

Epistemic Gaps: The Unresolved Issues of Higher Education in Nepal

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Abstract

Background: This paper investigates the epistemic gaps that have been prompted by the neoliberal educational policies and practices acting as the hinderers of the holistic development of the higher education in Nepal. The enshrined policies and acted practices are unmatching in terms of labor markets and curriculum, research and research policies, and practices, including subtle and embedded challenges on entrepreneurships and the curriculum, teaching pedagogies and classroom management, ritualistic practical classes and internships, and thesis and report writing.

Methods: This study adopts qualitative research design with exploratory method that help me for flexible investigator. This method of data collection allows me to use informal conversations in the subject area with my students and faculty colleagues. I used semi-structured questions to ask students of both the campuses. I observed physical facilities of both the campuses. I used thematic analysis that emerged from coding and decoding of the qualitative data obtained from the students and faculties of both the campuses.

Findings: This paper unravels epistemic gaps that are transferred historically through colonialist approach (since the establishment of higher education, the cultural approach of curriculum formulation is top-down, whatever the central curriculum board brings up that is being practiced with the principle of all in all) on curriculum building since the establishment of higher studies institutions in Nepal.

Conclusion: I argue that academic institutions dealing with higher education should be provided with flexible policy on modification of curriculum, based on bottom-up approach, nevertheless, applying bottlenecking policies on interdisciplinary research collaborations and

innovations in any kind of upgradation of the faculty members from the top-down approach. Students' politics and party-political engagement in the academic institutions must be deemphasized to enhance academic fruition which can fill the epistemic gaps in Nepalese higher education.

Keywords: students' politics, bottom-up approach, curriculum formulation, curriculum-labour market mismatch, teaching pedagogies

Introduction

The development of higher education in Nepal has systematically progressed through various phases influenced by socio-cultural, economics and political dynamics. There are stark problems of inequity and limited access. The insufficient infrastructure adds another hurdle, nevertheless, there are potential opportunities for expansive growth and reform. The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 marked significant progress in Nepal's higher education, but there are deeply rooted issues that still need to be addressed. These issues hinder the education system's ability to effectively serve the population ([Paudel, 2020](#); [Witenstein & Palmer, 2013](#)).

The COVID-19 added greater issues in achieving higher education goals. Access to education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted online, exposing stratified inequalities—not only socioeconomically, but geographically as well ([Gautam & Gautam, 2021](#); [Devkota, 2021](#)). Rural access to quality education remains confined to urban elites ([Dhamala et al., 2021](#)). The gap in access and technological resources continues to disadvantage lower-socioeconomic students. While the expansion of online education provided potential for students, although lacking infrastructure perpetuated the divide ([Rawal, 2024](#); [Kunwar, 2020](#)).

Public campuses face systemic challenges from the lack of focus on innovation and research, inadequate faculty training, un-updated curriculum and limited curriculum structures. Such issues have been cited as significant impediments to delivering quality education and student motivation ([Pandey, 2023](#)). Various studies suggest that these structural deficiencies profoundly impact learners and their academic performance.

Moreover, the Nepalese higher education sector suffers from neoliberal policies which perpetuate an unequal focus on a marketable curriculum, overlooking deeply rooted inequalities within the system. Such inequalities accentuate the need for effective educational interventions that strive for both quality and fairness in opportunity ([Pangeni, 2016](#); [Dhamala et al., 2021](#)).

Furthermore, the significant demand for change has prompted some stakeholders to focus on the role of advanced education as the primary engine for economic and social development. This recognition embraces the fundamental roles that advanced education plays in human resource development, technology, and social advancement ([Acharya et al., 2022](#); [Shrestha, 2023](#)). Specifically, studies indicate that improving use and access to education is

vital for the socio-economic development of Nepal as it ensures a more educated workforce equipped to tackle emerging challenges ([Dhamala et al., 2021](#); [Rawal, 2024](#)).

In a nutshell, the Nepalese higher education landscape emerges from a rich tapestry of history and contemporary issues, creating the need for deliberative policies addressing systemwide change and equity. Having these aspects in mind would enable the design of public campus tailored strategic solutions aimed at the gaps and conflicting issues in the country. The epistemic gap in higher education that this study deals with is a practical knowledge gap in the curriculum delivery strategies and labor market of the country. Although other gaps are succinctly experienced, however, this study deals with only curricular dysfunctions in the general area of studies run in the public campuses. Following research question lead to my findings of the study:

1. What are the epistemic gaps prevalent in higher educational institutions in Nepal?
2. How can those epistemic gaps be addressed by the public campuses?

Literature Review

Epistemic Gaps in the Context of Public Campuses

Epistemic gaps in this study focus on the differences between the classroom and the workplace. The impractical skills and knowledge needed in the workforce are crucial issues in the Nepalese public campuses in general subjects. Employers' expectations and the courses offered are often at odds. There is a heavy reliance on rote memorization of theoretical concepts and insufficient focus on practical training, which is essential for dealing with the multifaceted challenges of the contemporary job market. As pointed out in other studies, there is increasing concern among students about the perceived disconnect between their education and the needs of the marketplace, and their employability prospects. It has a pressing academic stress against students in higher education ([Iqra, 2024](#)).

