

Emotional Inclusion in the Workplace: Representation and Experiences of Exclusion Among Gender and Ethnic Minorities in Nepal's Civil Service

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Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of emotional inclusion within Nepal's civil service, focusing on the institutional representation and workplace experiences of women and ethnic minorities. Over the past 18 years, constitutional provisions and affirmative action reservation policies have significantly enhanced numerical representation, bringing 26,274 women and individuals from marginalized communities into the civil service. However, substantive inclusion remains incomplete, as these groups continue to confront systemic barriers to professional advancement and equitable opportunities. Utilizing a qualitative research design, this study synthesizes insights from an extensive literature review of over 60 sources alongside primary data gathered from seven semi-structured interviews with civil service personnel representing Women, Dalit, Madhesi, and Adivasi Janajati communities. Thematic analysis uncovers persistent institutional challenges, including the glass ceiling, a patriarchal organizational culture, caste-based stigma, implicit bias, microaggressions, and systematic exclusion from informal, power-induced networks. These barriers collectively undermine employees' sense of belonging, psychological safety, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. The findings demonstrate a significant disconnect between official policy pledges and actual workplace practices, highlighting the urgent need for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Accessibility (DEIBA)-focused interventions, such as unconscious bias training. Ultimately, this research argues that public organizations must transcend mere numerical diversity to foster authentic emotional inclusion. To cultivate genuine representation, enhance employee engagement, and maximize institutional effectiveness and public service logic, Nepal's civil service must build structural frameworks that institutionalize inclusive leadership, targeted mentorship initiatives, and robust emotional support systems for marginalized personnel.

Keywords: Emotional Inclusion, DEI, Marginalized Communities, Bureaucracy, Social Justice

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Introduction

The concept of emotional inclusion has recently emerged as a pivotal extension of traditional diversity and inclusion discourse within organizational studies. The term was formally articulated by Mollie Rogers Jean De Dieu in *Emotional Inclusion: A Humanizing Revolution at Work* (2023), wherein she contends that workplace inclusion must transcend formal diversity initiatives to prioritize the emotional and psychological experiences of employees. Prior diversity scholarship, particularly since the 1990s, predominantly emphasized demographic representation and equal opportunity through standard Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks. However, contemporary research increasingly demonstrates that numerical diversity alone does not ensure that employees feel respected, safe, or valued within an institutional environment (Ferdman, 2014; Shore et al., 2011). Emotional inclusion addresses this gap by highlighting critical dimensions such as psychological safety, interpersonal belonging, and the appreciation of individual uniqueness, thereby ensuring that employees can contribute authentically without fear of marginalization. Furthermore, empirical studies indicate that emotionally inclusive environments strengthen employee engagement, elevate self-esteem, and enhance psychological well-being, ultimately fostering long-term workplace productivity and organizational stability (Bailey et al., 2018).



Note. Emotional Inclusion: Word Cloud developed by Author (2025)

Nepal has made significant progress in expanding demographic representation within its public administration through comprehensive constitutional and policy reforms. The Constitution of Nepal (2015) and the Civil Service Act (1993) institutionalized affirmative action measures aimed at increasing the participation of women and historically marginalized communities in the civil service. These reservation systems and inclusive recruitment mechanisms were

introduced to correct deep-seated inequalities in state institutions and to promote a representative bureaucracy (Adhikari, 2019; Lawoti & Hangen, 2013). Yet, while these reforms have increased the presence of diverse social groups within the administrative system, both national and international scholarship consistently indicates that physical representation alone does not automatically translate into meaningful inclusion (Pitkin, 1967; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006). Organizational environments that lack respect, belonging, and psychological safety frequently create conditions where individuals are formally included yet remain socially and emotionally marginalized within institutional structures (Kahn, 1990; Shore et al., 2011). In Nepal's civil service, patriarchal workplace cultures, deep-rooted hierarchical power relations, and implicit forms of discrimination continue to undermine the emotional well-being and professional confidence of women and marginalized employees (Bhattarai et al., 2024; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025).

Recent empirical evidence underscores the critical importance of evaluating inclusion beyond mere numerical representation. According to the National Inclusion Commission, approximately 14,956 women and individuals from marginalized backgrounds entered the civil service within fifteen years of implementing the inclusion system, reflecting measurable structural progress (NIC, 2022; Bhul, 2025; Panthi, 2025). Nevertheless, these numerical gains are insufficient to guarantee genuine social and emotional integration in the workplace. True inclusion requires that employees experience substantive participation in decision-making processes, formal recognition of their contributions, and a supportive institutional culture that values their distinct identities and perspectives. When emotional inclusion is absent, personnel often experience reduced psychological safety, diminished self-esteem, and weakened organizational commitment—outcomes that negatively impact overall productivity and institutional stability (Knox, 2024; Bailey et al., 2018). Despite Nepal's progressive inclusive policy framework, emotional inclusion has not yet been integrated as a central priority within civil service reform initiatives. In this context, the present study examines the interface between structural representation and emotional inclusion in Nepal's civil service, aiming to understand how diversity-promoting policies translate into the everyday, lived workplace experiences of gender and ethnic minority employees.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: Emotional Inclusion and DEIB

Conceptual Evolution of Emotional Inclusion

Emotional inclusion denotes an organizational climate wherein an employee's distinct identity is validated, their voice is systematically heard, and their professional treatment is entirely devoid of discrimination. It encompasses deep-seated dimensions of institutional respect, psychological security, self-esteem, and mutual belonging, which collectively assure employees of their social and emotional safety (Kahn, 1990; Shore et al., 2011). The evolution of this

concept introduces a critical psychological dimension to traditional inclusion theory, positing that legal and structural presence alone is insufficient; employees must also experience a genuine sense of belonging and appreciation (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). Given the theoretical prominence of "Belonging" within Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Accessibility (DEIBA) frameworks, human resource practices must place the psychological state and professional confidence of personnel at the center of administrative design (Mor Barak, 2017). Empirical research consistently demonstrates that respectful and inclusive workplaces elevate employee morale, organizational commitment, and innovative capacity (Bailey et al., 2018). Within the intricate socio-political landscape of Nepal—where deeply entrenched ethnic, gender, and regional divisions heighten the risk of implicit workplace discrimination—achieving emotional inclusion is the sole mechanism through which structural representation gains practical meaning (Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025).

