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Intervention Strategies in Nepal's School-Level Education Programs for the Country's Socioeconomic Transformation

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Abstract

The deficiency in providing quality education is a significant challenge across many developing nations. This study examines the connection between the education system and the level of socioeconomic issues in the context of Nepal. The main argument is that Nepal's gender-related issues, the training gap among its populace concerning pro-environmental behavior, lateness habits, skill deficiency among the young generation, and unstable economic growth are directly or indirectly connected to the country's education system. Nepal's school-level educational programs and teaching methods are less practical for fostering human capital and economic progress than Japanese educational programs. Based on the context of Nepal, human capital theory, and research literature pertaining to educational programs, we propose a comprehensive intervention model composed of several non-academic programs, including physical education, community cleaning, and school textiles, designed to augment Nepal's social and economic development.

Keywords: gender-related issues, pro-environmental behavior, lateness culture, skill deficiency, economic activities, educational programs, intervention strategies, Nepal

1. Introduction

Nepal's National Education Policy-2019 envisions an educated, civilized, healthy population capable of leading the nation to prosperity (MoEST, 2019). The School Education Sector Plan 2022-2031 aims to create a skilled, efficiently managed, accountable, and competitive public school system. This system aims to provide citizens access to relevant and high-quality education that meets regional and global standards (MoEST, 2022). However, the reality has shown that the education system has not effectively addressed the country's diverse social and economic issues.

The first concern is the incidents of gender-related issues. According to a report from the Nepal Police Headquarters (NPH), there were 2,144 reported cases of actual rape and 687 cases of attempted rape in the fiscal year 2019/20 (NPH, 2022). The second concern is that in Nepalese schools, students primarily gain general knowledge about the environment rather than practical insights that could foster pro-environmental behaviors. This is evident in the widespread presence of unmanaged garbage and litter observed throughout the country. The third issue is the widespread lateness culture in Nepal. This tardiness is evident in various aspects, including meetings, appointments, and public office operations. Additionally, this trend extends to national projects like road and bridge construction. Fourth, in Nepal, schools traditionally prioritize teaching mathematics, science, or English as standard subjects, assuming that high scores in these subjects correlate with students' future success. Certain model schools have been enhancing their school infrastructure and introducing innovative teaching methods for subjects like English, math, and science (ADB, 2022). However, when compared to Japanese school students, learners in Nepal often lack the skills necessary to thrive in a global economy, both in terms of living and working. The Japanese school-level educational programs are taken as references for a comparative study, given that one of the authors possesses extensive teaching experience in Japanese educational institutions with international prestige in education (OECD, 2018). Fifth, despite the Government of Nepal (GoN) allocating a considerable share of its budget each year to the education sector to create a prosperous modern Nepal, economic vulnerabilities persists. The Nepalese economy has been experiencing unstable and low growth rates over the last couple of decades, except for the years 2017 (9%), 2018 (7.6%), and 2019 (6.7%) (MoF, 2021). Nepalese

youth continue to migrate to foreign countries for employment.

Under these circumstances, this research focuses on the following questions: What should be delivered at schools in Nepal to address gender-related issues, environment-related problems, lack of life skills among young people, and punctuality habits through new educational programs? What strategic policy could enhance both education quality and economic activities in the context of Nepal?

What sets this study apart is, first, its local context on global issues, emphasizing what non-academic programs should be practiced in the school-level education system so that various socioeconomic challenges will improve in the long run. Second, when the problems facing society or the economy are apparent, it is time to shift the conversation towards normative perspectives, like what actions should be taken to drive social change.

This paper has five sections, which begin with a contextual introduction of the research issues, a review of past literature, and an intervention model with its theoretical background. Later, we critically discuss Nepal's socioeconomic issues, describe intervention programs step-by-step, and conclude the discussion with policy directions.

2. Literature Review

Research literature suggests that effective educational programs directly or indirectly impact human and social behavior, address gender-related and environmental issues, impart specific skills, challenge cultural taboos, and contribute to economic development by fostering educated and skilled human capital. This section discusses these aspects, focusing on the literature on school-level intervention programs.

Human development is not predetermined by genetics, static, or following a linear trajectory (Fischer & Bidell, 2006). Instead, it is distinct for everyone, greatly influenced by environments, cultures, and relationships, constantly adjusting, organizing, and reorganizing. Furthermore, it remains susceptible to change throughout the lifespan (Slavich & Cole, 2013; Osher et al., 2020). Almond et al. (2018) link significant childhood developments to parental time. Heckman (2008) argues that increased investment in cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities during childhood enhances human capital productivity during adolescence and later in life.

