Effectiveness Of School Dropout Prevention Practices In Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Lots of primary school and high school students drop out each year. School dropout phenomenon has been a serious issue in the current scenario which poses a major challenge in the educational commitment of a country. The main objective of this article is to study the effectiveness of school dropout prevention practices in Nepal. The secondary data has been used in this article to find out how effectively the preventive practices are put in place and the gaps if any. So preventing school dropout has been a crucial task and campaigning successful completion of school education has been a prime concern of each and every country. Therefore the students who are at the greatest risk for dropping out of school can be identified and proper methods of bringing them back to school can be applied. The government should also start the most effective intervention programmes to reduce the dropout rates. It is equally important to track students who are at risk for school failure and to maintain a focus on students' progress toward educational standards. Various factors and indicators responsible for school dropout have to be addressed to impact enrollment status. The school dropout process is directly related to educational and socioeconomic status of the parents as well as child labour and school environment. So it is important to look upon the issues associated with dropout factors. To leave no child out of school, government as well the educators must emphasize the issues related to student mobility, alternate routes to school completion, and alternate timelines for school completion. The paper highlights the role of government policies on positive action as well as effective public awareness programmes which will help in the reduction of the number of dropout students which ultimately keeps the students in the school and contributes to the nation's educational development.

KEYWORDS
School Dropout, Prevention, Intervention, Effectiveness, Education

1. INTRODUCTION

A relatively high proportion of students enroll in basic education in Nepal, but a relatively small proportion reach to grade 8 and graduate. The majority of pupils fail and remain in the same classes frequently and are unable to finish their secondary level or basic level education. This article focuses on the fundamental level of school dropout, its contributing reasons, and the many preventive efforts implemented in Nepal.

1.1 Education

Every kid has the fundamental right to receive an education that fosters the development of their personality, skills, and physical and mental capacities. For a person's and a country's overall growth, education is essential. It is a crucial instrument that empowers people and makes them prosperous both socially and economically. Future leaders and workers will be the current children.

The right to education is guaranteed by the Nepalese constitution, and all citizens are expected to get free secondary education. The School Sector Reform Program (SSRP), which the Nepali government has been implementing since the 2009 school year, has reorganized the educational system mainly into three groups: early childhood development classes, basic education (Grades 1–8), and secondary education (Grades 9–12. (MoE, 2011).

1.2 School Dropout

It has been noted that a significant portion of students leave school each year before finishing their education.

Dropouts are students who leave school either permanently or temporarily before finishing a certain educational cycle, such as primary or secondary school. A student is considered a dropout if they do not enroll for a specific number of consecutive semesters. (Xavier & Meneses, 2020). In Lekhesa's perspective, dropouts are students who quit school before the last year of the learning cycle in which they are enrolled, which could be the first, second, or college school.(Lekhesa, 2007). School dropouts are young children who enroll in classes but leave before finishing their grades and without transferring to another school for a variety of reasons other than death. (Chugh, 2011).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 School Dropout and its Reasons

Children being dropped out of school has become a serious issue in many nations worldwide especially in low earning countries like Nepal. (Young & Chavez, 2002). Despite a significant increase in the number of young people beginning elementary school, the rate of school dropouts has remained high in developing nations. Over 50% of pupils who begin elementary school do not finish their entire educational journey. Nepal is a prime example of a country where poverty and social backwardness cause a high percentage of school dropouts.Lewin & Sabates, 2012).

The school dropout simply refers to an individual who does not complete his or her primary or secondary level education due to some reasons. Many children enroll in the basic level school but never finish their education.

2.2 Dropout Causes

A number of factors cause students to leave school, including (a) parents' low socioeconomic status (b) academic failure, (c) poor or bad relationships with teachers, (d) pregnancy and other medical reasons, and (e) family or job obligations and child labour (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Shuger, 2012). Due to the variety of reasons, students drop out. Interventions for school completion must have a variety of elements, with the primary goal being to raise student involvement. A focus on learning, high standards for student accomplishment, and a supportive and caring school atmosphere have been demonstrated to be the most effective ways to increase student results. (Dynarski et al., 2008).