In relation to public campuses in Nepal, it is possible to classify certain varieties of epistemic gaps. One significant example is the stark lack of applied skills known as the practical knowledge gap. One of the examples, as a researcher and faculty member, I have obviously observed in the process of writing thesis and report writing process in bachelor and master level students of the public campuses.

Despite students being taught theoretical principles during their course of study, it seems that many students do not possess the necessary competencies that employers are seeking, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and effective communication skills ([Panthee, 2023](#)). This issue is made worse by the lack of professional development opportunities available to educators who are expected to teach relevant content according to current labor market demands, further increasing the gap between education and diverse employment opportunities ([Panthee, 2022](#)).

In addition to neglecting the needs of the labor market, the curriculum mismatch is attributed to outdated educational practices and other overarching public socioeconomic factors that impact colleges and universities in Nepal. [Heikkila, et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that many

public institutions are limited by resource constraints which affect their ability to revise curriculum and provide hands-on skills training. These systemic factors often lead to low engagement levels and high students' disengagement with practical experiences, which greatly limits their epistemic agency—the capacity to take charge of their learning. [Panthee \(2022\)](#) highlights that the curricular activities focus on rote memorization instead of real-world problem-solving that fosters innovative thinking underscoring the urgent need for a fundamental overhaul of higher public education system, focusing on real curriculum and industry alignment.

Furthermore, bridging these epistemic gaps, within a region's educational framework, can be resolved with the collaboration of other institution sectors, as well as other stakeholders in the industries affected. In this context, the QAA accredited public campus-Damak Multiple Campus in the vicinity, a constituent higher education institution of Tribhuvan University has been engaging with fabulous curricular activities as per the demand of the market demands. Such engagements are seen in the QAA accredited campuses such as Sukuna Multiple Campus, Janata Multiple Campus and the like which are upgrading their curricular activities at all aspects with the timely calendar of University, UGC, and Labour market demands of the country. However, there are still shortcomings in the prevalent curriculum system of Nepalese higher education which requires further study in the area.

Public campuses in Nepal have the potential to improve their educational offerings by forming partnerships that provide field-based knowledge for curriculum development. Industry stakeholders can offer case study materials, internships, and workshops that augment academic courses, thus ensuring graduates are equipped with requisite skills for employment ([Zouaoui et al., 2025](#)). [Bernhard et al. \(2019\)](#) note that this strategy not only delivers educational value to students but also enables employers to access well-prepared workforce ready candidates who are able to make a positive contribution.

Bridging epistemic divides also involves augmenting the professional development of educators. Continuous training is critical for any educator to make sure that they align with current teaching styles and practices across industries which are being practiced by the QAA certified public institutions in the region. Learning how to use effective and efficient pedagogical methods during teaching will improve students' participation, their academic performance, and other forms of engagement ([Panthee, 2023](#)). This professional development includes instilling in students the ability to question the world, suggesting ways in which knowledge is built and how it is applied beyond the classroom ([Silva, 2015](#)). [Longoria et al. \(2026\)](#) in their work Co-creating lifelong learning for global higher education transformation note that in this ever-evolving world of complexity and globalization higher education plays a significant role in addressing today's societal challenges (P. 9). This examples the real epitome of Nepalese higher education's transformation to address the ever-upcoming complexity in professional development and overcome the challenging requirements.

As a final remark, to address the gaps in public campuses in Nepal requires an all-inclusive strategy which combines curriculum transformation, intensive educator training, and strong collaboration with industries.

These strategies seek to enhance the relevance of education to better equip learners for the workforce, as well as encourage an enduring ethos of learning and flexibility central to thriving in today's economy. By balancing the public campus's practical curriculum with theoretical components, the campus can promote a more advantageous educational system for learners and employers ([Heikkilä et al., 2020](#)). The next I discuss about the evolution of public campus in Nepal.

The Historical Evolution of Public Campus in Nepal

The public campuses in Nepal have evolved alongside the changing socio-political and economic paradigms of the nation. The journey began in 1959 with the establishment of Tribhuvan University (TU), which was the first higher education institution in Nepal. This shaped the modern higher education landscape of the nation while attempting to meet the educational needs that had been neglected during the Rana regime which focused solely on the elite ([Paudel, 2020](#)). In this context, [Rawal \(2024\)](#) asserts that TU helped widen access to education especially after the restoration of democracy.

Over the years, additional universities were established to address the mounting demand for higher education while also tackling the prevailing socio-economic problems in the nation. During the 1990s, expansion policies for higher education were introduced, however, they faced considerable bottlenecks. One such bottleneck is illustrated by [Dhamala et al. \(2021\)](#) as they discuss and suggest that the available opportunities for education in science and technology, crucial for elementary economic growth, was still lagging far behind global benchmarks in comparison to other countries within the region. The difficulties were deeply rooted in culture with respect to traditional mindsets which influenced educational opportunities, especially for women and other underrepresented groups ([Rawal, 2024](#)).

