



Research Article

Exploring the Role of Public and Private Partnerships in Educational Development of Nepal

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Article Information

Received: 17 September 2024

Revised version received: 16 October 2024

Accepted: 19 October 2024

Published: 25 October 2024

Cite this article as:

R. Singh (2024) *Int. J. Soc. Sc. Manage.* 11(4): 136-140. DOI: [10.3126/ijssm.v11i4.70985](https://doi.org/10.3126/ijssm.v11i4.70985)

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Peer reviewed under authority of IJSSM

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Keywords: Public-private partnerships; Nepal's educational development; infrastructure; teacher training; educational quality.

Abstract

The education system of Nepal has undergone significant transformation in the last few decades. The transition is observed from a primarily government-driven model to one that increasingly incorporates public-private partnerships (PPPs). This paper aims to explore the role of these partnerships in enhancing educational quality, access, and equity in Nepal. By examining case studies, policy frameworks, and outcomes of various initiatives, it is assessed the efficacy of PPPs in addressing the systemic challenges faced by the Nepali education sector. The research also provides critical insights into how these partnerships can be leveraged to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education. Additionally, this paper also explores the role of PPPs in enhancing Nepal's educational development by improving infrastructure, access to education, teacher training, and overall quality of education. Through a review of existing literature and case studies, this study assesses the effectiveness, challenges, and potential of PPPs in transforming educational landscape of Nepal.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental human right and an essential tool for the socio-economic development of any nation. In Nepal, the education sector has faced significant challenges, including disparities in access, quality, and infrastructure, especially in the rural areas (Ghimire, 2019; Poudel, 2021). Despite government efforts to improve the education system, limited resources and administrative inefficiencies

have hindered the progress. Moreover, Nepal's educational sector has experienced various reforms over the last few decades, yet there remain significant gaps in access, quality, and resource allocation. Although the government has made substantial efforts to increase enrollment rates and educational infrastructure, public resources alone have proven insufficient to meet growing demands. Thus, public-private partnerships (PPPs) are increasingly seen as a

potential solution to address these gaps in educational development by pooling resources and expertise from both sectors and enhance Nepal's educational outcomes (Bhatta, 2011). Penetrating the resources, expertise, and innovation from the private sector, PPPs can complement government efforts and contribute to sustainable development in the education sector.

The disparities in Nepal's education system have persisted, particularly in terms of access to quality education across different regions. Despite the fact that the government has implemented various policies to address these issues, the progress is slow (Sharma & Lamichhane, 2020). Therefore, this paper explores the role of PPPs in addressing critical issues in Nepal's educational system and assesses their potential in improving education quality and access that contribute to the country's broader socio-economic goals.

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- How effective have PPPs been in addressing the challenges of Nepal's educational sector?
- What are the potential benefits and limitations of expanding PPPs?
- How can the government and private sector collaborate to optimize educational outcomes?

Literature Review

The study is guided by the following literature review that is discussed under different sub-headings:

Theoretical Framework of Public-Private Partnerships in Education

Public-private partnerships are defined as collaborative agreements between public sector institutions and private entities aimed at providing public services or infrastructure. In the context of education, PPPs can involve the provision of school infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum development, or direct management of schools. According to Verger et al. (2016), PPPs in education are often motivated by the desire to improve educational outcomes, increase efficiency, and expand access to underserved populations. However, the success of PPPs in education depends on factors such as governance, accountability, and alignment of goals between the partners. In the similar vein, "Nepali society deserves interconnectedness of all stakeholders and engages people to strengthen continued peace, happiness and prosperity" (MoEST 2019; Nepal National Framework of SDG 4: Education 2030, p. vi).

State of Education in Nepal

Nepal has made significant strides in improving access to education, particularly following the implementation of the Education for All (EFA) initiative and the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP). According to the Ministry of Education (2016), the gross enrollment rate for primary education reached 137% in 2015, with a net enrollment rate

of 96%. However, challenges such as high dropout rates, poor infrastructure, and disparities in educational quality between urban and rural areas remain persistent issues. The government has recognized the need for private sector involvement in addressing these challenges, leading to the formation of various PPPs aimed at improving education outcomes. For example, the collaboration between the government and private educational institutions has played a critical role in increasing access to higher education and technical training (UNESCO, 2020).