Low family income and parents' low educational and professional attainment levels are additional factors linked to school dropout.(Ekstrom et al., 1986; Chan et al., 1984). The primary cause of dropouts is poverty, thus the students do labour to sustain the family economy.(Umesh R. Dixit, 2010). Jayachandran indicates that the major factor of dropout are children and parents who are not interested in studies, unable to cope, work for wages, salary, participation in other economic activities, attend to domestic duties and financial constraints. (Jayachandran, 2006) Another study also discovered that females were dropping out of school to care for their younger siblings and the home while both parents were employed (Patel & Gandhi, 2016). A similar study related to school dropout emerges from children's household situations such as child labour and poverty. (Sabates, 2011).

Due to a lack of interest in their studies and the expensive cost of tuition, the children drop out of school, forcing them to work outside the home while also taking care of their families.(Gouda &T.V. Sekher, 2014). Families that gave their kids complete freedom to choose their own activities and behavior were more likely to have dropouts. (Rumberger, 1990). Peer pressure has an impact on students' decision to drop out (Omollo & Yambo, 2017). Parents of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes most commonly cite income pressure, home chores, a lack of interest in further education, and test failure as the main causes of their children's dropout.(Arindam & Debasis, 2014).

Sebatane considers disability as one of the contributing factors to primary school dropout. They stated that the lack of initial access to school for learners with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) means most of them are able to drop out of school. (Sebatane, 2009).

According to reports, certain schools in Nepal are so far away that it is exhausting and difficult for students with disabilities to travel there and back each day, which leads to their dropping out. (UNESCO, 2011).

Perrin maintains that the physically abused learners exhibit lower intellectual and cognitive functioning compared to learners with average intellectual and cognitive functioning on general intellectual measures. They also experience problems in specific measures of verbal facilities, memory, dissociation, verbal language, communication ability, problem-solving skills and perceptual motor skills. Academic performance is another area of substantiated difficulty in physically abused learners. Compared with non-abused learners, victims of physical abuse display poor school performance and adjustment. These abused learners also receive more special education services; score lower on reading and mathematics tests; exhibit more learning disabilities and are more likely to repeat a grade. A learner may thus feel obliged to drop out of school. (Perrin, 2007).

Pridmore describes the long-term impacts on the health and nutritional state of younger students as well as the ramifications of school enrollment, dropping out, and academic success. The learning potential of school-aged students who experience hunger, malnutrition, lack of energy, protein, or specific micronutrients in their diets is lower than that of healthy, nourished students. (Pridmore, 2007). Perrin claims that these underprivileged students attend classes less frequently, are more likely to repeat courses, leave school early, struggle to study because of low attention spans, show little enthusiasm, and have cognitive impairments. (Perrin, 2007).

The absence of suitable facilities for students with disabilities, such as playgrounds that are wheelchair accessible or school restrooms, also adds to dropout rates in the educational setting. Despite the high rates of return on educational investment, a lack of interest also seems to be a significant influence in a student's decision to leave school.

2.3 Dropout Prevention Practices–Worldwide

The problem of school completion is not limited to wealthy nations like the United States or Western Europe. Millions of children and young people worldwide lack access to education or have restricted access to it. For those fortunate enough to have access to public education, it is frequently restricted to a primary education, leaving them without the opportunity to pursue higher education.Many students drop out of school and seek other options, such as child labour or surviving on the streets, because the prospects for a future based on education are dim for those who attend. The following points describe the various dropout prevention practices around the globe.