Considerable research has confirmed that specific educational programs, including those focused on learning outcomes, enhancing pro-environmental behavior, and addressing gender-related issues have a positive impact. For instance, an intervention by integrating the "Teaching at the Right Level" methodology in Indian schools initially faced setbacks but contributed to refining the program. Ultimately, two scalable versions successfully improved learning levels in government schools (Banerjee et al., 2017). Public school interventions can improve learning levels and address socioeconomic conditions, such as minimizing gender-related issues. An empirical study in India involved teenagers in school discussions. The aim was to change their support for old-fashioned ideas about gender roles. Discussion covered topics such as gender-related harassment, girls' education, gender roles at home, and women's employment outside the house. The study concluded that the program made attitudes 16% less old-fashioned or 0.18 standard deviations more supportive of treating genders equally. Boys reported behaving more in line with modern ideas about gender (Diva et al., 2022). Another study confirmed that implementing early educational intervention programs has a beneficial effect on preventing and addressing gender-based violence from early childhood, such as creating awareness about gender violence, enhancing classroom relationships, diminishing violent behavior, and empowering the most susceptible individuals (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2023).

Younger children learn about the environment from the natural context and their family, youngsters through friends and education, and adults through pro-environmental organizations (Cincera & Krajhanzl, 2013). The designers of pro-environmental behavior models tend to consider individual, social, and institutional constraints insufficiently and (falsely) assume that humans use the available information systematically. Moreover, people do not act pro-environmentally because they feel they cannot influence the overall situation and would not be held responsible (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Also, social and institutional constraints—materializing in terms of lack of time, money, and information—prevent people from acting pro-environmentally, regardless of their attitudes or intentions (Farrow et al., 2017). A study examined the impact of a training initiative designed to foster mindfulness, empathy, and pro-environmental outlooks among elementary school students. The study revealed that those who engaged in the training demonstrated notable enhancements in mindfulness abilities, characterized by substantial effects. Additionally, improvements were observed in considerate social behavior and cognitive empathy. Furthermore, there were significant gains in pro-environmental attitudes (Jalón et al., 2022).

Besides, a study on punctuality confirmed that the timeliness exhibited by educators in their arrival to school or

class, coupled with their adept management of classroom dynamics, bears considerable significance. The punctuality of teachers, particularly when commencing instructional sessions, wields a profound influence on students' motivation and engagement in the learning process (Anggraeni et al., 2020). There is also an argument that a prevalent habit of tardiness and procrastination within the public can significantly impede economic growth and development (Berlinski, 2010; Di Pietro, 2014). This argument appears particularly pertinent in the context of Nepal.

The crucial factor for economic development is not the schooling duration but the cognitive skills acquired during primary and secondary education (Goczek et al., 2021). The intellectual abilities of the populace, as opposed to simple educational achievements, strongly correlate with personal income, income distribution, and economic advancement. The connection between skills and economic growth is resilient. Developing countries exhibit more substantial skill gaps than what is typically inferred solely from school enrollment and achievements (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2007). A quality education system prioritizes students' cognitive development while also fostering responsible citizenship and emotional growth (UNESCO, 2005). However, in Nepal, the predominant focus in teaching and learning tends to be on memorization and recitation of text, neglecting critical thinking, analysis, and creativity (NSSRPP, 2017). In contrast, Japanese education places significant importance on incorporating non-academic activities such as lunch and cleaning, physical education (PE), and life-long skills, especially for younger children during their crucial formative years (Tsuneyoshi, 1994).

There are three primary positive connections between quality education and economic growth. Education enhances labor productivity, fosters innovative skills and technological knowledge, and facilitates the transfer of competencies for adapting innovative technologies in new areas (Mankiw, 2022). Literature also suggests that the education sector can be linked to entrepreneurship and job creation since entrepreneurship is vital for tackling rural poverty (Sutter et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial endeavors provide rural residents with increased autonomy and flexibility in their work, enhancing the synergy between entrepreneurial and agricultural activities (Venkatesh et al., 2017). Furthermore, entrepreneurship contributes to job creation and more efficient utilization of surplus labor in rural areas (Kachlami et al., 2021).

Students with empty stomachs tend to learn poorly (UNICEF, 2023), so school meal programs can play a crucial role in supporting their health, physical strength, and learning abilities (Destaw et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2021). One notable example is India's midday meal program, the world's largest, which has been shown to help students learn better (Chakraborty & Jayaraman, 2019). School meals are particularly beneficial for students in economically weak households (Kaur, 2021). The Nepalese government supports agricultural cooperatives, considering them a key element in its poverty reduction strategy. However, farming households continue to face challenges in accessing markets for agricultural products (Dhakal & Mueser, 2023). We argue that the Nepalese government has not been actively promoting national strategies, such as connecting the agriculture sector with the education sector to foster rural entrepreneurship and rejuvenate rural regions.