The DEIB Framework and the Emotional Dimension

The DEIB framework provides a robust analytical lens for examining the emotional underpinnings of organizational inclusion. While early diversity frameworks focused primarily on demographic representation and equity of opportunity, the deliberate integration of "Belonging" shifts the focus toward the subjective emotional and psychological experiences of employees within institutional spaces (Shore et al., 2011; Nishii, 2013). Belonging signifies the degree to which employees feel accepted, respected, and intrinsically connected to their organizational community. When marginalized personnel perceive that their unique perspectives are acknowledged and valued, they develop heightened psychological safety, which empowers them to articulate innovative ideas and participate substantively in decision-making processes (Edmondson, 1999; Osborne, 2020). Consequently, the DEIBA framework compels public institutions to transcend symbolic tokenism and cultivate environments where structural differences are constructively accommodated and institutionalized (Ferdman, 2014). Such environments solidify systemic trust between employees and public institutions, driving creativity, elevating engagement, and fostering long-term commitment to organizational goals (Mor Barak, 2017). Therefore, emotional inclusion must be deeply embedded into administrative policies, leadership paradigms, and governance structures to ensure that employees from diverse backgrounds can exercise their duties with dignity, confidence, and equitable opportunity.

Theoretical Synergy with Representative Bureaucracy

The conceptual apparatus of emotional inclusion is intrinsically tethered to the theory of representative bureaucracy, which contends that public institutions should demographically

mirror the diverse populations they serve. Within this paradigm, representation operates at two interdependent levels: descriptive representation, which entails the physical presence of individuals from diverse social strata within public entities, and substantive representation, which involves their active agency in shaping policy agendas and administrative outcomes (Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006; Selden & Selden, 2001). However, the operational efficacy of a representative bureaucracy depends heavily on the prevailing institutional climate. Emotional inclusion provides the baseline psychological conditions required for minority employees to comfortably express their perspectives, engage in rigorous policy discourse, and contribute meaningfully to administrative dynamics (Kellough & Selden, 2003).

In the absence of emotional safety and institutional belonging, minority civil servants frequently hesitate to participate actively, thereby stunting the progressive goals of inclusive recruitment mandates. Within Nepal's civil service, women and marginalized personnel have historically confronted institutionalized patriarchal structures, rigid hierarchical authority, and implicit biases that suppress their professional voice and institutional confidence (Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025; Bhattarai et al., 2024). Ultimately, emotional inclusion serves as the critical bridge transforming descriptive, structural representation into active, substantive participation enabling marginalized perspectives to inform policy formulation and public service delivery, thereby maximizing the ultimate efficacy of representative bureaucracy.

Nepalese Context: Representation, Bureaucratic Culture, and Emotional Inclusion

Nepal has instituted comprehensive constitutional and legal mechanisms to cultivate inclusive representation within its public administration. The Interim Constitution of Nepal (2007) and the subsequent Constitution of Nepal (2015) formalised proportional inclusion across state structures. This constitutional mandate was operationalised through amendments to the Civil Service Act and the introduction of affirmative action reservation policies within the Public Service Commission (PSC) recruitment processes (Bhul, 2025). These regulatory frameworks specifically reserve quotas for women, Dalits, Indigenous Nationalities (Adivasi Janajatis), Madhesis, persons with disabilities, and candidates from geographically backward regions.

Consequently, the demographic representation of historically marginalized communities within the civil service has steadily expanded. According to data from the 66th Public Service Commission Annual Report, approximately 26,274 individuals from these reserved categories entered the civil service over the last eighteen years via these inclusive recruitment pathways (PSC, 2025), as detailed below in Table 1. Yet, while these structural reforms signify monumental progress toward achieving a representative bureaucracy, public administration scholars caution that numerical inclusion does not inherently guarantee substantive or meaningful participation in governance (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013; Adhikari, 2019; Panthi, 2025).

Table 1: Numerical Participation of Women and Marginalized Communities in Last 18 Years

Fiscal Year (BS)	Women	Adivasi Janajati	Madhesi	Dalit	Disabled People	Backward Region	Total Quota	Total Open	Ratio
2081/082	365	273	233	96	46	43	1056	1266	1:0.83
2080/081	341	282	248	104	49	42	1066	1340	1:0.80
2079/080	500	401	310	133	58	58	1460	1935	1:0.75
2078/079	380	288	191	74	53	37	1023	1433	1:0.71
2077/078	9	6	2	1	2	0	20	28	1:0.71
2076/077	39	26	24	7	3	4	103	130	1:0.79
2075/076	625	509	409	168	95	77	1883	2394	1:0.79
2074/075	1088	858	711	292	163	132	3244	4007	1:0.81
2073/074	1383	1026	901	385	189	142	4026	5273	1:0.76
2072/073	797	629	503	213	101	95	2338	3300	1:0.71
2071/072	639	547	454	168	95	76	1979	2783	1:0.71
2070/071	626	509	384	173	91	71	1854	2767	1:0.67
2069/070	372	318	254	106	51	35	1136	1707	1:0.67
2068/069	352	280	212	99	40	30	1013	1805	1:0.56
2067/068	471	371	300	105	59	43	1349	2487	1:0.54
2066/067	495	368	319	142	64	43	1431	2080	1:0.69
2065/066	117	94	91	36	15	12	365	840	1:0.43
2064/065	366	245	183	84	33	17	928	2228	1:0.42
Grand Total	8965	7030	5729	2386	1,207	957	26274	37803	1:0.69

Note. 18 Years Inclusion Demographic in Civil Service, 66th Report, Public Service Commission, 2081/82 (2025)

Despite improvements in recruitment diversity, structural inequalities remain deeply entrenched within the hierarchy of Nepal's civil service. Senior administrative and leadership positions continue to be dominated by historically privileged groups—particularly the Khas-Arya elite, who have traditionally monopolized bureaucratic authority. This imbalance reflects patterns of elite capture, wherein formal inclusion policies coexist with resilient, informal power structures. Consequently, many civil servants from marginalized backgrounds confront a "glass ceiling" that obstructs their progression into senior decision-making roles, irrespective of their qualifications. Empirical literature suggests that informal power networks, implicit psychological biases, and caste-based hierarchies continue to dictate promotion trajectories and leadership access within the bureaucracy (Bhattarai et al., 2024; Bhul, 2026; Sundas, 2024). As a result, female and minority civil servants frequently report a diminished voice in policy discourse and an absence of institutional support systems for career advancement (Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025).