2.3.1 Mentoring

Students who are at risk of dropping out frequently struggle academically, personally, and with familial issues that make it difficult for them to succeed in school. Students' attendance at school may also suffer as a result of these issues, and their capacity to form relationships with classmates may be hampered by chronic absences. Having a relationship with an adult in the classroom can help students feel more included. Teachers are able to effectively mentor pupils by outlining the value of education. According to research on mentoring, students with impairments are more likely to graduate if they have even casual contacts with supportive adults.(Ahrens, DuBois, Lozano, & Richardson, 2010); (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004); (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). To improve the quality of education, certain American companies have partnered with educational institutions. In addition to preventing students from dropping out, their counseling services will serve to boost the number of future qualified workers. Through these collaborations, corporate staff serve as mentors to help at-risk youngsters build their social and human capital from a young age so they may graduate from high school and be ready for college.(Einolf, 1995).

2.3.2 Family Engagement

Children are more likely to succeed in school when their relatives are involved in their education. It is critical that schools foster a family-friendly environment and communicate that family involvement is encouraged and appreciated. Reaching out to parents who participate in school activities at low rates is very crucial. Organizing casual school events, like potluck dinners, typically attracts a large number of family members and offers a laid-back atmosphere where educators can build rapport with parents. Additionally, these events give parents a chance to connect with one another. (Epstein, 2001).

It is not reasonable to presume that parents possess the knowledge and abilities necessary to support their children's academic success. Schools should modify materials for families from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds and give parents information that clarify school expectations and standards. (Bae & Clark, 2005).

A study was conducted with 1,010 fourteen-year-old students (51% female) from the ninth grade of a public school in Iceland's capital. The results showed that students from more authoritative families were less likely to become disengaged from school by age 15, making them more likely to complete upper secondary education by age 22. This indicates a connection between parenting practices and the likelihood of school dropout or graduation. (Blondal & Adalbjarnardottir, 2014).

2.3.3 Academic Intervention

Poor academic performance and frequent absenteeism can lead to students being held back a grade. Falling behind and being retained considerably raise the likelihood of students dropping out. (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). Students who fail courses require assistance to improve their academic skills and earn credits. Offering academic support, such as tutoring, enrichment programs, and credit recovery, can help students catch up on their work, enhance their academic abilities, and increase the chances of passing necessary courses and high school exit exams to graduate. (Wilkins, 2011a).

2.3.4 Class/School Restructuring

Students in large schools may feel overwhelmed and disconnected. When they lack a strong connection to school, dropping out can seem like an easy choice. Some school restructuring initiatives include smaller class sizes and block schedules, which reduce the number of teachers students interact with. In these settings, teachers can focus on fostering

relationships with students and among peers. A more personalized learning environment helps create a sense of community, which has been linked to an increased sense of belonging and better academic performance. (Cotton, 1996; Oxley & McCabe, 1990; Raywid, 1998). Small learning environments allow teachers to engage with students individually, offering the opportunity to tailor instruction to students' interests, motivate them, and address their specific challenges. Some European countries have created Personal Learning Environments (PLE) that empower students to take charge of and manage their own learning. With guidance from teachers, students can set their own learning goals. This approach requires interactive classrooms and personalized ICT solutions.

3. METHODS

This article mainly uses secondary data from various sources and finds out what preventive measures have been applied in the reduction of dropout students from the school. Various journal articles have been studied to discover the effectiveness of the preventive measures of school dropout.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Government Policies and Practices for the Reduction of School Dropout

This topic discusses the key government policies measures implemented to control the barriers to education.

4.1.1 Poverty

Poverty is a major issue in Nepal. According to Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (NLSS), 20.3% of Nepal's population lived below the national poverty line. However, the Human Poverty Index suggests that 44% of Nepalis lack access to basic resources, health, and formal education. (NLSS 2022). In 2021, 245,758 children were out of school in Nepal, which includes 221,825 children who were not enrolled and 23,933 who dropped out. (CBS, 2021) Around 3.5 million girls, Dalits, Janajatis, children with disabilities, children affected by conflict, and other disadvantaged students are in a condition of being out of school status. The government's current policy guarantees free education up to the secondary level, along with free textbooks. Scholarships are also available for socially disadvantaged groups and girls. A plan to make education mandatory for these disadvantaged groups has been approved. Additionally, the government offers free and regular midday meals in public primary schools across 19 districts.