Despite calls from economically disadvantaged groups for a more active role from the state in education, private sectors increasingly influence the education system. This influence is shaped by the ascendancy of neo-liberalism and the impact of free-market economic forces (Desjardins, 2015). World Bank continuously supports Nepal's education sector, but it is also argued that instead of properly tackling Nepal's socioeconomic issues, its policy promotes privatization and liberalization in the education sector (Regmi, 2017). In the Nepalese context, new educational programs appear to be urgent in facilitating the attainment of broader development goals, which have been inadequately explored in existing literature. This study aims to fill this gap through a normative approach and advocate for interdisciplinary research concerning the ramifications of global educational programs.

3. Theory, Context, and Intervention Model

This study is inspired by human capital theories, which suggest that investing resources in improving human skills leads to beneficial outcomes for individuals, organizations, and societies (Schultz, 1961). Examples of such resource allocation include investments in computer training, formal education, and lectures promoting virtues such as honesty and punctuality, as well as expenditures on healthcare. These allocations are considered forms of capital, as they contribute to the augmentation of individuals' income, enhancement of health, and enrichment of knowledge, thereby fostering a lasting positive impact throughout their lifetimes (Backer, 1993). As measured by cognitive outcomes, the quality of education has a profound impact on the economy. Economic growth is strongly influenced by the intellectual abilities of workers (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020).

As stated above, Nepal's education policy objective and political parties' slogan is to create a population that is

educated, civilized, healthy, and capable of leading the nation to prosperity. However, the reality is that the cases of domestic violence, abduction, sexual assault, and human trafficking against women and children are still alarming (Maiti Nepal, 2023). Next, in Nepal, various types of litter, including plastic bags and bottles, shattered glass bottles, newspapers, cardboard boxes, chewing-tobacco packets, cigarette butts, broken bricks, cement sacks, and other debris, are often haphazardly discarded. During travel, individuals are also observed tossing pet bottles and snack packets out of vehicle windows. Although waste management in Kathmandu has relatively improved in the past since the current mayor Balendra Shah issued strict rules and regulations, still huge amounts of garbage and sewage flow in the rivers through the city. Unmanaged garbage can be seen across the country in Nepal. In Nepalese context, experiences widely demonstrate a common occurrence of lateness in various aspects, including appointments, meetings, bill payments, salary disbursements, loan repayments, office attendance, responsiveness to calls, and even completing the national level projects such as constructing roads, bridges, school/hospital buildings, and many more. If we observe from an international perspective when Nepalese students submit their academic certificates for immigration purposes or further studies abroad, we find that foreign officers often encounter confusion due to the inconsistency in graduation dates on these certificates and the delay in conducting exams by educational institutions. The central question is why people in one country complete tasks punctually while people in another country tend to do everything late. We argue that due to insufficient education and training during their formative years, young individuals lack the fundamental daily life skills and successful participation in the job market. Finally, one of the primary objectives outlined in the Five-Year Plan (2019-2023) is to create employment opportunities within the economy. However, insufficient domestic employment opportunities have prompted a significant outflow of young individuals from the nation. The unemployment rate among Nepalese youth aged 15 to 29 is notably elevated, at 19.2 percent. Consequently, the dearth of employment prospects within the country has intensified feelings of desperation among the youth population (Jha, 2023). Therefore, we propose various school-level intervention programs to address these socioeconomic issues in Nepal, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Contextual issue, purposed programs and expected outcome

Socioeconomic Issues	Current State	Proposed Programs	Expected Outcome
Gender-related harassment	High	Seating arrangement Anti-bullying banner Discussions Physical education	Low
Unmanaged garbage/litter quantity	High	School calendar Community cleaning activity Garbage separation activity	Low
Lateness habit	High	Clocks Short-time activity Educators' punctuality	Low
Skill deficiency	High	Home economics Career days	Low
Unemployment	High	Instructional materials Paper factory School textiles School meal program	Low

Source: Created by authors.

Table 1 and Figure 1 are interconnected. In Table 1, the five socioeconomic issues are listed in the first column correspond to the Y-axis in Figure 1. The term "High" in the second column in Table 1 corresponds to the upward trend part of the curve, while "Low" corresponds to the downward trend part in column four. Similarly, in the figure, the term "Intervention" indicates the proposed programs listed in the third column of Table 1.

