

Critical Appraisal of Challenges in Tribhuvan University of Nepal

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Abstract

This paper thoroughly evaluates the key obstacles confronting Tribhuvan University in particular and other higher educational institutions of Nepal in general. Employing a secondary-analysis method involving governmental reports, multilateral development documents, scholarly writings and research papers termed as peer-reviewed literature, it combines evidence on access and equity, governance and regulation, quality assurance and academic standards, funding and resource limitations, faculty capability and research productivity, infrastructure and digital disparities, and relevance to labor market requirements in general and challenges faced by Tribhuvan University in particular. The paper concludes with specific policy and institutional suggestions for enhancing higher education—highlighting cohesive governance, sustainable funding, quality control, research capacity enhancement, and strategies for inclusive access. The paper accords some indispensable recommendations for policy makers, higher education institutions (HEIs), Tribhuvan University and global collaborators in academic domain. This paper has employed critical analysis as a research tool to undertake the research on the pivotal topic.

Keywords: Higher Education, Tribhuvan University, Digital Literacy, Quality Assurance, Governance, Research Capacity

Introduction

Quality education has become a buzz phrase over the last few decades in the world. Nepal has become underscoring the value and quality of education since the Restoration of Democracy 1990. Both schools and colleges have been highlighting their promotional endeavors with the cause, “Quality Education Is Our Priority”. Of course, some of the schools and colleges have been able to translate their wish into reality as well. Privatization of education has outreached the government control and funding in education for several years in Nepal. Countless schools and colleges have come into existence to ensure quality education as claimed to be their priority. Even some of the public schools have started to follow the trend of quality education

by implementing strategies of private schools including English as a Medium of Instruction, Incentives to the teachers, dress uniforms, additional tuition fees beyond the provision of the government of Nepal. Despite numerous endeavors by both private and public educational institutions, quality education is still questionable as reflected in brain drain of students after completion of their schooling (Plus 2) for higher education to foreign nations especially Australia, the USA, Canada, England, Japan, China, and India. The ratio of outgoing youths for higher education abroad indicates that Nepalese guardians and their wards are not fully convinced with the type and level of education imparted in colleges and universities of Nepal.

This paper scrutinizes some of the challenges faced generally by colleges and universities and particularly by Tribhuvan University in terms of ensuring quality education. There are multiple factors ranging from qualified and trained teachers to the updated means and materials of teaching and learning that determine quality education. The researcher outlines and analyzes challenges such as socio-economic conditioning, poor infrastructure, low motivation and pay of teachers, political interference, lack of digital literacy, and lack of collaboration between management, teachers, students and guardians grounding on the data based on experience, and secondary sources. Since all of the challenges are interlinked, all of them collectively pose threats to both educators and education entrepreneurs in Nepal.

Literature Review

Mulugeta M. Abay and Nylon Marishane (2023) have focused on the significance of effective leadership in an academic institution. Their emphasis on leadership stems from a widely accepted belief that effective leadership is crucial for ensuring quality education in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs). Nevertheless, the research indicates that various internal and external factors hinder the leadership of Ethiopian HLIs in its pursuit of delivering quality education in this domain. The findings of the study have disclosed that the standard of higher education and the capabilities of students are deemed inadequate. The results of their study highlight that numerous factors contribute to this issue, including the insufficient competence of incoming students, the poor quality of general education (Grades 1–12), ineffective leadership, subpar teaching and learning practices, inadequate qualifications and competencies of instructors, as well as a lack of teaching facilities and resources. These elements represent the primary challenges faced by the leadership of HLIs in their endeavor to ensure quality education. To seek solutions of the current challenges, the educational leadership can become a good driver (Abay & Marishane, 2023, p. 223).