4.1.2 Social exclusion linked to caste/ethnicity

The non-Dalit Muslims have the highest number of school leaving students, accounting for 14.3% of total out of school students. (CBS, 2011) Dalit castes such as Dom, Musahar, Halkhor, Pasawan etc. have high proportion of children not attending school. (CBS 2021). The Constitution of Nepal guarantees that there will be no discrimination based on religion, race, gender, caste, or ethnicity. The Vulnerable Communities Development Plan of 2007 reaffirms the commitment to providing free education for girls and Dalits. There is also a policy in place to recruit teachers from Dalit, Madhesi, and Janajati communities. Scholarships are provided to Dalit children from Grade 1 to 8 to assist with the cost of stationery and uniforms.

4.1.3 Disability

Children with physical and mental disabilities are at a higher risk of dropping out of school, with 60% of disabled students not attending.(CBA, 2021. The Constitution of Nepal guarantees the right to education for all citizens, including those with disabilities. The government has also introduced scholarships, Braille books, and other necessary materials at no cost. Additionally, special and integrated schools have been established to address these challenges.

4.1.4 Child labour

37% of children in the age group 5-17 years are engaged in child labour. The children in work are more likely from the poorest sector (MICS 2014). According to Annual Household Survey, 2014, 8.3% of children aged 5-9 years and 38% of children aged 10-14 years are engaged in child labour. As a result, the Child Labour Act of 1992 imposes legal restrictions on the employment of children. The Kamaiya system was also prohibited in Nepal starting in 2000. The government has set up several commissions and organizations to oversee and prevent child labour.

4.1.5 Social norms and gender biases

Gender bias is prevalent in Nepal, with girls facing more discrimination than boys. The dropout rate is higher among girls, particularly Dalit girls. The government introduced scholarships for girls in 1971 and made them a specific target group in the Education for All (EFA) National Plan of Action for 2001-2015. Legislation to combat child marriage has also been implemented.

4.1.6 School infrastructure and staffing

The quality of school infrastructure varies across the country, especially in the Terai and Mountain regions. Nepal has the highest dropout and repetition rates in South Asia at both primary and lower secondary education levels, resulting in inefficiency and the loss of human resources. To address this, the School Sector Reform Plan of 2009 set standards for class sizes and the number of students per classroom. Since the 2015 earthquake, efforts to improve school infrastructure

have been underway. There are also plans for nationwide policies to ensure education safety, make buildings more disaster-resistant, and enhance the infrastructure and facilities of new schools.

4.1.7 Language

Non-Nepali speakers often face learning challenges, with language acting as a barrier to education. To address this, the constitution recognizes the right to education in one's mother tongue. In response, 21 different types of textbooks have been developed.

4.1.8 Emergency and Natural Disaster

The 2015 earthquake impacted over 1 million students, while more than 1 million children in the Terai region were affected by the extended protests and economic blockade. Families and children vulnerable to natural disasters in Nepal, such as floods, landslides, droughts, cold waves, disease outbreaks, and earthquakes, have also been affected. Nationally, there is a commitment to declaring schools as "zones of peace." A Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Plan has been implemented to address these challenges. (UNICEF, 2016).

4.1.9 Governance

Nepal transitioned into a federal democratic republic with the adoption of the new Constitution in September 2015. This led to a decentralization of the government, and local governments were established. As a result, the responsibility for school-level education shifted to local governments, prompting increased focus on improving education at the school level. (UNICEF, 2016).

4.1.10 National ECD initiatives

The EFA National Plan of Action and the EFA Core Document 2004-2009 programs in Nepal (NNC-UNESCO, 2003 & MoES, 2003) committed to expanding and improving ECD centres in Nepal. The ECD strategy paper (2004) and the SSRP (MoE, 2009) set the target to provide ECD services to 80 percent of 3–5-year-old children by 2015. The ECD strategy also targeted to have 80 percent of new entrants at Grade 1 with ECD exposure by 2015. The government's Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002–2007) and the three-year interim plan (2007/08–2009/10) had ECD centers as a strategy for increasing school enrolment, retention and reducing repetition and dropout rates of students. The number of ECD centres in Nepal were 35,121 as of the 2014-2015 school year (Van Ravens, 2009; FLASH Report, 2014).