The development of region-based campuses was very important but came with their own sets of issues such as limited resources, inadequate primary infrastructure, and insufficient teaching staff ([Acharya et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, the growth of private institutions after the late 1990s furthered these problems due to a focus on monetary gain rather than quality education ([Pandey, 2023](#)). Explaining conceptual model in higher education in Nepal [Witenstein et al. \(2013\)](#) argue that even though private institutions contributed to the growth of higher education, they indirectly created an uneven playing field that marginalized public institutions.

As we move forward into the contemporary Nepalese higher education, the effort being made towards inclusivity in higher education has received strong support from every aspects of the country's multidimensional milieu. But according to [Sharma and Sunuwar \(2026\)](#) still there are literacy gaps, enrollment, educational attainment and participation in higher education (pp. 32) absolutely based on geography, community and the socio-economic conditions.

Considering the need to improve access for women and rural populations, significant policy reforms have been made ([Rawal, 2024](#); [Devkota, 2021](#)). However, there is a persistent gap in educational access disparity, inequities and access to education due to a lack of implementation strategies ([Wittenstein & Palmer, 2013](#); [Sharma & Sunuwar, 2026](#)). The

transition to online learning in the COVID-19 pandemic offered insight into the socio-economic disparities within education, as students from lower economic backgrounds faced barriers to participating in online classes because of inadequate resources and technology education ([Devkota, 2021](#)) which exemplify the absolute inequity in educational accessibility in Nepalese higher education system.

Furthermore, [Subedi et al.\(2019\)](#) state that the governance of quality assurance for public campuses has also faced criticism. While attempts have been made to increase academic standards and align curricula with market needs, less attention is paid to the achievement of these frameworks. Based on other South Asian countries, Nepal is working towards establishing open and distance learning systems to expand higher education access, which marks a positive strategic shift ([Bajracharya, 2014](#)). However, [Adhikari and Sharma \(2026\)](#) indicate that their findings from three universities were merely formalistic focusing on content knowledge rather than transformation of skills and attitude to higher education students (pp. 59). This exemplifies the epistemic gaps prevalent in the Nepalese higher education which is the core argument of this paper.

[K.C. et al. \(2024\)](#) pointed out the role of community colleges in providing targeted education, which increases access to higher education at the community level. These institutions may provide educational advancement while fulfilling regional workforce requirements, thus tailoring education to the community's needs. Nevertheless, careful monitoring and evaluation are critical to confirming their impact and sustainability in closing the gaps in education.

To sum up, the Nepalese public campuses' development history is linked with the social, political, and economic spheres of Nepal. There have been many struggles throughout the journey such as limited systemic resources and negative social perceptions regarding education. Still, the commitment towards inclusivity and quality improvement is hopeful for the future of higher education in Nepal. The country can better its higher education system to better serve its diverse population by turning the emerging opportunities into advantages and learning from the past disappointments. The following sub-title discusses about the challenges which are being facing by the higher education in Nepal at present.

Current challenges in Nepal's higher education system

Nepal's higher education system is currently grappling with a multitude of challenges that hinder its development and effectiveness. Among the prominent issues are resource constraints, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and systemic inequities that persist within the Nepalese higher education landscape. These challenges not only affect the quality of education but also have far-reaching implications for economic growth, social equity, and overall national development.

A critical challenge faced by higher education institutions in Nepal is the scarcity of resources, which manifests in various forms including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, and a lack of qualified faculty members due to which impactful management of public campuses lack which has resulted into short down of public campuses in some places in the region that requires further study in the future. Studies indicate that despite efforts to

expand access to higher education, only about 15% of the population benefits from it, which is significantly below the global average ([Dhamala et al., 2021](#)). The underfunding of institutions has severely restricted their ability to develop and maintain necessary facilities, affecting the quality of education provided to students ([Acharya et al., 2022](#); [Yadav, 2022](#)). Furthermore, the private sector's non-participation exacerbates the situation, as reliance on public funding becomes unsustainable, limiting institutional development and innovation ([Acharya et al., 2022](#)).

Universities and colleges, which were unprepared for a widespread shift to digital learning, faced numerous obstacles, including a lack of technological infrastructure and inadequate teacher training ([Gautam & Gautam, 2021](#); [Devkota, 2021](#)). [Devkota \(2021\)](#) finds that the pandemic has highlighted the digital divide in Nepal, where students from rural areas and lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle to access online educational resources. Specifically, it was found that students with low English proficiency and limited technological skills encountered significant barriers to engaging in online learning, reinforcing existing inequalities within the system. Moreover, this shift to online learning has called attention to the necessity for educational institutions to enhance their technological proficiency and invest in digital resources ([Gautam & Gautam, 2021](#)).