This deep-seated workplace culture heavily dictates how inclusion policies materialize in practice. Nepal's civil service has historically evolved within a rigid, hierarchical administrative system characterized by extensive red-tapism, process-oriented inertia, and patriarchal norms. Scholars observe that the historical dominance of Khas-Arya bureaucratic traditions can cultivate an unsupportive, exclusionary work environment for personnel from socio-culturally diverse backgrounds (Guragain, 2024; Lawoti & Hangen, 2013). Within these institutional settings, marginalized employees frequently encounter subtle discrimination, pervasive microaggressions, and systematic exclusion from the informal networks where critical decision-making occurs (Shore et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007). These lived experiences collectively erode psychological safety, diminish professional confidence, and suppress active participation in organizational life—ultimately compromising employee morale and overall institutional effectiveness (Bailey et al., 2018; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025). Therefore, institutionalizing emotional inclusion alongside existing structural mandates is vital to ensure that demographic representation in Nepal's civil service translates into equitable governance and substantive participation.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design, synthesizing secondary document analysis with primary qualitative interviews to explore the lived dimensions of emotional inclusion within Nepal's civil service. The secondary data comprises an extensive review of over 60 national and international sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government records, and contemporary scholarship on public administration, workplace inclusion, and organizational psychological safety (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). Foundational legal and institutional frameworks—including the Constitution of Nepal (2015), the Civil Service Act (1993), and annual reports published by the National Inclusion Commission—were systematically analyzed to situate the inquiry within Nepal's evolving public policy landscape.

Theoretically, this study is informed by Jean De Dieu's *Emotional Inclusion: A Humanizing Revolution at Work* (2023), which posits that emotional and psychological well-being are inseparable from genuine workplace integration. Utilizing a qualitative methodology allows for a nuanced, deep-dive exploration into the structural, cultural, and experiential dynamics of emotional inclusion. These qualitative dimensions are often obscured by purely quantitative metrics, particularly within a rigid bureaucratic apparatus characterized by deep-rooted processism, hierarchical compliance, and entrenched social stratifications.

Table 2: Demographical Description and Coding of Interview Participants

Participant Code	Interview Particiapnts	Gender	Ethnicity	Category	Service/ Department	Age	Joined (BS)
KII-1	Sita	Female	Open	Open	Administration	35	2068
KII-2	Laxmi	Female	Adibasi Janajati	Minority	Education	40	2070
KII-3	Rekha	Female	Madhesi	Minority	Administration	36	2067
KII-4	Radha	Female	Dalit	Minority	Finance	39	2073
KII-5	Ram	Male	Adibasi Janajati	Minority	Account	42	2068
KII-6	Shyam	Male	Madhesi	Minority	Administration	41	2069
KII-7	Prakash	Male	Dalit	Minority	Audit	40	2072

Note. Interview Data (2026)

The primary data consists of seven semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2025 and January 2026 with civil servants from diverse gender and ethnic minority backgrounds. Purposive sampling was utilized to select participants capable of providing deep, nuanced insights into bureaucratic workplace culture, emotional inclusion, and institutional practices. To ensure balanced intersectional representation across gender, ethnic, and social strata, the cohort comprised four women (one from the Open category, one Adivasi Janajati, one Madhesi, and one Dalit) and three men (one Adivasi Janajati, one Madhesi, and one Dalit). Additionally, snowball sampling was employed to access individuals within specific institutional networks, utilizing participant referrals to identify colleagues with relevant lived experiences.

The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed participants to articulate their professional experiences in rich detail while strictly maintaining institutional anonymity and confidentiality. The generated data was analyzed using a systematic thematic coding process, wherein primary interview narratives were triangulated with secondary documentary evidence to identify recurring patterns regarding representation, emotional well-being, psychological safety, and workplace exclusion. This integrative analytical approach ensures that both macro-level structural policies and micro-level lived experiences converge to form a comprehensive, grounded understanding of emotional inclusion within Nepal's civil service.

Table 3: Integrated Literature Review Matrix

Focus Area	Author(s) / Documents (Year)	Key Arguments / Findings and Relevance to Emotional Inclusion & Civil Service
Nepal: Legal & Structural Foundations of Inclusion	Constitution of Nepal (2015); Civil Service Act (1993); Public Service Commission [PSC] (2025); National Inclusion Commission [NIC] (2022); Asian Development Bank [ADB] (2024)	These documents establish the legal "quota" system. Findings indicate that while legislative acts created entry points for marginalized groups, the structural framework often prioritizes numerical representation over the actual emotional or professional integration of recruits. Social inclusion analysis is now considered a prerequisite for sustainable project and program design in South Asia and Nepal.
Evolution of Inclusive Governance in Nepal	Bhul (2021, 2025; 2026); Panthi (2025); Sundas (2024); Lawoti & Hangen (2013); Guragain (2024); Bhattarai et al. (2024)	Evidence suggests that while Nepal leads in policy design, it struggles with transforming legal mandates into lived results. Governance remains influenced by traditional elite structures, creating a "systemic exclusion" that negatively impacts the emotional well-being and sense of belonging for minority groups within the civil service hierarchy.
Emotional Inclusion & Psychological Safety	Jean De Dieu (2023); Merlini, Humphrey, & Smith (2025); Prajapati (2025); Woods et al. (2024); Knox (2024); Rodrigues & Junça Silva (2024)	Workplace inclusion serves as a direct buffer against emotional exhaustion. Emotional Intelligence (EI) significantly predicts employee engagement, suggesting that "Emotional Inclusion" is the critical missing link required to make structural diversity effective. EI is further linked to "flourishing," which is essential for long-term workforce resilience.
Barriers: Resistance, Exhaustion & Microaggressions	Bhul (2025; 2026); Plaut et al. (2020); Liaquat & Balcetis (2023); Sue et al. (2007); Isirabahenda et al. (2026); Moore et al. (2010); Brauer (2024)	Systemic barriers include "Diversity Resistance" and heavy "Emotional Labour." Minority members often perform "surface acting" to fit into dominant cultures, leading to chronic stress. Microaggressions erode psychological safety, while dominant groups may exhibit "backlash" behaviors when inclusive policies are perceived as status threats.