As depicted in Figure 1, the X-axis represents the number of years, while the Y-axis indicates the level of socioeconomic issues. Each nation grapples with distinct categories and varying degrees of socioeconomic challenges. Therefore, to reflect this existence, the imaginary curve on the Y-axis does not start from zero but it begins leaving a certain space. An upward trend in a curve reflects an increased level of socioeconomic issues. Prominent socioeconomic issues in the Nepalese context include the frequency of gender and caste-based

harassment within a specific timeframe, the volume of unmanaged waste accumulation in public areas, chronic delays in completing routine tasks and larger-scale projects, insufficient skills among young professionals, and a high rate of unemployment, which are represented on the Y-axis.

If a nation provides adequate training programs at an early-age (students aged six to 18), there will exist fewer socioeconomic issues in the future, resulting in a downward trend in the curve. To address gender-related issues in Nepal, we propose changes in classroom seating arrangements, the creation of anti-bullying banners, discussions aimed at shifting cultural norms regarding gender attitudes, and a focus on improving girls' physical strength through regular exercise at school. It may require five to ten years to observe a noticeable change, but we believe such programs will play a key role in diminishing nationwide gender-related issues. In contrast, if the younger generation lacks proper training in their school education, the country may face various social unrest and economic downturns at any time, causing the curve to move upward. Other proposed programs are elaborated in section 4.

We believe that schools can play a leading role in shaping the social norms and economy because there are 27,343 public schools located across diverse geographical locations, 282,585 teachers and an enrollment of approximately six million students in Nepal (CEHRD, 2022).

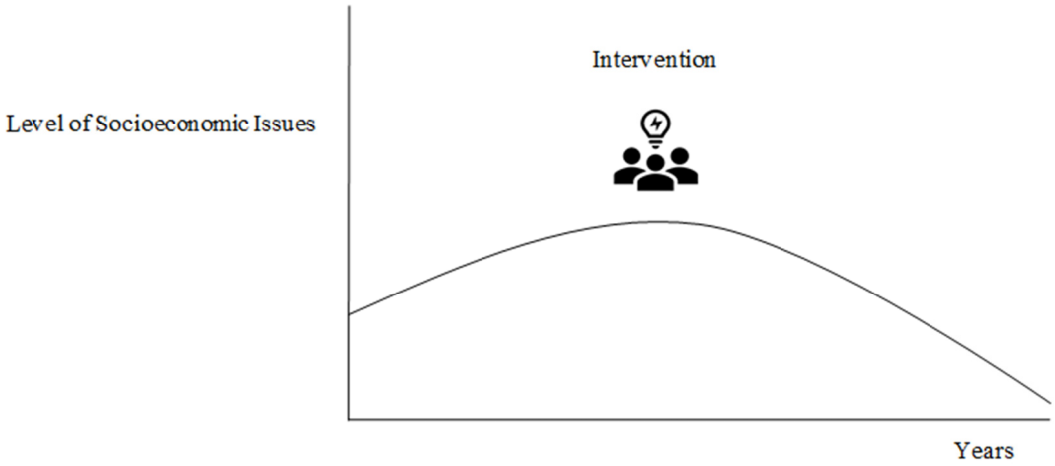

Figure 1. Changes in socioeconomic issues over time (Source: Created by authors)

4. Recommended Programs

4.1 Intervention for Gender-Related Issues

Since the early 2000s, the role of women in Nepal's political space has changed, as especially demonstrated by the fact that since the 2008 elections, the number of female members in the Constituent Assembly (CA) has increased from 57 to 197 (33% of the 601 elected members). Yet, it is a bitter fact that many of the women who had fought as combatants to bring the nation forward are now limited to being homemakers and Nepal is still not safe for women (Basnyat, 2019). Women have a narrow space in society and the economy and many harassment cases go unreported because the victims fear negative reactions from their relatives or the public. Table 2 shows the incidents of violence against women and children in Nepal which is increasing every year.

Table 2. Incidents of violence against women and children in Nepal, 2011-2019

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Rape & attempted rape	711	922	1,326	1,543	1,541	1,667	2,207	3,016	2,831
Domestic violence	2,250	1,800	6,835	8,268	9,398	1,1629	12,225	14,774	11,739

Source: Nepal Police Headquarters (2022).

Another survey report in 2017 indicates that more than 20% of the women stated to have experienced physical

violence and 26% had experienced spousal violence (ERA/Nepal & ICF, 2017). The gender-based violence against women in Nepal remains a pressing issue, leading to their continued victimization, poverty, and marginalization. Specifically, women belonging to ethnic minority and low-caste groups face additional layers of marginalization (Rana & Koirala, 2021).