Meanwhile, the scholars' assessment of educational quality (student performance) is approached through the lens of learners' perceived enhancement in their skills, knowledge,

and attitudes, as evaluated by the students themselves, alongside the satisfaction levels of their instructors, supported by document analysis and interviews for comprehensive triangulation. Drawing from their educational experiences, students were surveyed via a structured questionnaire to determine whether their learning quality met their expectations. The data gathered from the four selected HLIs reveal that 75 out of 150 respondents (50%) felt that their knowledge, skills and attitudes fell short of their expectations during the teaching and learning process. Additionally, 57 students (38%) believed that the quality of education they received was satisfactory, while the remaining 18 students (12%) were unable to form a judgment (Abay & Marishane, 2023, p. 227).

Academic staff members are anticipated to fully participate in their teaching and learning endeavors while offering academic guidance and support to their students. However, the leadership interviewees from the selected Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) identified a deficiency in staff engagement and commitment as a significant issue in executing effective teaching, learning, and academic counseling. Some academic staff members are involved in moonlighting—either with or without the awareness of their employer HLI—to earn supplementary income. This additional work may interfere with their teaching and research responsibilities, as well as the academic advisory services provided to students. The primary reason for moonlighting is the inadequate remuneration scale for academic staff (Abay & Marishane, 2023, p. 231).

During their observations at both public universities, we noted the lack of a systematic approach for the regular maintenance of teaching facilities. Numerous broken and non-functional facilities were not being attended to. Consequently, both universities require an effective system to manage the upkeep of damaged teaching facilities and equipment. The sampled private HLIs were in a more favorable position as they met the minimum standards established by the Education and Training Authority (ETA) during the accreditation and re-accreditation processes. Nevertheless, during our facility visits, we observed issues such as slow internet connectivity and a shortage of office space for part-time academic staff (Abay & Marishane, 2023, p. 233).

The study by Ahmed and Ahmed (2024) highlights the essential function that higher education serves in equipping future generations to effectively navigate and tackle the complexities associated with sustainability challenges. The incorporation of sustainable development into the curricula of higher education institutions is increasingly acknowledged in the UAE. Numerous universities are integrating sustainable practices into their operational and research activities, as well as directly into their teaching methodologies. However, the swift pace of

societal change presents a significant challenge to the sector. Academia is crucial in promoting sustainable decision-making, and there is an urgent necessity for educational systems to adapt in order to prevent the continuation of unsustainable behaviors and practices. The existence of globally ranked universities among these institutions reflects the UAE's dedication to high-quality education and international standards, establishing the country as a center for sustainability education in the region. By investing in a diverse array of sustainability-related programs, the UAE cultivates a new generation of leaders and innovators who will play a key role in advancing sustainable development both locally and globally.

Ahmed and Ahmed (2024) have conducted a comprehensive analysis of how sustainability is integrated into higher education curricula worldwide, with a particular focus on the UAE. They have provided insights into the UAE's strategic objectives for sustainable development and showcased various successful programs and initiatives that promote sustainability education. Besides, their research has underscored the challenges and opportunities for enhancing sustainability education in the UAE, proposing pathways for its more complete integration into academic programs.

They have also emphasized the vital importance of collaboration and partnership in achieving sustainability goals within higher education and beyond. The function of higher education institutions has been evolving in response to the increasing demand for sustainable development. Historically, higher education primarily concentrated on equipping students with the technical skills and knowledge pertinent to their selected professions. Nevertheless, the escalating global challenges related to environmental and social sustainability have transformed the role of higher education. Institutions of higher learning are now acknowledged as crucial contributors to the promotion of sustainable development. Universities and colleges serve as vital platforms for educating individuals, conducting research, and collaborating with local communities to devise solutions for sustainability issues. Collaboration with industry is essential, as the UAE's focus on sustainable development resonates with the interests of numerous businesses that invest in sustainability initiatives. Alliances between higher education institutions and corporations can foster the creation of innovative sustainable solutions, offering students invaluable real-world experience and potential job opportunities. Embracing a multidisciplinary approach is critical to effectively address the intricate nature of sustainability challenges (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2024).