Intersectionality & Global Trends (2024–2026)	McKinsey (2025); OECD (2025); UNDP Nepal (2025); Lukkien et al. (2025); Spasova (2026); Andoh (2025); Duce (2025); Barnes (2024)	Modern inclusion must be intersectional, accounting for the overlapping effects of gender, motherhood, and ethnicity. Emerging trends include using AI for inclusive growth, though sustaining EDI efforts is becoming increasingly difficult in the post-pandemic "new normal." The "DEIBA" framework is rising to ensure accessibility is integrated with belonging.
Engagement & Organizational Performance	Shrestha & Bhujel (2025); Shrestha (2019); Bailey et al. (2015); Kahn (1990); Osborne (2020); Kiptulon et al. (2024); Venesia & Ramadania (2025), Zhang, (2025)	Inclusive practices are positively correlated with job performance in public enterprises. Psychological engagement is a primary driver of organizational efficiency. Systematic reviews confirm that organizational culture directly influences work-related stress, which in turn dictates the overall performance of the civil service.

Note. Integrated Literature Review conducted by author (2026)

Results and Findings

The empirical findings of this study are derived from an integrative triangulation of secondary documentary evidence and primary narrative data. The secondary data comprises a Literature Review Matrix (LRM) that systematically synthesizes over 60 national and international books, peer-reviewed articles, government records, and policy papers (conceptually mapped in Figures 1 and 2). This structural overview is paired with primary data collected from seven semi-structured qualitative interviews with civil servants from diverse gender and ethnic minority backgrounds representing multiple functional state departments, including administration, finance, education, audit, and accounts (detailed in Table 2).

The generated data was analyzed using a systematic thematic approach, coding both the documentary source materials and the lived interview narratives to isolate critical institutional patterns. These include recruitment experiences, pervasive microaggressions, hierarchical exclusion, psychological safety, and barriers to leadership access. The primary interviews proved indispensable for uncovering the nuanced, subjective dimensions of emotional inclusion that purely quantitative metrics and macro-level policy declarations inherently obscure. Ultimately, this rigorous triangulation between literature and lived narratives enhances the credibility, analytical depth, and validity of the study within the conceptual parameters of public service logic (Osborne, 2020).

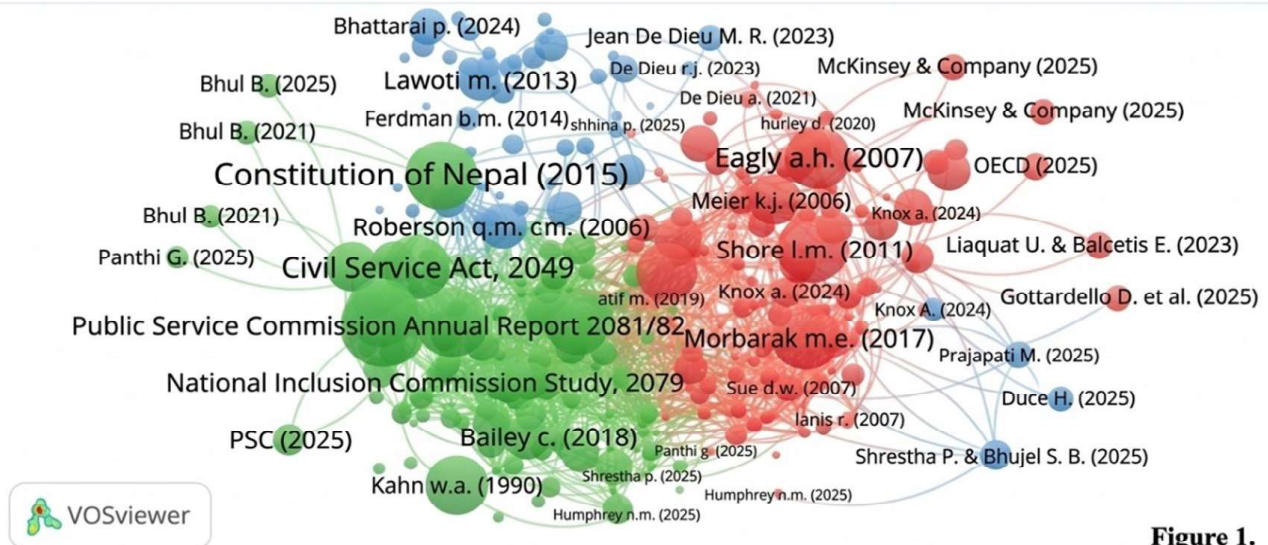
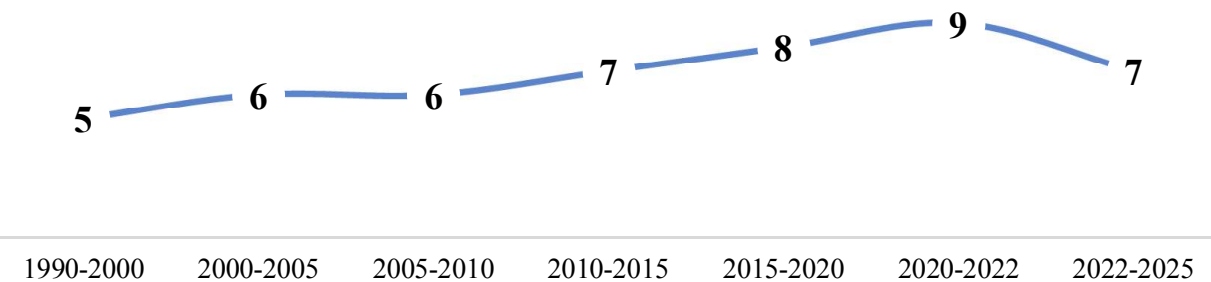


Figure 1.
Bibliometric Network of Nepali
Civil Service & Inclusion Literature

Source: Generated based on the reference list by the Author.

Figure 2. No. of Literatures Selected & Reviewed



Results: Experiences of Emotional Inclusion and Exclusion

Institutional Entry and the Paradox of Reservation Quotas

Entry into Nepal's civil service reflects a complex duality: it represents both the tangible structural gains of affirmative action policies and a source of profound emotional friction for minority personnel. Participants universally highlighted that reservation quotas were instrumental in facilitating their institutional entry. For instance, KII-2 (Laxmi, Adivasi Janajati) stated:

"Without the quota system, I would never have had a chance to compete with others; it opened the door for me."

