Bridging Educational Gaps Through Resource Equity** - Providing equal access to funding, infrastructure, and academic tools - Enabling community campuses to compete on a level playing field - Strengthening national education through inclusive policies	- Insufficient financial and technological support - Policy barriers preventing fair resource distribution - Institutional resistance to decentralization	- Creates balanced academic opportunities for students and faculty - Enhances research contributions from diverse regions - Strengthens regional development through skilled graduates	Equal opportunities in higher education ensure that students and faculty from smaller campuses can thrive alongside those from central institutions. Providing digital access to libraries and research materials can help bridge knowledge gaps, but challenges such as funding constraints and policy inefficiencies must be addressed. Universities and policymakers must work together to integrate marginalized institutions into the mainstream academic framework (Kumari et al., 2019).

| Sub-theme 6.2: Marginalized Faculty Inclusion | **Promoting Diversity in Research and Teaching** - Encouraging underrepresented faculty participation in academic activities - Reducing systemic inequalities in higher education - Enhancing institutional diversity and research quality | - Discriminatory academic structures limiting faculty opportunities - Lack of awareness and mentorship for marginalized faculty - Resource limitations at smaller institutions | - Increases diversity in research and academic discussions - Provides role models for students from underrepresented backgrounds - Strengthens institutional reputation and global competitiveness | Including marginalized faculty in academic research fosters equity and innovation in higher education. Their unique perspectives enrich research outcomes and ensure broader societal impact. However, structural barriers, lack of awareness, and limited institutional support remain significant hurdles. Institutions must actively create inclusive environments through targeted mentorship, research grants, and collaborative projects (Lamichhane, 2023). |

Table 6 highlights the critical role of community college support in ensuring an equitable and inclusive higher education system by addressing resource disparities and policy gaps. Strengthening these institutions can bridge inequality gaps, enhance research contributions, and improve student outcomes in underserved areas. However, challenges such as financial constraints, centralized resource control, and institutional resistance hinder progress. Equal opportunities for funding, infrastructure, and academic resources are essential for regional development and balanced academic participation. Additionally, marginalized faculty inclusion enriches research diversity and institutional competitiveness, yet systemic barriers persist. To overcome these challenges, universities and policymakers must invest in digital infrastructure, reform policies for equitable resource distribution, and implement mentorship programs to support underrepresented faculty and institutions.

Table 7

Theme 7: Research Oriented Faculty and Student-Centric Approaches

Theme/ Sub-theme	Key Points	Challenges	Impact on Higher Education	Discussion
Theme 7: Student-Centric Approaches	**Creating a Supportive and Inclusive Research Environment** - Prioritizing student engagement in research activities - Enhancing global visibility through	- Resource limitations affecting student support systems - Cultural and institutional barriers hindering	- Produces well-prepared graduates capable of addressing global challenges - Strengthens institutional	A student-centric approach enhances the overall academic experience and research productivity of universities. Providing international exposure and psychological support ensures students can confidently pursue

	internationalization - Providing academic and psychological support to foster innovation	internationalization - Bureaucratic challenges restricting student research freedom	reputation and competitiveness - Encourages student-led innovation and creativity	innovative research. However, institutions must address funding constraints, rigid policies, and limited awareness of support services to create an environment conducive to learning and discovery (Gautam and Gautam, 2021).
Sub-theme 7.1: Internationalization	**Expanding Global Presence Through Research Opportunities** - Attracting international students enhances cultural exchange and institutional prestige - Research-focused programs increase competitiveness in global rankings - Financial benefits from international student enrollments support university growth	- Inadequate funding and infrastructure to support internationalization efforts - Cultural and linguistic barriers affecting student adaptation - Strong competition from established international institutions	- Enhances cross-cultural collaboration and academic diversity - Increases financial sustainability through tuition and research funding - Strengthens Nepalese universities' global standing	Internationalization is key to strengthening Nepalese universities' global reputation. By offering high-quality research programs, institutions can attract diverse talent, fostering innovation and cultural exchange. However, challenges such as resource constraints and competition require universities to build global partnerships, invest in research infrastructure, and develop tailored programs for international students (Avvisati et al., 2014).
Sub-theme 7.2: Psychological and Academic Support	**Empowering Students for Research and Innovation** - Providing psychological support enhances student well-being and motivation - Flexible academic policies encourage creative and independent research - Skill-building workshops prepare students for real-world challenges	- Limited resources for mental health services and academic mentorship - Institutional bureaucracy restricting student-led research initiatives - Lack of awareness about available support programs	- Improves student retention, engagement, and overall academic performance - Fosters a culture of innovation by encouraging exploration of new ideas - Enhances institutional reputation through student-led research achievements	Psychological and academic support systems play a vital role in fostering student success. When students receive proper guidance, mentorship, and mental health support, they are more likely to engage in research and produce meaningful contributions. Institutions should address bureaucratic and financial constraints to provide a more flexible, student-friendly environment that nurtures innovation and academic growth (Laufer et al., 2021).