Nepal's education system has evolved significantly since the establishment of the National Education System Plan in 1971. Primary and secondary enrollment rates have improved considerably, with the gross enrollment rate reaching 96% at the primary level in 2019 (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education, Science, & Technology [MoEST], 2020). However, challenges persist, particularly in rural areas where educational infrastructure is inadequate, and access to trained teachers is limited. Moreover, disparities in gender, caste, and socioeconomic status continue to affect educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2015). These issues underline the necessity for innovative solutions, such as PPPs, that can help bridge the resource gap and provide a more equitable and inclusive education system.

Global Perspectives on PPPs in Education

Globally, PPPs have been used as a mechanism to improve educational quality, mainly in countries with limited government resources. In countries like India and Kenya, PPPs have been used to expand access to education by building new schools, providing teacher training, and offering scholarships to disadvantaged students (Patrinos et al., 2009). These partnerships often involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private companies, and philanthropic organizations that work in collaboration with government agencies to achieve shared educational goals.

Public-Private Partnerships in Education

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have become a global strategy in addressing educational challenges, particularly in developing nations where public resources are often limited (Patrinos et al., 2009). PPPs are contractual agreements between government entities and private sector organizations to jointly deliver services or infrastructure projects. These partnerships aim to combine the strengths of both sectors, enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, including education (LaRocque, 2008). Globally, countries like, the Philippines, Kenya and India have successfully employed PPPs to address educational infrastructure deficits and improve learning outcomes. In Nepal, PPPs have the potential to contribute to various aspects of educational development, such as school construction, teacher training, curriculum development, and

the provision of learning materials. However, the success of such partnerships depends on well-defined roles, strong governance frameworks, and the equitable distribution of resources (Bhatta, 2011).

Methodology

This research utilizes document analysis under qualitative approach, based on case studies and policy analysis ((Denzin, 1970; Patton, 1990) to evaluate the role of PPPs in Nepal's educational development. Secondary data from government reports, educational institutions, and international organizations are analyzed to identify patterns and outcomes associated with PPP initiatives in the country. The triangulation of data from different sources ensures the validity of the study's findings (Patton, 1990). Moreover, key informant interviews were also conducted with stakeholders involved in various educational PPPs, including policymakers, NGO representatives, and private sector participants. Thus, this paper employs a qualitative research methodology, primarily relying on secondary data from government reports, academic journals, and case studies of PPP initiatives in Nepal and other developing countries. A comparative analysis is used to assess the effectiveness of PPP models in improving educational access, infrastructure, and quality in Nepal. Similarly, case studies of successful PPP interventions in countries with similar socio-economic challenges are employed to critically analyze to construct results that may be applicable to Nepal.

Results and Discussion

The study was conducted to explore the role of PPPs in addressing critical issues in Nepal's educational system and to assess their potential in improving education quality and access that contribute to the country's broader socio-economic goals. The following results are constructed on the basis of thematic analysis of the secondary data and are discussed under different sub-headings below in corroboration with the reviewed literature:

School Infrastructure Development:

One of the critical areas where PPPs have made an impact is in the development of school infrastructure. In rural Nepal, where government resources are often insufficient, partnerships with private companies and international donors have led to the construction of new schools and the rehabilitation of existing ones. The Nepal Education Foundation (NEF), for example, has partnered with local governments to build schools in remote areas, ensuring that children in underserved regions have access to basic education (Ghimire, 2019).

Teacher Training and Capacity Building:

Teacher quality has long been a concern in Nepal's education system. To address this, various PPPs have been initiated to provide professional development and training

for teachers. The partnership between the Ministry of Education and the private organization, Teach for Nepal, has been instrumental in addressing the teacher shortage in rural areas. Teach for Nepal recruits and trains young professionals who commit to teaching in rural schools for two years, helping to improve educational outcomes in some of the country's most disadvantaged communities (Sharma, 2021).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

PPPs have also played a significant role in expanding technical and vocational education in Nepal. The National Skill Testing Board (NSTB) and private training institutions have collaborated to provide skill-based training programs, particularly for youth who are unable to pursue formal education. These programs are crucial in equipping students with practical skills that improve their employability and contribute to economic development (ADB, 2018).