However, the narratives reveal that while structural mechanisms provide access, they simultaneously cultivate a pervasive undercurrent of institutional stigma. KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) remarked:

"I was able to join because of the reserved seats, but I often feel colleagues question whether I am here because of merit or quota."

This sentiment was closely echoed by KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi), who observed:

"Some colleagues make comments implying my selection was quota-driven, not earned through hard work."

These lived experiences directly validate existing literature, illustrating that while legal frameworks successfully expand descriptive representation, they frequently introduce severe workplace tensions regarding meritocracy and competence (Constitution of Nepal, 2015; Bhattarai et al., 2024; Panthi, 2025). Consequently, achieving emotional inclusion at the entry phase depends not merely on statutory policy compliance, but fundamentally on the interpersonal attitudes of peers and the overarching organizational discourse surrounding affirmative action.

Bureaucratic Workplace Culture and Informal Marginalization

Beyond the entry phase, participants consistently characterized the day-to-day civil service environment as highly rigid, patriarchal, and heavily dictated by informal power networks. Many minority employees reported experiencing subtle forms of systemic discrimination, institutional microaggressions, and routine exclusion from critical informational pipelines. Elaborating on this dynamic, KII-5 (Ram, Adivasi Janajati) noted:

"Sometimes I am left out of discussions or meetings that affect my work, even when my role is relevant."

This systematic exclusion from the true centers of institutional power was reinforced by KII-6 (Shyam, Madhesi), who added:

"Decisions are often made in informal spaces I cannot access; I feel like an outsider."

Female participants emphasized intersecting gendered and cultural dynamics that actively suppressed their professional agency. KII-2 (Laxmi) explained:

"Even when I have suggestions, senior staff dismiss them or I am not invited to sit in critical meetings."

These narratives match established public administration scholarship, which identifies deep-seated red-tapism, rigid processism, and the historical dominance of Khas-Arya cultural norms as formidable structural barriers within Nepal's bureaucracy (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025). Ultimately, these patterns of informal exclusion and hierarchical inertia foster a profound sense of workplace marginalization, proving definitively that physical presence within an organization does not automatically translate into emotional inclusion.

Emotional Climate and Intersectional Psychological Safety

The overarching emotional climate and the accompanying sense of institutional belonging varied sharply along intersectional lines. While dominant-group participants expressed high levels of systemic validation, minority civil servants reported acute marginalization. For instance, KII-1 (Sita, Open category) observed:

"I feel valued and heard in my team; my opinions are taken seriously, which makes me confident at work."

In stark contrast, KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) articulated a profound lack of institutional visibility and structural validation:

"Even after completing my tasks well, my efforts are rarely acknowledged. I hesitate to speak up because I feel I will be judged."

This lack of psychological safety created widespread apprehension regarding professional expression and innovation. Emphasizing this systemic hesitation, KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi) noted:

"I often stay quiet in meetings; I am afraid speaking up will create problems or backlash."

These empirical patterns reinforce contemporary organizational literature asserting that authentic emotional inclusion demands systemic belonging, interpersonal respect, and psychological safety, none of which are guaranteed by mere numerical representation (Jean De Dieu, 2023; Rodrigues & Junça-Silva, 2024; Shore et al., 2011). Ultimately, the prevailing emotional climate operates as a primary determinant of employee motivation, intrinsic engagement, and perceptions of procedural justice within the state bureaucracy.

Structural Barriers to Career Progression and Leadership

Upward professional mobility and leadership acquisition continue to present formidable challenges for marginalized personnel. Multiple interviewees detailed decelerated promotion trajectories and implicit structural barriers that obstruct entry into senior administrative roles due to an absence of institutional backing and targeted professional encouragement. Reflecting on this institutional barrier, KII-2 (Laxmi, Adivasi Janajati) shared:

"I feel there is a ceiling above which women and minorities rarely move, no matter how qualified we are."

This critique of formal meritocracy was extended by KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi), who underscored the impact of cronyism and informal power dynamics:

"Opportunities for leadership are limited, and informal networks decide who gets promoted more than actual performance."

Furthermore, the lack of institutional socialization mechanisms further disadvantages minority personnel. KII-7 (Prakash, Dalit) observed:

"Mentorship and visibility in key projects matter for promotion, but minority employees are often left out."

These documented hurdles perfectly align with public administration literature tracing the persistence of glass ceilings and entrenched institutional blockages within Nepal's civil service (Bhul, 2021; Bhattarai et al., 2024; Zhang, 2025). Emotional and social exclusion at senior administrative tiers systematically reproduces demographic disparities, thereby stunting substantive representation in public sector governance.

Coping Mechanisms and Strategic Resilience

Faced with systemic emotional exclusion, marginalized civil servants deploy distinct individual and collective strategies to preserve professional resilience and mental well-being. At the individual level, personnel rely on meticulous performance standards, emotional self-regulation, and targeted interpersonal diplomacy. As KII-5 (Ram, Adivasi Janajati) explained:

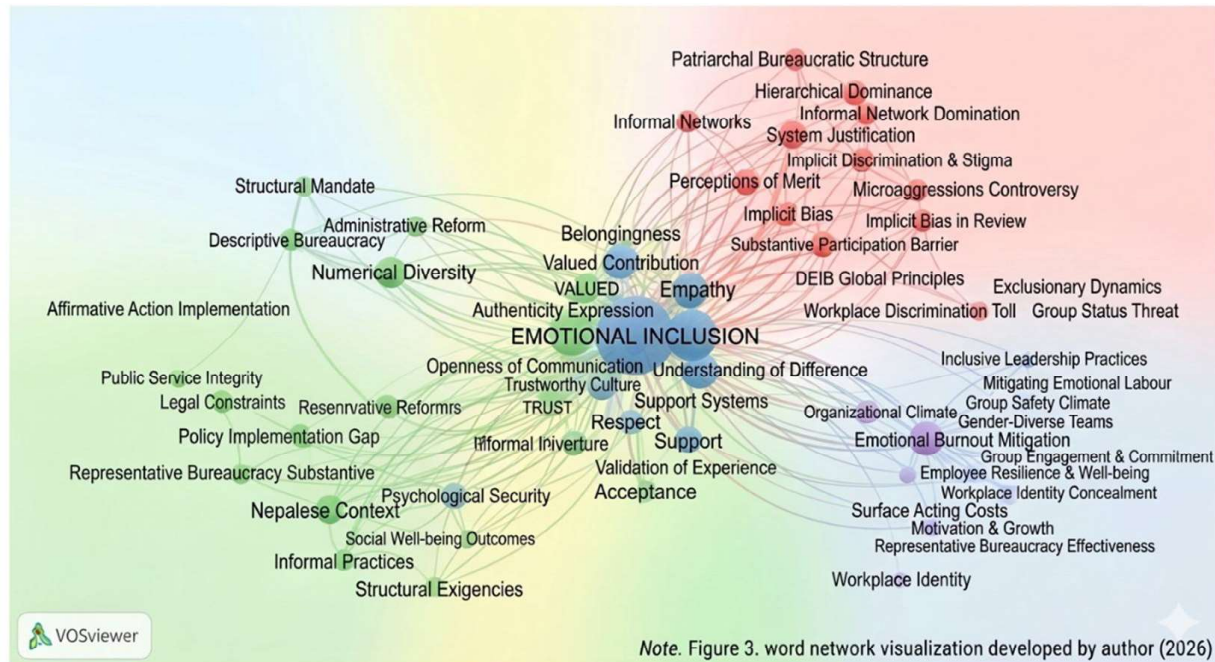
"I try to keep my work flawless and stay professional; it helps me gain respect even in difficult situations."

Collectively, marginalized civil servants actively mitigate institutional alienation by engineering informal counter-spaces and horizontal peer support networks. KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) illustrated this collaborative approach:

"We women and minority colleagues often meet informally to share experiences and advice; it gives us strength to keep going."

These strategic adaptations align with broader organizational behavior findings, which demonstrate that personal resilience and micro-level social support systems are vital for maintaining public service motivation and psychological equilibrium within highly rigid, patriarchal, and exclusionary administrative systems (Bailey et al., 2018; Ferdman, 2014; Mor Barak, 2017).

Findings: B. Major Causes of Emotional Exclusion: Nepal's Public Administration



The intersections of deeply rooted patriarchal thinking and institutionalized hierarchical dominance within Nepal's civil service constitute a formidable barrier to authentic emotional inclusion. Participants consistently characterized formal decision-making arenas as exclusionary spaces dominated by male seniority and regulated by informal, high-caste networks. Illustrating this structural marginalization, KII-2 (Laxmi, Adivasi Janajati) noted:

"Even when I have ideas or suggestions, they are often dismissed because the room is dominated by senior men."

This systemic silencing of non-dominant identities was further corroborated by KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi), who remarked:

"Women and minority staff are rarely asked for input in meetings; it feels like our voices do not matter."

Such restrictive institutional environments severely constrict access to critical leadership positions, targeted mentorship, and strategic decision-making opportunities, thereby diminishing employees' professional self-esteem and sense of belonging. Organizational research demonstrates that employees operating within rigid, patriarchal bureau-cultures frequently suppress core aspects of their identities, curtail their institutional participation, and exhibit lower long-term commitment to organizational mandates (Bhattarai et al., 2024; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kabeer, 2005; Mor Barak, 2017). Ultimately, the implicit biases perpetuated by these entrenched subcultures suppress innovative capacity and compromise overall administrative effectiveness (Jean De Dieu, 2023; Shore et al., 2011).

The Glass Ceiling and Truncated Leadership Access

Restricted upward mobility and the systematic exclusion of minority civil servants from senior, policy-shaping roles actively reinforce structural emotional alienation. In the absence of representative diversity at the highest administrative echelons, female and marginalized civil servants frequently perceive that their insights are systematically undervalued. As KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) shared:

"We are present in the office, but our ideas rarely influence policy or strategic decisions. It is as if we are invisible at higher levels."

This structural opacity within the promotional pipeline was further illuminated by KII-5 (Ram, Adivasi Janajati), who observed:

"Opportunities for advancement depend more on networks and identity than performance."

Public administration scholarship confirms that a lack of diverse representation within leadership tiers severely degrades workplace psychological safety, employee engagement, and institutional trust, often culminating in profound emotional exhaustion (Bailey et al., 2018; Kellough & Selden, 2003; Meier & Nicholson-Crotty, 2006). The resilience of this administrative glass ceiling demonstrates that descriptive, numerical representation cannot substitute for genuine emotional integration, ultimately degrading the quality of policy implementation and public service delivery (Bhattarai et al., 2024; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025; Osborne, 2020).

Everyday Prejudice, Microaggressions, and Implicit Bias

Unconscious cognitive biases, pervasive microaggressions, and deeply embedded identity-based stereotypes collectively foster a psychologically hazardous environment that actively sabotages emotional inclusion. Highlighting the weight of subtle, everyday prejudice, KII-6 (Shyam, Madhesi) reported:

"Sometimes colleagues make offhand remarks about my background; it makes me hesitant to participate fully in meetings."

Even when formal, objective metrics appear fair, the underlying interpersonal dynamics can remain exclusionary. KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi) articulated this disconnect, noting:

"I feel judged for my ethnicity, even when my work is evaluated fairly on paper."

These lived experiences substantiate extensive literature proving that implicit discrimination erodes employee morale, professional efficacy, and organizational creativity (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007). Evaluated through a comprehensive DEIBA framework, structural presence devoid of psychological safety and authentic interpersonal belonging fails to

yield an inclusive workplace, undermining the democratic efficacy of a representative bureaucracy (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Mor Barak, 2017; Zhang, 2025).

Institutional Deficits in Grievance Redress and Support Systems

The systemic lack of functional, responsive institutional mechanisms for grievance redress, emotional support, and formal sponsorship significantly exacerbates the emotional exclusion of marginalized civil servants. Employees who encounter active bias or systemic marginalization are left with virtually no safe, formalized avenues to seek administrative remedy or career guidance. KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) explained:

"There is no formal system to report discrimination safely; we rely on colleagues for support, which is not always enough."

The absence of proactive organizational socialization and advocacy frameworks leaves minority personnel vulnerable to professional isolation, as KII-2 (Laxmi, Adivasi Janajati) added:

"Without mentoring or peer networks, navigating the bureaucracy feels isolating and discouraging."