Table 7 shows how important it is to focus on the needs of students when creating a helpful research environment, raising the school's profile around the world, and offering academic and

emotional support to encourage new ideas. Internationalization strengthens institutional prestige through cultural exchange and competitive research programs, yet financial and infrastructural limitations hinder progress. Similarly, psychological and academic support enhances student motivation and research engagement, but bureaucratic barriers and limited awareness restrict access to these services. Addressing these challenges requires universities to invest in research infrastructure, streamline policies, and establish strong mentorship and mental health support systems. By prioritizing student engagement and global collaboration, institutions can enhance their research impact, competitiveness, and academic excellence.

Table 8

Theme 8: Miscellaneous Suggestions

Sub-theme	Insight	Analysis	Challenges	Discussion
8.1 Interdepartmental Collaboration	Collaborative efforts can lead to interdisciplinary breakthroughs. Breaking down silos fosters innovation, enhances problem-solving, and creates a dynamic academic environment.	Importance: - Interdisciplinary Innovation: Combining expertise from different disciplines leads to novel solutions (e.g., biotechnology advancements). - Shared Resources: Departments can pool resources (labs, libraries, expertise) to maximize efficiency. - Skill Development: Exposure to diverse methodologies enhances learning and research capabilities. Role of Professor-Student Collaboration: - Mentorship Opportunities: Professors guide students through research, improving critical thinking. - Academic Transformation: Encourages interactive learning and innovation. - Increased Productivity: Dividing tasks enhances research efficiency.	- Departmental Silos: Independent operations hinder collaboration. - Resource Allocation: Limited funding and infrastructure restrict initiatives. - Coordination Issues: Aligning schedules and priorities across departments is challenging.	Interdepartmental collaboration is vital for fostering innovation and improving research quality. However, institutional barriers such as departmental independence and resource constraints pose challenges. Universities should prioritize policy changes that facilitate smoother collaboration through financial and administrative support (Laufer et al., 2021).
8.2 Recognition and Rewards	Acknowledging achievements can inspire excellence. Recognition serves as a motivator, encouraging faculty and	Importance: - Motivation and Morale: Recognition creates a positive feedback loop of success. - Healthy Competition: Reward systems drive quality research and innovation. - Retention and Attraction: Recognized institutions attract and retain talent. Benefits: - Increased Engagement: Valued individuals contribute more actively. - Role Models:	- Subjectivity: Recognition criteria may be perceived as biased. - Limited Resources: Financial constraints restrict meaningful rewards. -	Recognition and reward systems significantly impact academic motivation and institutional reputation. To maximize their effectiveness, universities must ensure transparency and accessibility in their implementation. Addressing financial

students to strive for higher performance and innovation.	Highlighting excellence inspires others. - Institutional Reputation: Public recognition attracts funding and partnerships.	Awareness Gaps: Lack of knowledge about recognition programs reduces impact.	constraints through strategic funding can further enhance these initiatives (Adhikari et al., 2020).