4.1.11 Constitutional Right

Nepal's 2015 constitution declared that every citizen had the right to free education up to the secondary level. The constitution also protects the right to instruction in the mother tongue up to secondary level. Grades 1 to 8 are kept under basic level education while grades 9 to 12 are kept under secondary education in Nepal. Apart from this, there are various scholarships, free textbooks and free meals.

4.1.12 Teacher training

In 2015/16, there were about 95.3 percent fully trained secondary school teachers. It is also found that Compared to lower grades, it is spotted that Grades 9 and 10 have lower drop out and repetition rates (3.3 percent for girls, 3.2 percent for boys). Teacher training plays important role in reducing dropout rate. (NIRT, 2016)

4.1.13 Non-formal Education and Lifelong Learning

The difference between formal and non-formal education is typically defined by the setting in which learning occurs. Formal education takes place in structured institutions and typically results in recognized qualifications and outcomes. In contrast, non-formal education also has specific learning goals but usually occurs in environments where teaching is not the primary focus. In Nepal, with its high school dropout rates, large number of out-of-school children, many low-skilled workers, and the mismatch between higher education and labor market demands, non-formal education and lifelong learning are becoming increasingly vital.The ability of Nepalese individuals to adapt their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the modern labor market, both domestically and internationally, will play a key role in determining their chances of securing stable employment and escaping economic vulnerability. Most non-formal education occurs through labor market programs, on-the-job training, professional associations, work experience, and volunteer organizations. Informal education includes learning gained through involvement in clubs, libraries, museums, family activities, playground activities, volunteering, and other areas.

In Nepal, technical education and vocational training (TVET) are often mixed with non-formal education and lifelong learning. While this overlap is understandable in non-formal settings, it is crucial to emphasize that when TVET is offered as part of vocational programs in formal educational institutions, it should be considered a component of formal education. (Dahal, 2020).

4.2 Effectiveness of School Dropout Measures

In Nepal, many students drop out of school due to poverty, as they need to work to support their families. The country's adult literacy rate remains low, with nearly half of the population not completing basic education. Since the abolition of

the Panchayat system in 1990, Nepal has made significant strides in education, with a tenfold increase in the number of educational institutions. Although the dropout rate has been decreasing, it remains unsatisfactory. (Lillian Zmarzly, 2019). There is still much to be done to improve the education system. Education has not yet been made compulsory, and scholarships may not always reach the intended recipients. The additional costs involved in education make it unaffordable for poor families, contributing to continued dropout rates. The low educational levels of parents also impact their children's likelihood of staying in school. At the primary level, the number of Dalit students exceeds the number of Dalit teachers. Many students with disabilities have not been identified, and the lack of accessible infrastructure for disabled students remains a barrier to education. While laws like the Child Labour Act are in place to prevent child labor and encourage schooling, these regulations are not effectively enforced. Gender bias also keeps some students out of school, and one-third of schools still lack separate toilet facilities for girls. Child marriage remains common in many areas, and the 2015 earthquake destroyed many classrooms. Despite various policies and plans aimed at reducing dropout rates, progress has been slow, and many issues still need to be addressed.

5. CONCLUSION

It is hence studied that many students are leaving the school due to various reasons.Dropping out of school is a common issue among children from economically disadvantaged communities. Governments in developing countries like Nepal are working to increase enrollment in primary and secondary schools and ensure students remain in school until they progress to higher education. However, school dropout remains a significant challenge, particularly in public schools in Nepal. Key factors contributing to this issue include poverty, child labor, the distance to schools, parents' attitudes toward education, early marriages, and social exclusion. Addressing these underlying issues is essential for reducing dropout rates, and resolving these factors will make it easier to keep children in school. Tackling the root causes of school dropouts will also help improve the effectiveness of public policies.

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