Organizational theory emphasizes that in the absence of institutionalized support architectures and a supportive, rights-based organizational culture, emotional inclusion cannot materialize, regardless of how progressive an institution's recruitment quotas may be (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025; Zhang, 2025). These glaring structural deficits permanently impair an employee's sense of institutional recognition, directly stunting public service motivation, innovation, and long-term commitment to the state apparatus.

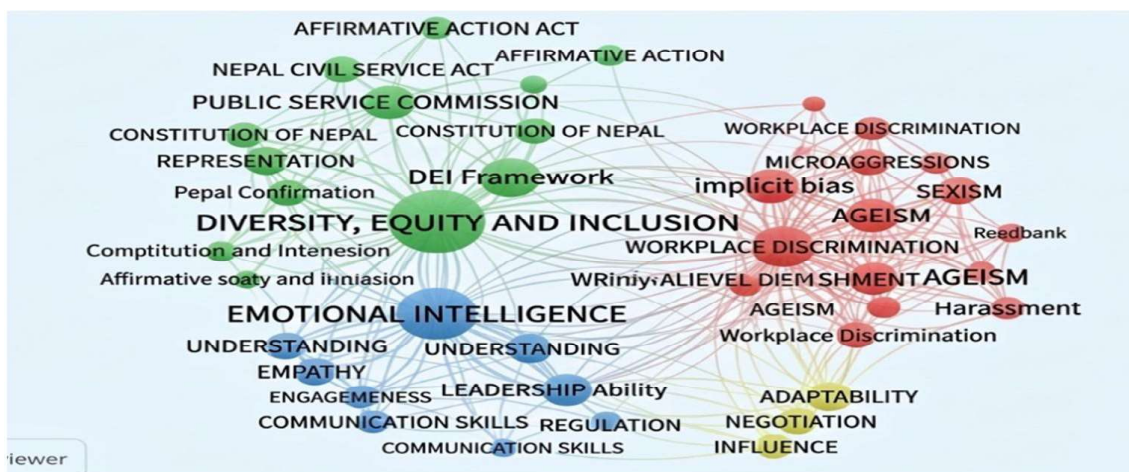


Figure 4. DEI and Nepal, developed by author (2026)

Discussion

Tracing the Chasm: From Descriptive Representation to Emotional Inclusion

Nepal has achieved significant milestones in institutionalizing descriptive representation within its public administration through robust constitutional and legislative mandates. The Constitution of Nepal (2072 B.S. / 2015) and the Civil Service Act (2049 B.S./1993) established formal quota allocations and affirmative action pathways specifically engineered for women, Dalits, Adivasi Janajatis, Madhesi, and individuals from geographically backward regions. Empirical evidence from the 66th Public Service Commission Annual Report (2025) validates this progress, proving that 26,274 civil servants from marginalized backgrounds successfully entered the state apparatus over an 18-year period.

However, the qualitative data uncovers a stark, structural disconnect between raw numerical representation and the actual day-to-day workplace climate. As KII-3 (Rekha, Madhesi) reflected:

"Being recruited through quota gives access, but colleagues still treat us as outsiders; merit is questioned."

This sentiment is further magnified by KII-4 (Radha, Dalit), who noted:

"Numbers may be increasing, but I still feel invisible in meetings."

This critical gap underscores that formal, statutory representation does not automatically guarantee interpersonal psychological safety, structural belonging, or mutual respect. These lived insights confirm foundational organizational literature asserting that authentic emotional inclusion is the vital mechanism required to translate superficial structural diversity into meaningful, substantive participation (Jean De Dieu, 2023; Shore et al., 2011; Ferdman, 2014).

Bureaucratic Inertia and Intractable Structural Constraints

The rigid, highly hierarchical, and patriarchal administrative subculture of Nepal's civil service historically dominated by Khas-Arya elite traditions exerts severe constraints on the realization of emotional inclusion. The generated narratives demonstrate that institutional seniority, high-caste informal networks, and exclusionary social norms heavily dictate an individual's access to strategic decision-making, formal mentorship, and career advancement. Elaborating on this institutional dynamic, KII-2 (Laxmi, Adivasi Janajati) observed:

"Even if we perform well, promotions and visibility depend on informal alliances and seniority, not merit."

These institutional pathologies manifesting as pervasive red-tapism, process-oriented inertia, and elite capture systematically reinforce social exclusion. They construct hidden, informal

power dynamics that suppress the professional voice and active agency of minority civil servants (Lawoti & Hangen, 2013; Bhattarai et al., 2024; Shrestha & Bhujel, 2025). Such deep-seated bureaucratic hierarchies exacerbate implicit psychological bias, institutionalized discrimination, and chronic emotional insecurity, proving that internal organizational culture plays a far more determinative role in shaping inclusion than formal legal frameworks.

The Policy Practice Disconnect and the Stigma of Competence

Despite the implementation of progressive legislative frameworks, practical execution within public institutions routinely fails to deliver an emotionally inclusive workspace. While the Public Service Commission and the National Inclusion Commission have successfully achieved their descriptive recruitment targets, informal, everyday workplace practices actively stall substantive integration. This policy–practice gap is captured by KII-5 (Ram, Adivasi Janajati), who stated:

"Policies exist on paper, but in reality, our contributions are overlooked and our voices ignored in key decisions."

Furthermore, quota-driven recruitment frequently triggers a negative institutional feedback loop known as the "stigma of competence" or "merit stigma." Within this dynamic, the professional credentials and intellectual capabilities of minority personnel are reflexively questioned by dominant-group peers, creating severe internalized psychological stress and external professional friction (Plaut et al., 2020; Liaquat & Balcetis, 2023). This enduring policy–practice disconnect illustrates that macro-level structural reforms and public service logic—when completely detached from targeted organizational socialization, strategic mentorship, and psychological safety architectures cannot fully achieve systemic diversity goals (Shore et al., 2011; Mor Barak, 2017; Osborne, 2020).