Table 8 highlights the significance of interdepartmental collaboration and recognition systems in enhancing academic excellence and research productivity. Collaboration across departments fosters interdisciplinary innovation, optimizes resource use, and enhances skill development, though challenges like departmental silos, resource constraints, and coordination issues hinder progress. Likewise, recognition and rewards motivate faculty and students, fostering a culture of excellence and attracting talent, but issues like subjectivity, financial limitations, and lack of awareness reduce their effectiveness. To overcome these barriers, universities should implement policies that promote seamless collaboration, allocate resources strategically, and establish transparent, well-funded recognition programs to sustain motivation and institutional growth.

Conclusion

Nepal's university education system requires comprehensive reforms to align with global standards and national development goals. Strengthening the research culture demands early exposure, mandatory participation, and equitable funding. However, persistent challenges such as resource constraints, favoritism, and bureaucratic resistance must be addressed. Enhancing academia-industry collaboration, student-centric approaches, and international engagement is essential for improving employability and institutional reputation, yet financial and administrative hurdles remain. Clear policies, fair resource allocation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration are crucial to fostering innovation, diversity, and academic excellence, ultimately creating a dynamic, research-driven academic ecosystem.

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ANNEX-1

1. How can universities in Nepal enhance their global ranking through research-driven policies and practices?

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Key Responses	Respondents
1. Uplifting University Ranking	Revisiting Policy Provisions	- Initiate research from the bachelor level, collaborating with agencies. - Policy for mandatory faculty research publications with incentives. - Encourage discourse with professors for policy revision.	Research Scholars, Faculty Members (SMC, BMC, PN, MMC)
	Decentralization & Inclusivity	- Academic and financial decentralization in research. - Inclusion of researchers from outside Kathmandu Valley.	(SMC, PN)
	Research & Innovation Centers	- Establish dedicated research centers and research incubation hubs. - Collaborate with industries for practical research.	(Y Dang, SGB Butwal)
	Research Monitoring & Evaluation	- Regular feedback and orientation for researchers. - Skill-based programs and training abroad. - Physical infrastructure improvement.	(Yerawati M.C Dang, MMC Banke)
2. Research Incentives & Grants	Motivation Through Grants	- Research grants should be based on qualification and skill, not political influence. - Faculty members and students need policy-level research grants.	(MNC Maharajgunj, SGC Butwal, F Kirtipur)
	Accessibility & Transparency	- Grants must be accessible to faculty from all regions. - Ensure financial transparency in grant allocation.	(PN, MN Campus)
	Incentives for Quality Research	- Direct grants for research publication. - Incentives for national/international field-based research.	(CDM Mgmt, SMC)
3. Industrial Collaboration	Industry-Oriented Curriculum	- Design curriculum based on industrial needs. - Strengthen ties with industries for job placements.	(CDM, M Agricultural Univ)
	Collaborative Research	- Promote industry-university partnerships for funding and innovation. - Support local production via research.	(SGB Butwal, Deukhuri)

4. Capacity Building for Faculty & Staff	Training & Development	- Training for securing research grants. - Research-oriented training for faculty development.	(M Agricultural Univ, SMC, Research Scholar F)
5. Conference Participation	Knowledge & Skill Enhancement	- Support faculty participation in national/international conferences. - Collaborate with renowned professors globally.	(MNC Maharajgunj, PN Campus)
6. Community College Support	Equitable Opportunities	- Research-based programs for community colleges. - Online library access for community faculty.	(YMDC Rupandehi, SGB Butwal)
7. Research-Oriented Faculty & Student Engagement	Student-Centric Research	- Prioritize research for international student intake. - Enhance technological skills of students.	(PN, Research Scholars)
	Academic Freedom & Recognition	- Reduce bureaucratic constraints on young researchers. - Recognize and support student innovations.	(Yerawati M.C Dang)
8. Miscellaneous Measures	Faculty & Staff Motivation	- Team building for research promotion. - Increase faculty remuneration.	(Research Scholar F, Chemistry Kirtipur)
	Research Infrastructure	- Develop research-friendly environments with lab access. - Link research with societal development.	(MMC Banke, SGB Butwal)
	Institutional Collaboration	- Strengthen interdepartmental research collaboration. - Promote open-minded research culture.	(Physics Kirtipur, Kirtipur Biotechnology)