Even teachers have been found practicing sexual harassment. This was highlighted by a case reported from Lalitpur-based school, where a male teacher (in his 50s) frequently practiced sexual harassment for female students during the school hour and finally 13 girls submitted a complaint letter (Satyal, 2020). Poor school infrastructure also facilitates gender-related problems. Schools' hallways are narrow and classrooms are small, and some 60 % have no electricity in Nepal (IEA et al., 2020). In such spots, sexual harassment is more likely to occur than in wider spaces. Although the GoN has made some progress in improving sanitation facilities, many schools still don't even have proper toilets and hand washing facilities, and many girls do not go to school during their menstrual period considering the inappropriate hygiene facilities. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) program conducted by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Nepal has improved the attendance rate of girls to some extent (UNICEF, 2018). In fact, our concern is why government authorities still tolerate school buildings that do not meet basic requirements; permit the opening of private schools and universities in narrow residential-type houses; and permit local contractors (without qualified architects and engineers) to construct public school buildings. A recent study shows that insufficient outdoor physical activity for kids in urban areas have become global policy concerns (Aubert et al., 2022). Although the issues of gender-based violence are well documented and prevention programs are now widespread, corresponding programs via school education are inadequate. Below, we propose intervention techniques.

First, the seating arrangements influence students' relationships. In Nepal's school classrooms, traditionally, girls and boys always sit in separate rows, but to understand gender sentiments from their early ages, it would be better to keep them in alternate rows/seats. The attraction between the opposite sexes cannot be prevented, but the important point is to improve mutual understanding. When students are aware of each other's feelings, the relationships between genders improve. When girls sit closer to boys, they can better foresee possible sexual harassment and prepare to tackle it. This could also give them more self-confidence to face career-related interviews or speak to other males throughout their lives. A seating arrangement could be implemented to mix students from high and low castes to break down the untouchability culture (a caste system) in the Nepalese context. Also, heavy-weight benches and desks that are currently used in many schools should be replaced by lighter furniture that can be moved around during brainstorming and group assignments.

Second, anti-bullying slogan banners can be prepared in one one-day workshop as is practiced in Japan. Workshop is already announced so that students are somehow prepared to write a slogan. Students listen a short lecture and see sample slogans against physical, social, verbal, and cyberbullying; get a workshop booklet, and each student writes his/her original slogan. Drawing images is also possible. In Nepal, schools might also inspire students to include slogans related to untouchability. Schools select top 10 slogans and send to the district level board of education; the board then selects one effective slogan from each school and prints the collection of slogans on a large banner. Each school gets this banner placed prominently on the school wall.

Third, schools should cooperate with other institutions. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local police officers might give lectures presenting data, stories, or videos about the adverse effects of cyber and sexual bullying. They should also highlight the adverse effects of practicing child marriage, the unplanned birth of a child, and how to use social media or address drug use. In this context, students should be taught what is written in the fundamental law (constitution). School headmasters could invite spiritual philosophers to teach children about responsible behavior and how to develop control over emotions. Teachers might also search in the literature and prepare well-founded speeches for students about morals, manners, ethics, and social rules.

Fourth and most important, physical education should be compulsory at the school level. Sports club, especially for team sports, should be promoted countrywide. Enhancing the quality of PE classes is a valuable investment in education that has the potential to enhance cognitive abilities and boost academic performance (García-Hermoso et al., 2021). PE serves as a defense mechanism for girls. Exercising physical defense strategies regularly puts them in a better physical and psychic position to settle domestic violence and minor sexual harassment by themselves. Regular physical exercises at school can change deeply rooted social attitudes, supporting gender inequality in the wider population. Sustainable Development Goal 4 highlights the importance of promoting global cooperation for teacher training in developing nations, particularly concentrating efforts on the least developed countries and small island developing states (UNDP, 2020). Therefore, a problem concerning developing countries is the lack of qualified PE instructors. In the Nepalese context, sports players, retired police officers and support from abroad could contribute to kick-off this intervention. To illustrate, professional sports

instructors could be invited from Japan to train Nepalese teachers.

4.2 Pro-Environmental Behavior Through Schools

Cleanliness, including environmental pollution, is fundamental in reducing health-related issues, such as the spread of communicable diseases. Additionally, cleaner places are more attractive than dirtier ones to tourists (Powel & Cabello, 2019). A study in Nepal showed that intervention in a community level by spreading information, making people aware, and providing people bins helped neighborhoods become cleaner. It also encouraged treated households to throw away their waste properly through waste collectors. However, it didn't make households separate their waste at home (Nepal et al., 2022). We believe such interventions can only bring about changes in limited areas and for the short run. Addressing nationwide and sustainable waste management challenges could be progressively achieved through systematic training at schools. The implementation of routine educational programs within schools emerges as a pivotal and productive strategy, as advocated by Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002). Our recommendations for the Nepalese education system, inspired by the activities in Japanese schools, encompass the following initiatives.