Universities in the UAE have the potential to lead the way in developing interdisciplinary programs that merge sustainability with various academic fields, including engineering,

business, and social sciences. This strategy promotes a comprehensive understanding of sustainability, equipping students with the varied skills necessary to confront these challenges successfully. Additionally, utilizing technology represents another pathway for enhancing sustainability education in the UAE, a country renowned for its technological capabilities. By integrating advanced technologies into their curricula, such as renewable energy and smart city solutions, higher education institutions can provide students with insights into the technological dimensions of sustainability practices.

Scott (2022) has analyzed the framework of Thailand's higher education sector, followed by an exploration of how educational reforms have influenced the quality of Thai education and its financial stability. Education quality can be characterized as an institution's capacity to cultivate competent graduates who meet the demands and expectations of society in an increasingly competitive global market. Nevertheless, the quality of education in higher education is multifaceted, necessitating that institutions concentrate not only on the curriculum content but also on the context, processes, and outcomes involved.

The quality of higher education institutions is not merely defined by the types of services or courses provided but also by the transformative effects they have on students and society (Yilmaz, 2019). Financial stability is described as an institutional strategy aimed at minimizing reliance on direct public funding by optimizing operational management, systematically reducing costs, and enhancing revenue generation through income diversification (Yilmaz, 2019). Scott (2024) has examined how the quality of Thai tertiary education is adversely affected by governmental inefficiencies that have perpetuated inequality at the K-12 level. The decline in educational quality at the primary and secondary levels has had a direct effect on the recruitment processes of Thai higher education institutions (HEIs), leading to lower entry requirements for new applicants and a subsequent reduction in education quality. Besides, he has investigated how reliance on international students for financial stability may pose risks to the long-term viability of the current Thai HEI system. He has concluded his paper with suggestions for policymakers and leaders of Thai HEIs on addressing the identified challenges and effectively promoting quality education while ensuring long-term economic sustainability.

Since gaining independence, Pakistan's higher education sector has undergone remarkable growth, resulting in a high demand for scientists, engineers, technicians, doctors, teachers, and managers on a global scale. Higher education presents various opportunities for society to contemplate the social, cultural, moral, economic, and spiritual challenges faced by humanity. It equips individuals with professional knowledge and skilled personnel essential

for national development. The successful migration of professional graduates from Pakistan to more favorable opportunities abroad has resulted in what is commonly referred to as brain drain, leading to criticism directed at countries like Pakistan. Critics argue that local universities struggle to attract top talent to their faculty positions. The services provided by the Pakistani government, the abundant job opportunities offered by multinational companies in Pakistan, and the appeal of overseas employment significantly diminish the actual talent pool available to universities. Furthermore, universities frequently face numerous disadvantages, such as insufficient facilities and an environment conducive to high-quality research, which often hampers their ability to fill teaching roles (Khan & Hui, 2021).

The predominant challenges confronting higher education in Pakistan include a shortage of academic space and educators, declining research standards, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, low student enrollment rates, outdated teaching methodologies, a lack of student engagement, poverty, and gender discrimination (Salik & Zhiyong, 2014). In addition to these issues related to declining standards and insufficient facilities, numerous private educational institutions have reportedly taken advantage of students in rural regions.

The proficiency of teachers, the study curriculum, and the criteria for student admission are the primary elements contributing to the deterioration of higher education quality (Ullah, Ajmal, & Rahman, 2011). Maintaining high standards in higher education is one of the major challenges confronting Pakistan's higher education system. Nevertheless, despite the government's continuous emphasis on quality education, numerous universities and degree colleges still fail to satisfy the minimum standards established by the HEC. In Pakistan, a significant number of universities lack adequate facilities and sufficient infrastructure to effectively educate students. Even in this contemporary age of educational technology, many degree colleges and universities in Pakistan operate without essential resources such as computer labs, digital libraries, and internet or on-campus internet services to support their students. The inadequacy of infrastructure represents a stark reality within Pakistan's higher education system, particularly in government-run institutions, which are more adversely affected than their private counterparts. Numerous degree colleges continue to employ outdated traditional teaching methods, devoid of modern technical resources (Khan & Hui, 2021).