Successes of PPPs in Nepal's Educational Sector:

In Nepal, several PPP initiatives have been launched in recent years, particularly in the field of vocational and technical education. One such example is the Enhanced Vocational Education and Training (EVENT) project, which was implemented in collaboration with the World Bank. This project aimed to improve access to vocational education and training for disadvantaged groups, with a focus on aligning education with labor market demands (World Bank, 2013). Through partnerships with private training institutions, the project has enhanced skill development and employment prospects for Nepali youth. Another notable PPP initiative is the development of digital classrooms and e-learning platforms in rural areas, facilitated by partnerships between the government and private tech companies. These initiatives have helped address the challenge of teacher shortages and have provided students in remote regions with access to quality education (Poudel, 2021).

Potential for Scaling PPPs in Nepal:

The potential for scaling PPPs in Nepal's education sector is significant, particularly in areas such as teacher training, curriculum development, and digital learning. The government's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Education 2030 (Nepal National Framework, MoEST, 2019) particularly provides a framework for expanding these partnerships. However, achieving scale will require more robust governance structures, increased transparency, and a focus on equity to ensure that the benefits of PPPs are felt by all students, regardless of socio-economic background.

Potential for Future Development:

Despite these challenges, PPPs hold significant potential to contribute to Nepal's educational development, particularly if implemented with strong governance structures,

transparency, and a focus on inclusivity (Sharma, 2021). The government can play a pivotal role by establishing clear guidelines for PPPs, ensuring that private sector involvement aligns with public goals, and monitoring outcomes to ensure that marginalized communities benefit from these partnerships. One area of potential growth for PPPs in Nepal is the expansion of digital education initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital learning platforms, and PPPs can be instrumental in scaling these initiatives nationwide. Similarly, expanding PPPs in teacher training and curriculum development can help address the issue of quality education, particularly in rural areas.

Challenges and Limitations:

Despite the successes, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of PPPs in Nepal's education sector. One major issue is the lack of a clear regulatory framework governing PPPs, which can lead to ambiguities in roles, responsibilities, and accountability (Bhatta, 2011). This also led to inconsistencies in implementation, with some partnerships failing due to misalignment of goals or inadequate oversight. Additionally, PPPs in education often face resistance from communities that are skeptical of private sector involvement in public services. Critics argue that privatization of education can exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly if private partners prioritize profit over social outcomes (Verger et al., 2016). Furthermore, concerns about equity and inclusiveness have arisen, as private entities may prioritize profit over access for disadvantaged groups. Another limitation is the lack of capacity within the government to manage and oversee PPP projects effectively. Thus, in absence of strong governance mechanism, PPPs risk becomes inefficient and unable to deliver their intended outcomes (Sharma & Lamichhane, 2020).

Conclusion

Public-private partnerships have the potential to play a transformative role in Nepal's educational development. Through implementation of the resources and expertise of the private sector, PPPs can address some of the key challenges of the educational sector such as infrastructure gaps, teacher shortages, and inequities in access. However, for these partnerships to be effective and sustainable, they must be governed by well-designed policies with an emphasis on accountability and inclusiveness. For narrowing down the existing gaps, the government, private sector, and civil society must work together to ensure that PPPs contribute to a more equitable and high-quality education system for all Nepali children. Public-private partnerships present a promising avenue for addressing some of Nepal's most prominent educational challenges, from infrastructure gaps to inequities in access and quality. Although several successful PPP initiatives have been implemented in Nepal, a more robust regulatory framework

and increased government oversight are essential for ensuring that these partnerships deliver sustainable and equitable outcomes. Evidently, the government and private sector must collaborate closely with a shared vision of expanding educational access and improving quality for all segments of Nepali society. Learning from successful PPP models in other countries and tailoring them in the context of Nepal could enhance its educational development and create a more inclusive education system.

Conflict of Interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this research paper.

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