Fixed gender biases further complicate the challenges within higher education in Nepal. Research has documented how societal norms and expectations continue to restrict educational opportunities for women, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as science and technology ([Dhamala et al., 2021](#); [Sharma & Bhatta, 2018](#)). This not only perpetuates gender inequality but also limits the overall talent pool available to the country for economic and technological advancement. The interplay of socio-cultural factors and educational access requires policies that promote gender equality and empower women by providing them with the necessary resources and support ([Devkota, 2021](#)).

Curricular relevance poses yet another significant challenge in the higher education system. Many programs within Nepalese universities are criticized for being outdated and not aligned with current labor market needs, leaving graduates ill-prepared for employment opportunities ([Yadav, 2022](#); [Upadhyay, 2018](#)). Studies have noted concerning about the disconnection between academic programs and industrial requirements, raising questions about the efficacy of higher education as a driver for economic growth ([Upadhyay, 2018](#)). A focus on theoretical knowledge over practical skills often results in oversaturation of graduates in certain fields while leaving essential sectors underserved ([Acharya et al., 2022](#); [Upadhyay, 2018](#); [Hussein et al., 2026](#)).

Moreover, higher education institutions exhibit variability in quality, which can be traced back to ineffective evaluation systems that fail to promote accountability and continuous improvement ([Gyawali, 2021](#)). The National Assessment of Student Achievement has reported stagnant student performance despite increasing access to education, suggesting that merely increasing participation rates will not necessarily enhance educational outcomes ([Joshi, 2018](#); [Manalo et al., 2025](#)). The need for robust monitoring and evaluation

frameworks is critical to ensure quality and equity across the educational spectrum of Nepalese higher education sector.

In addition to these systemic issues, there is a general lack of collaboration between educational institutions and the private sector, hampering innovation and the application of knowledge to real-world problems ([Adhikari & Aryal, 2020](#); [Amgain & Adhikari, 2022](#); [Ogunsola et al., 2026](#)). The absence of partnerships restricts opportunities for research and development, which are essential for progress in higher education. Collaborative ventures and engagement with industry stakeholders can create pathways for resource sharing, curriculum development, and internships, providing students with tangible skills and experiences that align with job requirements ([Amgain & Adhikari, 2022](#)).

In conclusion, Nepal's higher education system faces a myriad of challenges that are deep-rooted and interconnected. Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes increasing funding, fostering public-private partnerships, modernizing curricula, improving gender equity, and leveraging technology for equitable access to education. The unique sociopolitical and economic contexts of Nepal must be considered when implementing changes aimed at creating a more robust and inclusive higher education framework. By tackling these challenges, the nation can aspire to harness the transformative potential of higher education as a catalyst for sustainable development and social progress.

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design with exploratory method for data collection employing semi-structured interviews two times each with the students of Bachelor and Master levels in two of the public campuses in Morang and Jhapa districts of eastern Nepal, Urlabari and Damak respectively. I also conducted observations of classrooms and other facilities of the campuses for better understanding of the challenges and issues. I included two public campuses from different districts, one is fully accredited with QAA and another QAA non-accredited campus (which is under process for the accreditation) to understand the nuanced issues inside the public academic institutions, not with the perspective of comparison between them rather triangulation of data to observe the data saturation of the study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences, Education and Management on one of the campuses and in another with the faculties of Science Education and Computer Science. Being myself a faculty member in one of the campuses, I had a lot of informal conversations on the issues during my seating with them in the office and premises on one of the campuses which enriched my understanding of the research issue.

I chose three students each from all the faculties and two faculty members each from both the campus purposively. I conducted interviews with students and faculties from July 16 to 23, 2025 on one of the campuses and from October 7 to October 31, 2025, on another campus. I used digital technologies (AI applications) executing table in this study.

Following table inscribes the details of my participants with anonymized names of participants and public campus:

Table 1:

Participant	Campus	Status	Level		Viewpoints Summary
Durga	Urlabari	Student	BBS Year	4th	Lacking techno-infrastructure.
Manu	Urlabri	Student	B. Ed year	3rd	Fear of job placement.
Mabu	Urlabari	Student	M. A. Semester	3 rd	Lacks right teacher for subject.
Mani	Damak	Student	BBA semester	5th	Lacks opportunity in Nepal.
Sankar	Damak	Student	MBS semester	4th	Labor market weak, prefers migration.
Gaya	Damak	Student	B. Ed year	4th	Lacks job security/placement, limited opportunities.
Tayanu	Urlabri	Faculty	MBS		Curriculum/job market mismatch, political appointments.
Mahanu	Urlabari	Faculty	PhD		Lack of integrity in staff, improper placement.
Jahana	Damak	Faculty	M. Ed.		Lacks research skills, market/policy mismatch, TSC opportunity.
Ahana	Damak	Faculty	MCA		Lacks latest tech/policy in CS education compared to foreign countries.