Concurrently, traditional teaching approaches have become obsolete, and issues such as insufficient quality assurance, lack of accountability, separation of research, inflexible pedagogy and curricula, and subpar teaching quality are raising concerns regarding Pakistan's higher education system. A majority of professors and administrative officials are reluctant to

engage in educational initiatives, preferring instead to focus on their own financial and political advancement. A systematic shift from annual examinations to semester examinations must be executed to evaluate student academic performance on a regular basis. Internationalization and exchange programs for students between Pakistan and prestigious global universities should serve as a vital avenue for enhancing higher education and spreading knowledge. It is essential for every university to host distinguished professors and experts to instruct their faculty in contemporary and effective pedagogical techniques (Khan & Hui, 2021).

Gupta & Shiwakoti (2024) have investigated the perception of sustainability within Higher Education (HE) as viewed by community-based higher education institutions (HEIs), specifically community colleges. A review of existing literature highlights both the advantages and challenges associated with sustainability awareness, which is further supported by primary and secondary data gathered through interviews with senior officials from the University Grants Commission (UGC), university administrators, and former Chairpersons of the Nepal Public Campus Association (NPCA). The thematic analysis indicates that community colleges in Nepal are experiencing an identity crisis and are struggling to achieve their own sustainability, which has implications for meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key challenges include a lack of uniform regulations, the absence of sustainability-oriented curricula, decreasing student enrollment, ineffective management practices, and traditional teaching methods, insufficient and poor-quality. It is essential for universities to take the initiative in enhancing curricula, promoting energy conservation, and reducing waste, while also raising awareness about climate change and gender equality, and ensuring the monitoring of HEIs for quality education. Nepalese universities and HEIs encounter several obstacles in these endeavors, stemming from stakeholders such as staff, faculty, and students, as senior university administrators often lack the time necessary to focus on their responsibilities, duties, and the overall development of their institutions. Besides, political influences, stakeholder interests, and institutional barriers further hinder progress.

Community colleges in Nepal face numerous sustainability challenges, including inconsistent regulations, unstable financial situations, declining student enrollment, inadequate facilities, and ineffective management. Despite these obstacles, community colleges are striving to promote sustainable development by enhancing access to equitable education, fostering gender equity, and encouraging community participation. Achieving quality, affordability, relevance, and resilience in education necessitates strategic reforms in curriculum innovation, governance, and policy frameworks within higher education institutions (HEIs). To align

these institutions with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ensure their long-term sustainability and societal impact, improved financial models and capacity building are crucial (Gupta & Shiwakoti, 2024).

According to Bista (2025), the incorporation of technology into Quality Assurance (QA) processes has become a significant focus area. Selwyn (2016) underscores the importance of digital tools in facilitating data collection and analysis, which allows institutions to make decisions based on evidence. In a similar vein, Laurillard (2012) points out the capacity of technology to improve stakeholder engagement and transparency within QA processes. These findings indicate that utilizing technology can greatly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of QA frameworks.

- a. **Challenges in Implementation:** Various challenges have surfaced as major obstacles to the successful execution of QA.
- b. **Resistance to Change:** Numerous faculty members and staff have shown reluctance towards QA processes, perceiving them as bureaucratic and time-consuming rather than as avenues for development.
- c. **Resource Constraints:** Insufficient financial and human resources have hindered the establishment and execution of comprehensive QA frameworks, especially in smaller institutions.
- d. **Inconsistent Implementation:** The success of QA processes has differed among institutions due to inconsistent application and a lack of standardization.

