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Evaluating variation in school dropout rates in rural Nepal: A statistical study

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Abstract

This study discusses the complex range of factors that impact educational quality and school dropout rates in Nepal. It mainly considers such factors as socio-economic, cultural, and environmental ones. Some of the most common problems include social norms, the prevalence of early marriage, poverty, high levels of illiteracy, lack of access to schools and school facilities, inadequate transportation, and lack of learning materials. The analysis uncovered severe variations in student-teacher ratios in institutional schools versus children in community schools in various provinces. The ratios were significantly higher in community schools and had a noxious impact on educational impressions. Furthermore, the investigation focuses on the connection between repetition rates and school leaving patterns. Repetition and repetition of many reasons of dropout were observed in the lower grades and transition phases, which were the most vulnerable and unstable periods to deal with. By statistical analysis, the case of high student-teacher ratios is proved, showing the imperativeness of the take-on measures. A problem of endurance in terms of the rural areas is crossing these hazardous places and the long travel distance in the way that dropout rates are increased even more. Cultural phenomena including early marital ties keep girls from getting continued education, increasing the number of female students who drop out at higher levels. The study reveals that improving infrastructure, creating economic assistance, enhancing the skills of the teachers, and encouraging community awareness as well is fundamental for the reduction of the dropout numbers and making quality education available for everyone. Accordingly, the time should be determined by elements targeting several factors that limit educational success in Nepal. which will facilitate more successful intervention in the at-risk persons and provide the children with equal education opportunities, thus, serving as one of the tolls for the future nation advancement.

Keywords: Dropout Rates; Educational Quality; Socio-Economic Challenges; Student-Teacher Ratio; Early Marriage; Rural Education

1 Introduction

Dropout refers to the students who leave the school or colleges before completion of the study. Student stops their studies and permanently leave school or college education because of various factors such as socioeconomic factors, gender inequalities, etc. Education plays a key role in success in life. It can change the way of living and the perspective of people. Not only for individuals but also for nations, education plays significant roles in poverty reduction, sustainable goals, etc. Though this concept is well embedded within the people's minds, various factors have influenced the dropout rates in Nepal. Accessing quality education has been a major challenge, especially in rural Nepal. Over the past period, most students have dropped out in every grade stage. In Nepal, the education system has been categorized into 3 levels; primary (1-5), lower secondary (6-8), and secondary(9-12). There are both Government and Private institutions in Nepal, that provide education. Governmental Institutions tend to provide free education for all of the people. Though people still have different education opportunities, the dropout rate has not been minimized because of factors like limited access, cultural norms, poverty, etc. Research has shown that dropout rates are higher in rural areas than in urban areas.

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Not only students of government have increased dropout rates but also students of private schools because of poverty, low income, and social status. This is why we all, parents, teachers, and the government need to solve this problem [1]. In marginalized communities, gender-based inequalities have a great role in dropout rate elevation because of social norms and cultural concepts that girls should be in households kinds of stuff rather than in school [2]. Most of the parents are illiterate and their children's dropout rates are higher; the age group (10-14) is followed by the age group (5-9) [3]. According to the government's economic survey report, Instead of increasing enrollment rates, dropout rates are vastly increasing with two-thirds of students leaving by grade 12 [4]. Research has shown that student involvement has an extensive impact on dropout intentions in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive aspects [5]. Sociodemographic characteristics have a substantial impact on educational achievement and access in Nepal [6]. Schools with an organized curriculum and high attendance rates are more successful in lowering the dropout rates from the school [7]. Collaboration between school and community groups can reduce dropout rates at their combined work by providing social services, mentorship programs, and after-school activities that make them feel they belong and have a motive [8]. Dropout youngsters frequently experience emotional and physical burdens from working late hours to support the family. Compared to their non-dropout peers, they are more likely to be biased and have a feeling of social inferiority which may turn them into substance abuse [9]. For dropout prevention, improving existing policies of schools, alternative educational programs with high standards, and nurturing environments play crucial roles in prevention [10]. In the context of Nepal, the female dropout rate is higher than the male. Providing marginalized community females with scholarships covering tuition fees, and expenses like uniforms, textbooks and stationaries, transportation to school, and other potential barriers that can hinder access to education [11]. The other factors besides poverty that influence dropout rates are pupil-teacher ratio, health, parental education, the share of male repeaters, etc [12]. In today's context, increasing the number of private schools has significantly decreased the number of student ratios in government schools. This has not only decreased the student ratios but also decreased the quality of education which can be a great factor in the elevation of dropout rates in rural areas [13]. Private schools having high-quality infrastructures, quality teachers, and greater autonomy in decision-making and management, have operated more effectively in student welfare than public schools [14].