In Japan, the educational program incorporates a significant aspect known as school cleaning. After the last class, students actively participate in cleaning with brooms, dustpans, and mops. Students are organized into groups, each assigned to clean different areas, including classrooms, hallways, stairs, science labs, music rooms, toilets, etc. A unique tradition observed on the last school day before the commencement of winter or summer vacations involves an effort to make the entire school gleam with brightness. Engaging in school cleaning activities is considered a vital educational practice and has become a routine aspect of students' lives in Japan. In addition, people strictly follow the "Waste Management and Public Cleansing Law" (Law No. 137 of 1970, with several amendments) (GoJ, 2001). Hence, Japan is renowned as one of the world's cleanest nations. Accordingly, Nepalese schools may consider emulating this practice.

In Nepal, the school subject "Environmental Education" should first incorporate a waste management system into the instructional hours. Second, educators and students are encouraged to participate in garbage collection activities on the school premises and in the surrounding community for at least two hours each month. It works as a reverse teaching because when community people see young children walking around the streets and picking litter, it can have a powerful impact on community attitudes and behaviors towards cleanliness. Thirdly, students should engage in garbage separation activity, categorizing waste into distinct groups such as organic, paper, plastics, pet bottles, cans, glass, metals, textiles, etc. Thus, schools provide an ideal platform to develop pro-environmental behavior. As claimed by an author, collective effort has the potential to lead to cleaner communities and cities in the future (Chavez, 2016). Regular involvement of teachers, parents, community members, and, notably, millions of young students can establish a new social habit.

4.3 Addressing a Lateness Culture

As mentioned above, in Nepal, it is commonly observed that lateness is prevalent across different areas. As can be seen in Table 3, Nepal's business climate is still under scrutiny, characterized by slow public service delivery in acquiring licenses, meeting regulatory requirements, and poor-quality road infrastructure. We think that indicators of ease of doing business and punctuality share a high correlation.

Table 3. Nepal's ease of doing business rankings, 2010-2019

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
116	107	108	105	108	99	107	105	110	94

Source: World Bank (2023).

In contrast, Japan demonstrates how an ethos of punctuality, primarily in professional life, benefits economic development and society, and education plays an essential role in this respect. Being punctual is an inherent element of and is deeply rooted in Japanese culture (Stegner, 2006). All public vehicles are generally on time except at the time of earthquakes or accidents. At workplaces, employees are accustomed to arriving five to ten minutes before the start of their duty. All construction companies display a board at building sites demonstrating the project's completion date; they complete them at any cost, and clients can take possession of the site on the promised date.

At its root, the education system has supported Japan in building a punctual society. Japanese schools started teaching punctuality in 1873. In 1920, on June 10, Japan celebrated "Time Day" sponsored by the Ministry of

Education (MoE). The main activities of that day were correcting the wristwatches, and ringing bells and drums in churches, temples, shrines, and factories at noon. Primary schools introduced slogans such as "The clock advances, the idler falls behind" (sixth grade); "Ten thousand seconds begin from a second" (fifth grade); "A clock ticks, toil and moil" (fourth grade); "Time past is of no avail" (third grade); and "Learn how to read a clock" (second grade) (Nishimoto, 2002). Though Japan now is certainly different from the one in 1920, still everyone practices punctuality. School teachers and university lecturers must enter the classroom before the bell is rung, and students should be in their seats at least one minute before the class begins. If instructors are late (even a few seconds), they apologize to the students. Kindergarten schools also train kids to wash their hands within a certain time span. Such practices are indirect teaching techniques for valuing time.

We advocate for a transformative role of educational institutions and educators in shifting the prevalent habit of lateness to a culture of punctuality. In Nepal, first, schools should prioritize the installation of clocks in all classrooms, at the main gate, and in front of the playgrounds as a fundamental requirement. If possible, local authorities should set clocks public places. Second, ensuring punctuality among educators is crucial, and wearing wristwatches should be promoted as an essential dress code, reinforcing the importance of respecting time among students. The use of timers can be incorporated to efficiently control class activities, teaching students the value of utilizing every minute or second effectively. In other words, if teachers are punctual, young students try to be punctual, and vice versa. This approach benefits individual students and contributes to the broader economy and society, as today's pupils will play key roles as government officers, security personnel, business leaders, engineers, managers, politicians, educators, or other professionals in the future. By instilling a sense of punctuality at a young age, individuals will be better equipped to execute projects on time when they turn adult.