I limited my participants for this study to only ten participants (six students from different faculty and four faculty members only) because of data saturation. Initially, I informally conversed with the students of different classes of different levels belonging from three faculty departments at Urlabari, where I am engaged as a full timer faculty member. However, almost all students' experiences they shared with me were of same type which I used as data of qualitative nature in this study. Me as a researcher, talked to faculty member colleagues from all the departments at Urlabari who provided similar information, so I choose

only two faculty members from the campus where work as a teaching staff in which QAA accreditation is under process. In this vertex, triangulate the field texts (data) from QAA accredited public campus, I chose Damak to logify my triangulation of information from which I chose same number of students and faculties whether my data saturation is scientifically systematic. This triangulation praxis in this study limited my participants to only ten, nuancing the issue of epistemic gaps in higher education in the Nepalese public campuses which is limited to geography, socio-economic and cultural environments.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted in Nepali language with both types of research participants. Both interviews were recorded using mobile phone with the consent of participants. Those recordings were transcribed into English language by listening and re-listening to the recordings. Analysis write up was conducted by coding and decoding the transcribed documents. The coding and decoding process rigorously helped to develop analytical themes to analyze the field texts that are included in findings and analysis and discussion titles- using sub-titles. I used manual coding and decoding to develop themes for the analysis process of the field texts. I followed [Saldana \(2013\)](#) three phase coding system manually given as “raw data”, “preliminary codes” and “final code”.

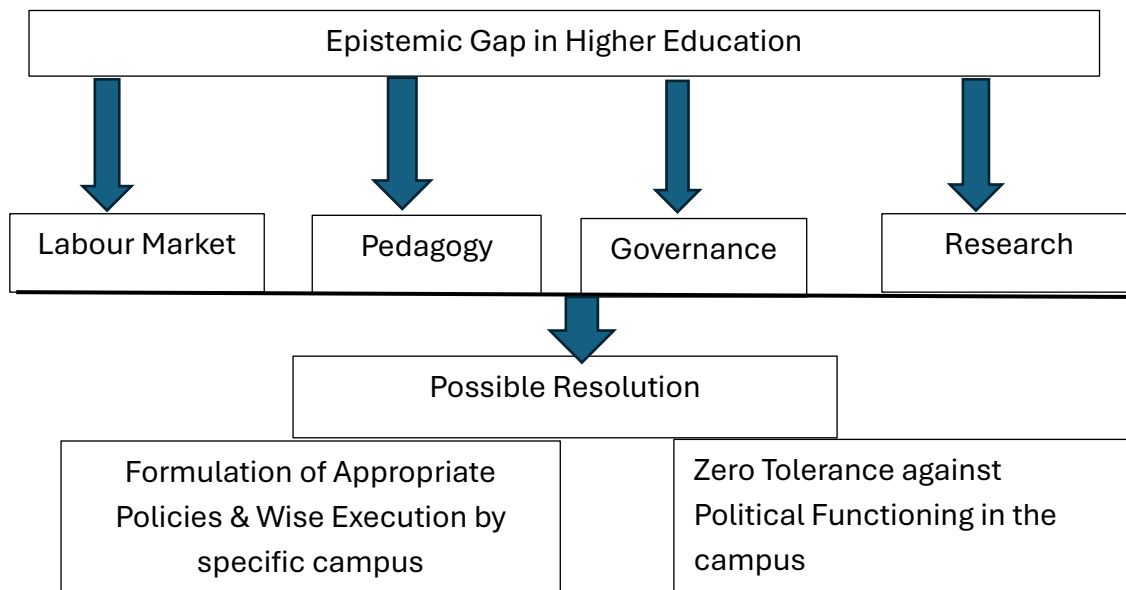
Ethical Considerations

I received voluntary consent from the student participants for this study. I interviewed two times and my student participants agreed to get involved in this study voluntarily. I requested my colleagues to get involved in this study informally as research participants. They agreed to get involved as per their venue and time. To avoid any biases, I used semi-structured interviews with both the groups of my research participants that led to fulfilling my objectives of the study. To conduct this study, I requested campus chief of both the campus whose informal consent provided opportunity to observe classrooms and other facilities of the campus along with interviewing the research participants of this study.

Findings: Analysis and Discussion

Following figure details the epistemic gaps in higher education followed in the analysis and discussion sections.

Figure 1.



Labor Market and the Curricular Gaps in Higher Education

It is obvious that we have observed a huge gap in technological development after 1990s in the country as well as in the global context. In this context, however, some of the courses that we studied before two decades in Humanities and social sciences, education and management courses seem similar in contents. On the one hand, there seems to be small curricular changes in twenty years' time; on the other hand, the societal perspectives in learning have changed drastically. One of the faculty research participants expresses his wearied experiences who mentions that:

“Some of the courses we studied long before twenty years is now being taught in the class. However, there is a huge generational gap in learning and the skilled labor required for the market today. Our teacher taught the same content and now we teach our students the same content with same approach where digital technology literacy has significantly overturned today's labor world”. The words of my research participants “Tayanu” from Urlabari has in-depth meaning constructed through his experience gained by engaging in higher education.

