

Lifelong Learning: Barriers and Potential in Nepal's Public Education System

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This policy brief has been prepared by Social Lab. Social Lab is a Nepalese think-tank established to address existing social and environmental issues through social entrepreneurship and innovation. Social Lab collaborates with social entrepreneurs, academia, civil societies, corporations, policy researchers, and activists to research and develop innovative solutions in bringing social and environmental reform.

I. Introduction

UNESCO defines lifelong Learning as a process that continues throughout life to address an individual's learning needs (1). The definition has been further clarified as creating systems that realize the right to education for people of all ages, and providing opportunities to unlock their potential – for their personal development and the sustainable economic, social, cultural, and environmental development of society (2). Lifelong learning has become imperative for individual development and societal progress in recent times.

Research on lifelong learning suggests that it's a process that is involved throughout life and throughout the places where an individual lives or works. It's a fundamental skill in life as a human being (3). Lifelong learning is the ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for personal or professional reasons. It enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, personal development, competitiveness, and employability.

In Nepal, the public education system has traditionally focused on formal education, often neglecting the broader scope of lifelong learning. Few initiatives are in line with the local government's approach towards life-long learning. Recent news on Kathmandu Metropolitan City launching "Book-Free Friday" makes a headline in daily news (4). While these little steps may look a far cry, these are important measures that need to be institutionalized and localized in all the 753 municipalities in Nepal.

On a broader scale, Nepal is actively implementing the national framework for Education 2030 in alignment with UNESCO's global educational goals. This framework emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The focus areas include improving educational access, quality, and governance to ensure holistic development (5).

1. Extracted from: <https://learningportal.iiep.unesco.org/en/glossary/lifelong-learning>

2. Extracted from: <https://www.uil.unesco.org/en/unesco-institute/mandate/lifelong-learning>

3. Journal Article: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042811025298>

4. News Article: <https://kathmandupost.com/kathmandu/2023/04/27/textbook-free-friday-initiative-welcomed-but-also-doubted>

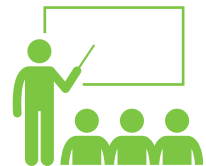
5. Extracted from: <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/nepal-implements-national-framework-education-2030>

II. Problems

Lifelong Learning encompasses a wide range of educational activities, including digital learning and extracurricular involvement, and is often associated with the idea of learning through practical experience. However, fostering a culture of lifelong learning is a challenging process, particularly in a country where educational disparities are significant. These disparities extend beyond gender-based inequalities to include differences in school type, geographic location, remoteness, income level, caste, social norms, and various other tangible and intangible factors. Above all, inequality among schools is one of the prime obstacles to fostering quality education for all (6). By this, we need to look from a perspective of urban-rural educational poverty or the differences between private and public schools.



Several factors contribute to the suitability of a lifelong learning platform for students, such as school infrastructure, teachers, socio-cultural context, policy, and governance. Unfortunately, the standards of these factors in public schools in Nepal are currently precarious.



Challenges such as insufficient classrooms, unmotivated and unskilled teachers using outdated teaching methods, low teacher salaries, lack of parental awareness, rural poverty, inconsistent policies, and limited involvement from local government representatives have hindered the transformation of the public education system in Nepal.

Nepal Government has allocated NPR 236 Billion for the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology for the Fiscal Year 2081/82 (7). The number has increased dramatically from NPR 70 Billion in FY 2079/80 (8). The question is whether the yearly increment of the budget has led to a significant transformation in the Nepalese Education sector where it needs to be. Some incredible initiatives like midday school meals, digital classrooms, sanitary pads for students, and similar interventions have been started to reduce the barriers for school children to school education. These initiatives from the government of Nepal are commendable.



However, Nepal still needs to progress further to improve and enhance the quality standards of the public education system in Nepal. Much of these drawbacks and loopholes can be observed on the ground while closely working with the public schools, specifically primary-level public schools in Nepal. The capacity of teachers, content for learning, learning space, and collaboration are some of the major stepping stones to crafting a path for lifelong learning among the public schools in Nepal.

6. Extracted from: <https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/rural-and-state-run-schools-nepal-must-catch-urban-and-private-ones>

7. Extracted from: <https://www.mof.gov.np/site/publication-detail/3359>

8. Extracted from: <https://economicsansar.com/budget-of-nepal-2079-80-highlights/>

III. Policy Options and Opportunities

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Intervention</i>	<i>Description</i>
Infrastructure & Resource Development	Invest in outdoor learning and access to digital resources	Mainstreaming digital learning shall promote life-long learning process for the students through beyond-book learning. In addition outdoor learning like: gardening, story telling, and arts can be imperative measures.
Curriculum & Pedagogical Reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the curriculum with inclusion of critical thinking and creativity Train teachers in student-centered teaching methods 	Substantial revision of contents is required in most of the public schools in Nepal by replacing with critical thinking contents, case studies, along with improvised pedagogical techniques for the teachers.
Teacher Training & Development	Professional development opportunities and improved working conditions for teachers	Many Nepalese public school teachers appear demotivated. Professional development training and improved working conditions, including refreshments, salary increments, and better facilities, are needed to address this issue.
Addressing Socio-Economic Barriers	Facilitate community engagement programs to educate parents on life-long learning	Bottom-up interventions are required to address the socio-economic needs of parents and community people such as: Livelihood training, financial literacy training, wellness, career development, and parenting skills.
Localization of Comprehensive Educational Policies	Develop and implement education policies that are tailored to local contexts and needs	With the emergence of federalism, local governments now have the autonomy to create tailored policies that address local needs and contexts. This allows for the development of localized educational policies that can leverage local conditions and the economy. A notable example is Kathmandu Metropolitan City's implementation of Book-less Friday.

IV. Discussion

Instilling a culture of life-long learning at schools requires a multi-faceted approach that focuses on infrastructure development, curriculum reform, teacher training, community engagement, and localized policy-making.

Investing in outdoor learning and improving access to digital resources is crucial for creating a conducive learning environment for children to move beyond the texts-book. Additionally, revising the curriculum to include skills for critical thinking and creativity, and training teachers in student-centered teaching methods, can help prepare students for the demands of the 21st century. The growing competitive world with the challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence requires smart and critical human abilities to navigate social and economic information.

Furthermore, providing professional development opportunities and improving working conditions for teachers is crucial for maintaining a high standard of education. Teachers are key players in the education system, and supporting their development is essential for ensuring that students receive quality education. The motivating factors could be refreshment training, increment in salaries, additional facilities, proper mentorship, and flexibility to lead creatively.

Addressing socio-economic barriers to education, such as poverty and lack of parental engagement, is also important. Facilitating community engagement programs to educate parents on life-long learning can help create a more supportive learning environment for students.

Finally, localizing comprehensive educational policies to meet the specific needs and contexts of different communities is crucial. By involving local stakeholders in the policy-making process, we can ensure that policies are more effective and sustainable. An example could be the inclusion of community people, children, parents, and local leaders along with the facilitation by the expert. A few examples of localized educational policies could be the promotion of gardening or agricultural learning for students, financial literacy programs for children, career counseling and future programs, digital literacy for all, etc.

Implementing these interventions can significantly contribute to creating a more inclusive, responsive, and effective education system in Nepal that prepares all students for success in the 21st century through required life skills and knowledge.