4.4 Career Experience and Life-Long Skill

In Japan, the term *Kateika* (家庭科) refers to home economics education, playing a pivotal role in the school curriculum. In elementary schools, students engage in activities like vegetable cutting, preparation of traditional or simple food set, sewing kitchen aprons, ironing, crafting eco-friendly shopping bags, assembling parts to create toy cars, and exploring their creativity through various original projects. This compulsory subject encompasses a broad spectrum of practical training for students aged between 11 and 15 years (grades 5-9). This includes cooking, clothing, consumption patterns, independent living skills, family life dynamics, financial planning, intergenerational relationships, welfare, life sciences and environmental awareness, as well as life planning (Ito & Nakayama, 2014). Activities extend to designing calendars, crafting wooden racks and chairs, cultivating vegetables, and more.

Another important part is, the Japanese education system builds a culture of work devotion through "career days" at schools (Fujita, 2011). The Career Promotion Education Policy (CPEP) was initially introduced in 1999 and revised in 2011. The primary objectives include connecting students with society, fostering competencies and self-understanding, expanding their areas of interest, enhancing problem-solving abilities, imparting the significance of work, and cultivating skills for future careers (MEXT, 2011). Many high school students also begin part-time jobs during their studies. Therefore, a work culture in Japan starts at an early-age.

An immature attitude towards work can impede economic development. Taking cues from the Japanese approach, Nepalese public schools should first integrate practical life skills training into their curriculum, empowering students to craft diverse products. For instance, students can be taught to cook curry and rice, make tea, grow vegetables, make salads, cut wood, assemble simple furniture items, craft baskets, and so forth. Although Nepali/Indian cuisine holds immense potential in the global market, many high school graduates cannot prepare local dish set. Next, MoEST should establish specific dates for career days within the school calendar. Rural students could gain valuable work experience in agriculture-based firms, housing companies, and hotels/restaurants, while urban schools can easily arrange diverse workplace opportunities. Educational experts and political leaders need to collaborate to execute these initiatives effectively. This hands-on experience would give the younger generation a profound understanding of the effort required to generate products and earn a living. After engaging in such work experiences, we anticipate that the younger generation would cultivate a greater appreciation for hardworking individuals.

4.5 Linking the Education Sector to Economic Activities

As previously discussed, the primary reason of international migration from Nepal is the scarcity of employment opportunities. Increased economic activity leads to the creation of more jobs. A country's economic performance is reflected in the value of real GDP and its stability, however, GDP growth displays considerable volatility and remains low in Nepal, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Real GDP growth of Nepal (annual percent change), 2013–2022

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
3.5	6	4	0.4	9	7.6	6.7	-2.4	4.2	4.4

Source: International Monetary Fund (2023).

Our purposed strategy seems like a policy against the market system, however, to establish a link between the education sector and economic sector, we advocate a certain degree's government involvement (in supply side economy) so that education sector itself can be a new market for the economy. We purpose for a strategic investment– the establishment of a Special Zone for Education. Within this zone, there will be three sections.

I. Section of Teaching and Learning Resources (STLR)

In Nepal, there is a noticeable trend where schools are compelling parents to purchase numerous books for their children, especially private schools, leading to schools earning commissions from book publishing companies. UNESCO points out that Nepal's National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) demonstrates inefficiency in overseeing the quality regulation of instructional materials within the private sector (UNESCO, 2021). Many books are causing students to view their school years as challenging, and their learning motivation is diminishing, particularly when they are obliged to study seemingly irrelevant books and take extra classes. Starting a tuition class for eighth-grade students in subjects such as Nepali and Social Studies is unnecessary. While it may generate supplementary income for teachers, establishing such tuition classes puts additional financial strain on parents. The government body should regularly oversee such cracks. Indian or Western textbooks, commonly used in numerous schools, often lack contextual relevance. For instance, a case study in an A-level economics textbook (2005) about sustainable fisheries in Canada was incongruent with teaching in landlocked countries like Nepal.

There is a need for "contextualized teaching and learning" due to the challenges the initiated participatory model faces in sustaining pedagogical reforms within the existing bureaucratic schooling structure (Wagle et al., 2023).

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2019 permits local governments/schools to create curricula and textbooks based on students' mother tongue or local context, but a scarcity of educational experts hinders the preparation of such critical materials (Dhungana, 2022). While it may entail higher costs, we emphasize a high degree of government involvement in producing such sensitive instructional materials rather than depending on the private sector.