In this context, different scholarships note that market demands and curricular gaps are literally high in Nepalese higher education ([Bhurtel, 2016](#); [Khatri, 2023](#); [Dahal et al., 2025](#); [Dangal & Karki, 2025](#)). In this connection [Sharma \(2024\)](#) finds that higher education in Nepal provide agricultural higher education however the labour markets have transitioned to service to manufacturing due to which labour force in agriculture remain unemployed. Further, he metnions that agricultural education can create jobs however, it is limited in Nepal due to lack of proper policy and its implementation (pp. 244). The gap between labour market and curriculum is one the epistemic gap prevalent in the Nepalese higher education. I argue

that this occurs either with skill crisis or academic cultural gap which has driven away higher education students from the labour markets in Nepal.

The Pedagogy: Empirical and Methodological Gaps

Higher education system in Nepal faces methodological deficiencies looking through the critical lens, includes outdated curricula, extremely limited practical training, passive and traditional teaching methods, faculties and students' politics, political interferences to list some. These issues fundamentally disrupt the development of critical thinking, creativity and practical skills in graduates which makes them less competitive in the job markets.

Critically understanding the inadequacies of existing empirical research with respect to higher education in Nepal is essential in shaping the future policies and practices concerning education in the country. Although there is much literature, the persistent gaps in foundational research pose a risk of developing misaligned strategies that comprehensively hinder progress within the education system. This paper draws upon multiple studies to illustrate the existing methodological gaps along with proposing ways to build upon them with further research.

A critical gap highlighted within existing research includes the socio-economic factors affecting access to higher education. The socio-economic barriers in achieving educational opportunities in Nepal have been reported by some scholars such as ([Acharya et al., 2022](#)) who indicate that lower socio-economic status prevents students from accessing higher education ([Acharya et al., 2022](#); [Acharya et al. 2023](#)). These findings are further corroborated by Devkota, who details how the shift to online and distance learning catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic worsened pre-existing inequalities and how students from lower socio-economic backgrounds faced greater barriers to accessing educational resources ([Devkota, 2021](#)). What is lacking in existing research is a holistic understanding of the economic disparity model in context of students' choices regarding attending, accessing, and persisting within higher education institutions. Longitudinal studies that examine these trends over time and empirical analyses which apply wider socio-economic frameworks are essential.

Moreover, some authors have already highlighted the neglect of focus pertaining to the inequalities of gender in the higher education system of Nepal. [Vogel and Korinek \(2012\)](#) note that the intra-household allocation of remittances is biased towards boys' education, which reflects underlying gender discrimination regarding spending on education. Nevertheless, stronger longitudinal studies are needed to grasp the impacts of these inequalities on girls' education and the role of culture in sustaining such inequities over time. Different types of methodological approaches from mixed-method frameworks could provide more sophisticated understanding regarding the impact of construction of gender on education, whereas ethnographic studies focusing on the voices of schoolgirls could illuminate the complexities of their struggles and realities that shape their education frameworks.

Another important methodological limitation is the absence of comprehensive qualitative research bringing together learners, educators, and administrators within the context of higher education. Quantitative research, although useful to track specific patterns

and relationships, often misses the education context due to the lack of subjective dimensions. For example, as [Acharya et al. \(2022\)](#) assess the systemic issues within higher education in Nepal, there is a gap in the qualitative data that captures the stakeholder's lived experiences. The binary research findings' research gap should be filled with deeply engaged methodological approaches. In this context, qualitative research can augment data collections by bringing to light and illuminating the relevant phenomena in education. There is a wealth of knowledge about institutional practices and policies that can be captured through interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory observations that can be used as research methods.

The influence of policy-driven education on socioeconomic advancement remains unexamined. Dahal's examination clearly calls for an intra-disciplinary approach that intertwines the institutional aspects with the changing curricula ([Dahal, 2010](#)). The studies prioritize ratios like enrollment numbers versus GDP, overlooking critical factors like the value of curriculum design, teaching methods, institutional leadership, and overall governance on educational efficacy and sustainability. It would be beneficial if policies and their execution were critiqued through qualitative case studies centered around education and socio-economic development. Moreover, more research is needed that strategically determines the alignment between policy frameworks and defined educational outcomes across diverse population segments.

Moreover, there is a critical gap in empirical investigations into distance education as a sustainable mode of teaching and learning after the pandemic. [Gautam and Gautam \(2021\)](#) note that the online education revolution triggered by COVID-19 brought changes in teaching learning system, waking up to the possibilities offered by technology in education, it seemed that technology was being used more as a known 'add-on' rather than being integrated in a holistic manner which would serve Nepal's future needs in the higher education sector. In this connection [Chaudhary et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize the need for evaluation of virtual learning spaces, particularly for regions with scarce resources like Nepal. In my opinion, in order to address this issue, longitudinal empirical investigations with measurable components of student satisfaction and learning outcomes would be extremely useful.