An analysis of case studies has shown that institutions with effective QA frameworks exhibit several shared practices:

- a. **Integrating QA into Institutional Culture:** Successful institutions have woven QA into their fundamental values and practices, promoting a culture of accountability and ongoing improvement.
- b. **Leveraging Technology for Data-Driven Decision-Making:** These institutions have employed technology to optimize data collection and analysis, allowing them to make decisions grounded in evidence.
- c. **Emphasizing Ongoing Professional Development:** Successful organizations have invested in professional development initiatives to equip faculty and staff with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective engagement in QA processes.

Moreover, nurturing a culture of accountability and innovation has proven essential in overcoming resistance and ensuring the long-term sustainability of QA initiatives. The success of QA frameworks is significantly influenced by an institution's commitment to fostering a culture of accountability, innovation, and adaptability. While QA frameworks serve as a foundation for establishing and maintaining standards, it is vital to address challenges such as resource constraints and opposition to QA initiatives to achieve sustained improvements. Effective QA transcends merely meeting regulatory requirements; it involves instilling a mindset of continuous improvement throughout the institution, thereby ensuring academic excellence and the institution's ability to adapt to evolving educational demands and global standards (Bista, 2025).

Methods and Materials

This paper has been accomplished based on the secondary sources of information. The research design employed so far has been exploratory and critically analytical. The use of scholarly research works and government reports on higher education have been massively used in order for pertaining to the topic of the study. The research method has been qualitative and the critical analysis of the data drawn from the secondary sources and primary observation of the researcher has been undertaken.

Discussion

Tribhuvan University—the oldest and largest university in Nepal—has been representing higher education in Nepal over numerous decades. The establishment of this university harbingered the milestone in higher education. Since its inception, it has been imparting education across the country, despite numerous contributions to the development of higher education nationwide, it has been facing countless challenges as well. This paper discusses some of the challenges including the failure in implementing the academic calendar, delay in results announcement, centralization of the administrative tasks in the Kathmandu Valley, delay in certificate issuance, lack of motivation among both teaching and non-teaching staffs, lack of digital infrastructure, insufficient e-libraries, updated curricula etc. Because of these problems, students from all zones and corners of the country have to suffer unnecessary hurdles. These challenges annoy students and on top of that, competent and promising students and teachers get to quit the university and seek for the better options for higher education usually overseas. The following are the major challenges those Nepalese academic institutions especially Tribhuvan University and its affiliated colleges face:

1. Failure in Implementation of Academic Calendar: Although the university has a tentative calendar, it is uncertain to be implemented almost every year. There are

multiple causes for this failure. First, the employees are not motivated due to lack of professional training and poor leadership. The appointment of the vice-chancellor is often influenced by the political figures. The appointment is hugely affected by the politicians as even the prime minister and education minister are chancellor and pro-chancellor whose affiliation is with political parties. Consequently, these authorities find hard to stay unbiased when appointing the vice-chancellor of the university. This process psychologically discourages deserving and visionary teachers from working honestly and wholeheartedly. The politically influenced professor usually becomes the vice-chancellor. When the leader is so, her/his competence and merit in terms of leadership gets questionable. Consequently, the implementation of the academic calendar is terribly affected. Many planned and unplanned holidays in the country due to political unrest and instability of the government terribly disturb the completion of the courses assigned for certain programs and levels. The teachers do not seem comfortable to do justice with the teaching and learning process as well.

2. **Centralization of Administrative Services:** The issuance of certificates and transcripts along with other mark sheets, provisional certificates, original certificates, registration cards, answer sheets examination and re-examination, the remuneration of examiners, invigilators, observers, superintendents is distributed from the Kathmandu Valley. Therefore, such employees outside the valley find hard to get their remuneration timely. The process becomes unnecessarily complicated that ultimately discourages them from engagement and effectiveness in undertaking responsibilities. Students are losing trust in the institution due to complications faced by them during the course and in the aftermath.
3. **Lack of Commitment among Professors and Authorities:** Most of the university teachers and authorities are engaged in different private institutions. Their loyalty to Tribhuvan University is questionable because they hardly spend full working hours in their respective campuses and offices. Although they draw full salaries and receive other facilities from Tribhuvan University, they work for other institutions. As a result, they fail to deliver quality education to the students. Professors are usually supposed to conduct research and improve education standards of the country. Similarly, the office bearers of Tribhuvan University are mostly associated with private institutions. Either they are big investors or proprietors of such institutions. The teachers learn this trend from the office bearers. The university authorities cannot control such anarchy because most of them are the pioneers of such a practice that they are permanent faculties of Tribhuvan University but their loyalty and commitment is with the private