Intersectional Realities and Layered Administrative Marginalization

The dynamics of emotional inclusion are further complicated by intersectional social positions, where gender, caste, and regional ethnicity interact synergistically to intensify institutional barriers. Female civil servants from marginalized backgrounds confront layered, compounding vectors of professional discrimination, navigating concurrent experiences of structural sexism, institutionalized casteism, and systematic exclusion from informal decision-making hubs. As KII-4 (Radha, Dalit) powerfully observed:

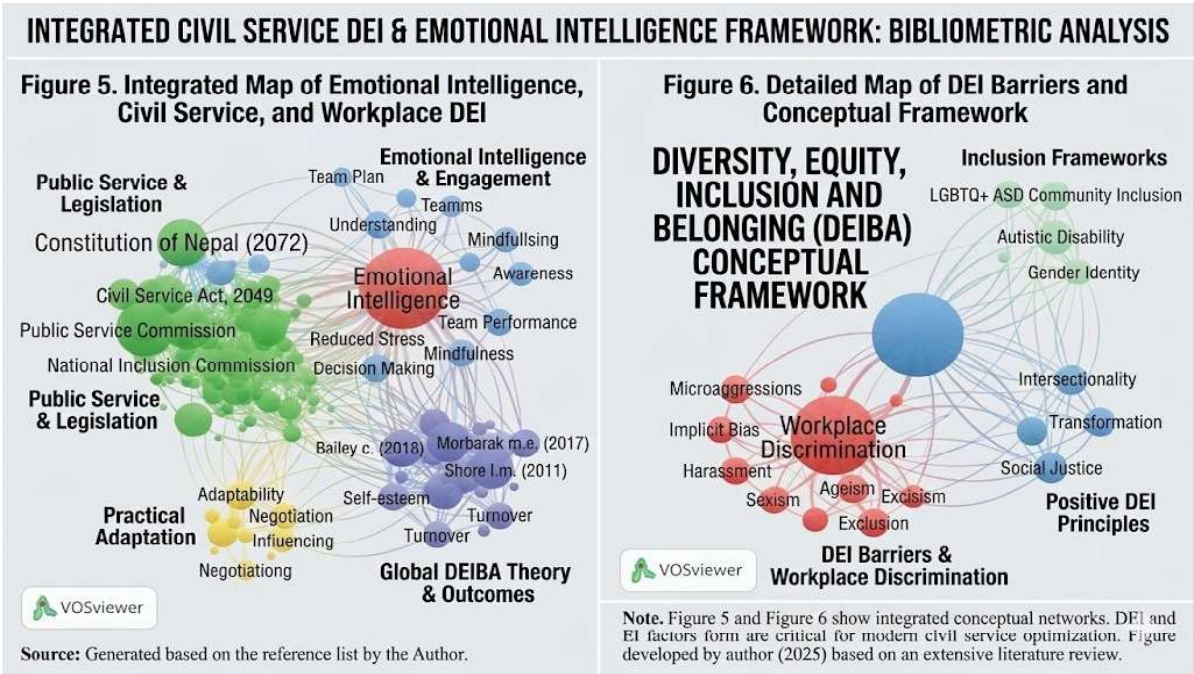
"Being a woman and Dalit makes it doubly difficult to get recognition; we are often excluded from important decisions."

Simultaneously, male civil servants from regional minority backgrounds encounter unique structural boundaries. KII-6 (Shyam, Madhesi) remarked:

"Madhesi men may have quotas, but hierarchical norms and cultural biases still limit our voice."

These intersectional realities match contemporary Nepalese sociology and public administration literature detailing the persistence of implicit microaggressions, cultural prejudices, and structural exclusion within the civil service (Sue et al., 2007; Bhattarai et al., 2024; Sundas, 2024). Intersectional analysis demonstrates that achieving authentic emotional inclusion requires a deliberate, multi-dimensional focus on overlapping identities to cultivate safety, belonging, and equity across all tiers of the state bureaucracy.

Summary Matrix of Discussion Outcomes: This analytical synthesis proves that while Nepal has made significant descriptive gains, substantive and emotional inclusion remain severely restricted by informal exclusion, institutional stigma, and intersectional barriers (visually mapped in Figures 5 and 6). Comprehensively transforming bureaucratic culture through the integration of Emotional Intelligence, targeted DEIBA frameworks, and formalized grievance support systems is imperative. This structural evolution is critical to translate formal legal representation into psychologically safe public participation, thereby optimizing both employee well-being and overall state effectiveness.



The next step in the evolution of Nepal’s civil service is moving beyond numerical representation toward genuine emotional inclusion. While structural reforms, quotas, and inclusive recruitment policies have increased the presence of women and marginalized groups—

including Dalits, Madhesis, Adivasi Janajatis, and employees from backward regions—to 26,274 over 18 years (PSC, 2025), interviews and literature reveal persistent barriers. Patriarchal norms, hierarchical structures, Hindu-Khas Arya dominance, implicit biases, and informal exclusion prevent employees from experiencing belonging, recognition, and psychological safety. Emotional inclusion, as defined by Jean De Dieu (2023), emphasizes accepting emotions without judgment and prioritizing the emotional well-being of all employees, creating conditions for active participation, voice, and engagement. Research confirms that emotionally inclusive workplaces reduce exhaustion, enhance morale, and improve organizational commitment (Bailey et al., 2018; Humphrey et al., 2025; Mor Barak, 2017). Without embedding emotional inclusion, structural gains risk remaining symbolic, limiting policy effectiveness, innovation, and the quality of public service delivery (Shore et al., 2011) and stalling the institutionalization of public service logic (Osborne, 2020).

To translate numerical inclusion into substantive inclusion, targeted policy and institutional reforms are essential. Emotional inclusion should be explicitly incorporated into the Federal Civil Service Act and HR policies, alongside regular training in inclusive leadership and emotional intelligence for all administrative and decision-making levels. Safe grievance handling mechanisms, mentoring programs, peer support networks, counseling, reflection exercises, and tools such as emotions wheels can foster psychological safety, belonging, and self-esteem (Humphrey et al., 2025). Leadership should actively dismantle informal barriers, elite capture, and discriminatory practices, while monitoring mechanisms track not only recruitment numbers but also employees' lived experiences. These interventions collectively strengthen engagement, productivity, and long-term organizational commitment, while also enhancing service delivery, social justice, and inclusive governance. Emotional inclusion, therefore, is a critical foundation for Nepal's federal and equitable public administration, ensuring that diversity is meaningful, practical, and sustainable.

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