To reiterate, the research on higher education within Nepal appears to have been conducted within an empirical and methodological vacuum. Further research needs to employ more holistic socio-economic factors, longitudinal and qualitative methodologies, more comprehensive analyses of the gaps in representation of women in education, robust analyses of the implemented education policies, and assessments of online education and its short and long-term implications for Nepali education systems. As the nation grapples with such persistent educational problems, these conceptual frameworks have the potential to contribute meaningfully and critically towards constructive and sound policy development directed at increasing the accessibility and equity of quality higher education to all citizens in the country with appropriation of achieved qualifications and job market values.

Governance in the Run: Knowledge Gaps in Policy and Practice

In Nepal, the interface between educational policy and practice unveils critical knowledge gaps that undermine governance and the realization of educational goals. As a result of historical factors and contemporary global influences, the political landscape continues to dominate educational policies and their execution. To fill these gaps in the areas of education politics, I refer to some key scholarly works on Nepalese politics.

Within the context of Nepal, one important component in relation to education policy challenges is the restructuring of policies within the national context. As pointed out by [Shah and Brett \(2021\)](#) the narrative of the nation shapes its problems and solutions which affects local level policy implementation and enactment. This scenario demonstrates a fundamental gap between policies and classroom practices concerning the education system in Nepal. In addition, the authors talk about the 'Contexts of Influence' policy analysis model, which illustrates that to identify why barriers exist in educational policy implementation, it is necessary to address all layers from policy creation to execution ([Shah & Brett, 2021](#)).

In Nepal, the relationship between educational policy and government initiatives impacts entrepreneurship, particularly in the context of higher education. While efforts are being made to offer entrepreneurship training programs at some university campuses, the educational landscape continues to place greater emphasis on nurturing employability skills than innovation and entrepreneurship. This reflects a longstanding paradigm where, as [Prajapati \(2019\)](#) observes, there is a striking lack of entrepreneurial education offered in higher institutions which tends to erect social barriers that stifle entrepreneurial initiative among students.

Moreover, the situation is made worse by the globalized nature of educational policy, which has a far-reaching influence on Nepal's dynamics. Scholarships observe that the globalization led by neoliberalist principles adopted since 1997 have transformed policies concerning education since the restoration of democracy, making them more responsive to international frameworks and benchmarks globally ([Sarpong & Adelekan, 2024](#); [Pandey, 2023](#); [Regmi, 2019](#)). Nonetheless, this has resulted in a gap between policy intentions and local realities, where contextual and cultural frameworks are often ignored. For example, educators in urban locations may be quick to embrace a global educational practice, but their rural counterparts are hampered by poor infrastructure and a lack of basic training. My decade long experience in the Kathmandu valley as a faculty in different universities teaching and my involvement as a teaching faculty after COVID-19 in outside Kathmandu valley have made me realize these differences.

Considering the gaps provided by the teachers' unions brings another dimension to the interplay between policy and practice. Poudyal argues that teachers' unions in the private school sector confront the neoliberal policies that lean towards market-driven efficiency resulting in severe access to quality education. This illustrates a significant paradox; policies intended to realize educational benefits are thwarted by union politics for mitigation regarding representation and advocacy within the policy-making bodies. In this manner, teaching conditions in Nepal tend to be marked by fragmented policymaking and sharp interest

divergence. As commented by [Bista et al. \(2020\)](#) higher education in Nepal is being historically shaped as per the political shifts which has been paralyzing the education system continually (p. 9).

Additionally, [Poudel \(2020\)](#)'s analysis of policy documents related to vocational education and training reveals that the Nepali government adopts initiatives that appear progressive, but in reality, those policies are rarely aligned with the socioeconomic context of the intended population. His critical discourse analysis highlights a gap between the concepts of vocational training architecture and its application within marginalized communities and makes a case for policies to be more responsive to the needs of these communities.

Further elaborating the afore mentioned gaps in understanding, some studies assessing antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in Nepal focus on the awareness gaps among the primary stakeholders like the practicing farmers and medical personnel ([Lambrou et al, 2021](#)). The results portray a misalignment of government-sponsored frameworks to address AMR and the reality of how those frameworks are understood by the practitioners using them. The case described above showcases the failure to communicate critical health issues as an example of a pervasive knowledge gap which, in this instance, transcends the realm of education policy and adversely affects public health.

To further broaden the discourse, the agricultural policy strategic pathways proposed by [Mishra \(2024\)](#) raise alignment concerns of government spending with tangible return on investment beyond agriculture, such as education. He argues that the rural areas which depend on agriculture not only for economic survival but also education as a yardstick for development, justify productivity, and call for a complex interplay between agricultural policies and academic achievement.

Addressing the reoccurring issues of similar policy frameworks with no systemic barriers in place is extremely unlikely to make a difference in any of the fields. In this context, [Thapa \(2023\)](#) analyzes the discourse of educational politics in Nepal that must focus on internal elements as well, rising from the domestic realm which includes geopolitical factors. He further comments that the interaction between Chinese and Indian interest zones in Nepal impacts education through various cultural and economic activities. This form of external impact may be an additional challenge to local attempts working towards the uniformity of education that is compatible with the specific ethos and social dynamics of Nepal.