institutions somewhere else. This is indeed a horrible challenge that terribly affects the quality education in the country.

4. **Lack of Governance & Control:** The leaders in this university are mostly selected based on the political approach. The professors of all levels having direct access to the ruling political parties are considered qualified to hold the official positions. Competence and connection as essentials to leadership are not much valued when appointing the officials in this university. Almost the same tendency pervades across all levels of leadership in such a huge academic organization. The employees including teaching and non-teaching staffs understand the procedures as usually used in appointment of their leaders. Therefore, they do not seem respectful and committed to their immediate authorities. The reflection of political instability faced by Nepal is tangible in Tribhuvan University as well. Although the employees and the leaders are supposed to collaborate in a disciplined manner to achieve the goal of the organization, the ideal is hardly translated into practice. Qualified and competent professors who have huge potentials to lead university and their respective departments lack motivation. With the repressed minds, their performance is getting poorer gradually. The order, system and structure are not functioning as per the ideals of public institutions that are to deliver the best services including teaching-learning and research activities in the university.
5. **Inadequate Digital Literacy:** Digital literacy refers to the skills needed to effectively use digital tools including computer, projector, online apps such as Google meet, zoom meet, social media, electronic devices such as smart phones, tablets etc. However, at Tribhuvan University, all teachers, students and administrative staffs are not competent at using these digital tools for efficiency and effectiveness in their performance. They lack competences in terms of digital teaching, learning, research, and administration. Without sufficient digital literacy, faculties are not being able to effectively integrate technology into their pedagogy. This limits innovation in teaching and learning. Traditional lecture-based teaching usually dominates, with less use of blended or online methods that could enhance engagement. Students with low digital skills are at a disadvantage, especially as education increasingly moves online. At the global level, universities are adopting digital methods (online courses, digital assessments, AI tools). Nevertheless, Tribhuvan University is lagging behind that result in remaining backward in imparting competitive quality education in a global job market. Digital literacy is a vital component of 21st-century skills. Without it,

qualified graduates from this university cannot be acceptable in the global market of jobs.

Conclusion

The colleges and universities need to form cross-functional teams that include students, faculty, and administrators to create, execute, and assess QA processes. Consistently they should focus on gathering feedback from all stakeholders to guarantee that QA initiatives address their needs and concerns. The higher academic institutions should provide extensive professional development programs to prepare faculty and staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage effectively in QA processes. These programs should encompass subjects such as data analysis, assessment design, and change management. They need to utilize digital tools and platforms to enhance the efficiency of data collection, analysis, and reporting. Establish systems for tracking and monitoring key performance indicators associated with QA, and leverage data to guide decision-making and promote ongoing improvement.

The paper has highlighted several challenges faced by Tribhuvan University, primarily relating to the failure in implementing the academic calendar, centralization of administrative services, lack of commitment among faculty, and governance issues. The academic calendar is often not adhered to due to unmotivated employees, influenced by inadequate leadership and political intervention in the appointment of the vice-chancellor. Centralized administrative processes complicate remuneration for staff outside Kathmandu, undermining their engagement and leading to student distrust. Besides, numerous professors divide their loyalty between the university and private institutions, affecting the quality of education. Governance is compromised as political affiliations overshadow competency in leadership roles, resulting in a lack of respect and commitment among staff, which is evident in the organization's overall dysfunction.

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