Therefore, STLR (a government body) should produce high-quality instructional materials for both private and public schools. Adequate funding is crucial to produce high-quality teaching resources, encompassing textbooks, drill books, teachers' manuals, test papers, dictionaries, handouts, complementary digital teaching and learning materials, moral education books, school songs, and so on. Subject-related experts and IT professionals will get employment opportunities from this section. As a complementary section of *STLR*, a paper industry has the potential to generate numerous jobs within the economy.

II. Section for School Textiles (SST)

SST will produce school-related clothing, including uniforms, school bags, shoes, flags, neckties, caps, and so on. Private investors could be attracted to this section. The quality of clothing worn daily reflects a nation's human development level. Wearing the proper uniforms helps students better prepared to compete in the job market and feel "governmentality" (Friedrich & Shanks, 2023).

Certain occupational castes possess unique skills in their traditional occupations, yet they face challenges such as lower educational attainment, unemployment, and economic disadvantage compared to other castes. They often experience societal neglect and exploitation (Khanal, 2020; Gautam et al., 2021). In Nepal, scholarship programs are in place to support *Dalits* (MoE, 2016; Vertex Consult, 2016), but we assume that it is just a short-run strategy. SST could integrate Dalits into the economic system for a long-term solution, considering their traditional occupations such as clothing and shoe making. Scaling up and maintaining consistent production of school uniforms, shoes, belts, and so on could significantly elevate their living standards. The MoEST should reconsider school uniforms, potentially introducing suits during winter to ensure proper dressing, instill a sense of maturity and leadership, and stimulate Nepal's garment industry, thus creating jobs.

III. Section for School Food (SSF)

To address the issue of unhealthy snacks consumed by students during school hours, the establishment of SSF is recommended. Currently, some parents give their children pocket money for snacks, leading to the consumption

of substandard and occasionally expired items like biscuits, chocolates, candies, or instant noodles. The School Meal Program, initiated in 2017, has proven beneficial for 600,000 school children in Nepal. However, concerns have been raised about the existing cash-based system for the program, as it may compromise the quality of the supplied food. According to Upreti et al. (2021), approximately 50% of students reported having unhealthy snacks during their snack breaks. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive school meal concept to ensure the provision of healthy meals.

The proposed SSF aims to institute the systematic supply of locally produced meals within educational institutions. This approach serves a dual purpose by addressing malnutrition and promoting the domestic agricultural sector. We believe the agricultural sector can supply traditional/local foods such as chickpeas, beaten rice, seasonal fruits, fresh vegetables, and so on. Management part could be challenging but nationwide school meals program could contribute to a more stable income for local farmers (Borkowski et al., 2021). Despite the foreseen challenges, such as the establishment of well-equipped school kitchens and the recruitment of trained culinary staff, a comprehensive school meal program holds the potential to emerge as a dependable market for farmers.

5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

This article contends that Nepal possesses a fragile education system. To transform a nation from a "Third World to a First World" status, it is essential to provide comprehensive training and equip individuals with the standards of service characteristic of developed nations (Yew, 2000). Therefore, extensive discussions involving politicians, policymakers, and educators seems urgent to reform the Nepal's school-level (grade one-12) educational programs. Several reformed programs must be implemented urgently.

To combat gender-related harassment, the introduction of a mandatory subject, PE, in public schools is urgently necessary. Schools should also create anti-bullying slogan banners that could be implemented at a lower cost. Regular garbage collection as well as separation activities in schools and students' participation in community cleaning can contribute to reducing environmental pollution and fostering pro-environmental social behavior. Beyond financial resources, considerable time, sustained effort, and community engagement are also essential, recognizing that altering social behavior is a gradual process.

Establishing a culture of punctuality in society can be facilitated through the consistent punctuality of educators at their workplaces and by ensuring accurate timekeeping in schools and public places. Additionally, integrating the subject of home economics into curricula for practical education could prove beneficial. Furthermore, scheduling career days on school calendars could gradually create a profession-dedicated culture as in Japan.

It is recommended to establish the Special Zone for Education as a strategic investment project to strengthen connectivity between the education sector and other domains. Therefore, a substantial portion of the national budget and development assistance should be redirected to the education sector for at least a decade or two. Political party leaders need to take the lead on this initiative. In conclusion, although education is not a panacea for all socioeconomic challenges, it is imperative to recognize the positive impact of an enhanced education system. In future work, we should select a specific program and assess its outcomes in a particular area through field experiments.

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