In a nutshell, looking at educational politics in Nepal uncovers significant knowledge deficiencies that exist in the gap between policy design and execution. These deficiencies are the result of several interrelated factors such as globalization, local socioeconomic conditions, the role of institutional actors like the teachers' unions, and international political dynamics. Bridging these inequities calls for improved gathering and evaluation of data through robust policy frameworks that adapt educational models to the realities of Nepal's multifaceted population. It is only through these means that Nepal can intend to fill these knowledge gaps and subsequently improve the educational outcomes for all constituents. Furthermore, the following sub-title discusses the empirical and methodological gaps in existing higher education research.

Void of Research Skills and Enthusiasm: The Tacit Paradoxical Practices

The teaching member in higher education is expected to get involved in the research activities along with curricular deliveries.

The lack of research interest among the faculties, shortage of funding on research, faculty politicization, and student politics in the public campuses form the contorted face of higher education in Nepal, serving more to illustrate systemic underused ([Gautam et al, 2025](#)). In the case of public campuses, a major insight concerns the dissonance between claims made in policy documents and actions taken at the grassroots level. Implementation of higher education policies of Nepal issued in 2014 and 2019 focused on quality assurance and research, however, their actual enforcement is weak due to overwhelming bureaucratic inefficiencies, political manipulation, lack of motivation and self-interest. Policies and frameworks are increasingly constructed to tick boxes for external funding, rather than local context, which changes the reality to ‘no impact’ despite the persistent rhetoric of change.

Filling this gap necessitates a more inclusive policy formulation process that integrates faculty, students, and neglected stakeholders. The research skill paradoxes prevalent in higher education tacitly support dysfunctional academic culture of research and publication avoidance in terms of quality academic culture. Nevertheless, the quality academic culture in higher education has risen in recent years although with menacing challenges (for e.g. see [Sapkota, 2025](#); [Paudel & Giri, 2024](#))

The existing studies on higher education in Nepal are limited by rigid methodological frameworks, particularly in the research innovations under social sciences and humanities, education and management which are dominantly running programs in the public campuses. In my review, I noticed that many studies are fixated on access and equity and ignore the focus on pedagogical innovation and epistemic injustices against students in terms of research skills transfer and establishing academic culture.

Discussion

This study has examined the enduring epistemic gaps within the public system of higher education in Nepal, taking account into the history, current issues, and the gap between policy and implementation. It has come to light that there is an intricate combination of systemic inefficiencies, political influences, and gaps in the extant literature that stagnates the advancement of academics tailored with the infrastructural shortages in the public campuses. In the following discussion, I formulate my insights with recommended options for change as a final remark.

I am always struck by the absence of appropriate epistemic frameworks as I reflect on public campuses issues in Nepal and the public higher education system. I contend these gaps are represented in four major forms: (1) the lack of alignment between curriculum and actual labor market opportunities; (2) the inadequacy of teaching and learning orientation towards the needs of society; (4) a highly centralized governance structure led by politics; (4) and the failure to engage critically with local philosophical frameworks. These factors cumulatively

result in the erosion of the intellectual sovereignty of public campuses, which devolves them to become mere bureaucratic institutions instead of knowledge creating and disseminating institutions.

In examining the history of public campuses in Nepal, I became aware that the adopted education policies have a lineage rooted in colonial paradigms, which is evident in the dominantly rote and rote pedagogies that prevail.

The founding of Tribhuvan University in 1959 was a major turning point, but the over-centralized system it brought along has continued to sustain stagnancy in terms of syllabus content, rigid bureaucratic frameworks, unequal access to quality education, including faculty development programs and sustainability. For example, the extreme differences in the salary and the perks, and other facilities in between Central Department and community campuses which work within its jurisdiction. I believe that this stagnation is precisely why innovation has been lacking, especially at public campuses which tend to be further from global pedagogical paradigms. The graduates from the public campuses orient themselves around seeking jobs only after their completion of bachelor's degree but they are not oriented towards entrepreneurship through curricular training.

Conclusion

Finally, I would argue that the public campuses' epistemic gaps in Nepal result from a combination of historical neglect, political exploitation, fragmented policy frameworks, and multi-prong strategies.

Public campuses need to be given more flexibility in modifying curriculum, faculty recruitment on meritocratic bases, and interdisciplinary research collaboration. The student unions and faculty must be elected based on academic qualifications, removing the political criteria for these positions. Policy reforms need to be actionable rather than aspirational. The integration of local knowledge systems with global academic standards enriches higher education in Nepal. In the end, the pursuit of epistemic justice is what truly underpins change in the public campuses of Nepal.

In my capacity as a researcher and a faculty of higher education, I must stress that no attempt has been made to fill the gaps which leave the potential of higher education as a conduit of social and intellectual liberation, devoid of actual fulfillment. The journey is fraught with challenges; however, with public policy reforms and enduring scholarly activism, public universities in Nepal can once again assume their rightful status as authentic loci of knowledge and critical inquiry. Further research can lead to comprehensive understanding of epistemic gaps commanded by skill crisis or educational cultural gaps in the Nepalese higher education.

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