This paper has been an attempt to gain insight into the reasons for rural school dropout. It was employed to test whether the school dropout rate is increasing or decreasing over a period. The areas that have been examined by different studies that may have a gap in qualitative research are quantitative data. This analysis attempts to assist the students' predicament in acquiring education in the rural area. This paper will focus on raising awareness to lay the foundation for knowledge. The main purpose of this paper is to eliminate gender, class, or caste biases and subsequently to give a hypothesis that provides us with future approximate data about the dropout. The entire data collection process is of the secondary type and thus, it might not be effective and may not give a correct result since it would be different from primary data. The techniques utilizing the data analysis is the simple, hence some constraints may be obtained.

2   Materials and Methods

This study uses a secondary data analysis method to study trends in education statistics, and more particularly, to analyze the school dropout rate in Nepal. The data used in this study was retrieved from two mainstream online, scholarly sources, namely, Edusanjal, Flash I Report 2076, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Government of Nepal, and Nepal: Education Sector Analysis 2021 [15, 16, 17]. Being a secondary data analysis, this paper does not engage primary data collection but utilizes existing data sets found on reputable online sources. The data, required for the study, was fair and adequately retrieved from the sources. The data then underwent thorough compilation and organization for analysis. Consequently, this paper relied on the use of graphical interpretation to present the findings achieved and did not involve statistical calculations. Line graphs, bar charts, and stacked charts are tools used to visually illustrate trends, patterns, and relationships over time in school dropout rates and other domains critical to education. Ethical considerations involve using fair and unbiased data and citing the material made available for the research. This would entail noting the limitations or biases of the secondary data used in this study. However, the researcher hopes to use the findings of this graphical research to suit efforts in ascertaining the significance and available interventions for the school dropout rates in Nepal. In order to relate the data between two variables hypothesis t-testing has been performed.

3   Results and Discussion

Various factors affect the quality of education as well as influence the dropout rates in Nepal. Some of them are social norms, cultures, early marriage, ignorance, illiteracy, climatic change, lack of transportation facilities, lack of stationary materials, proper clothes, poverty, lack of nutritious foods, etc. These factors have vastly influenced the dropout rates in Nepal.

For most of the students, they have to travel for hours in order to get to school for education. On the way, they have to cross rivers and hills. During rainy days, because of the increase in the level of water in the river, students can't cross it, therefore it makes them drop out of school. This is a common story for students living in rural areas where private institutes are minimal and community schools are far away from home. Because of the lack of breadwinners in the family, teenage children are forced to take responsibility for the home and work for others instead of attending school. In rural areas, it is found that most of the families are unaware of the family planning resulting in having many children. This also has led to a decrease in quality education as well as an increase in dropout rates. Having a traditional concept of marrying daughters before puberty is regarded as auspicious, therefore children mostly girls are forced to marry before puberty which also increases dropout rates. Teenage is the age when the increase of secretion of gonadotropin hormone is high. Both boys and girls produce androgens, though there is a higher level of production in boys. It feels like the mind is being controlled, increasing curiosity, and sexual captivation. These are the days when most males fall into problems and are found to increase dropout rates. Bullying the needy ones, so-called poor children has also increased dropout rates. The condition of the schools, and school environment have influenced the dropout rates. The comparison between community and institutional schools has also created a condition for an increase in dropout rates.

The figure below depicts the distribution of the Student-Teacher ratio in Institutional and Community Schools throughout numerous Nepalese provinces at lower, higher, and combined basic levels in 2019-2020. They are described below.
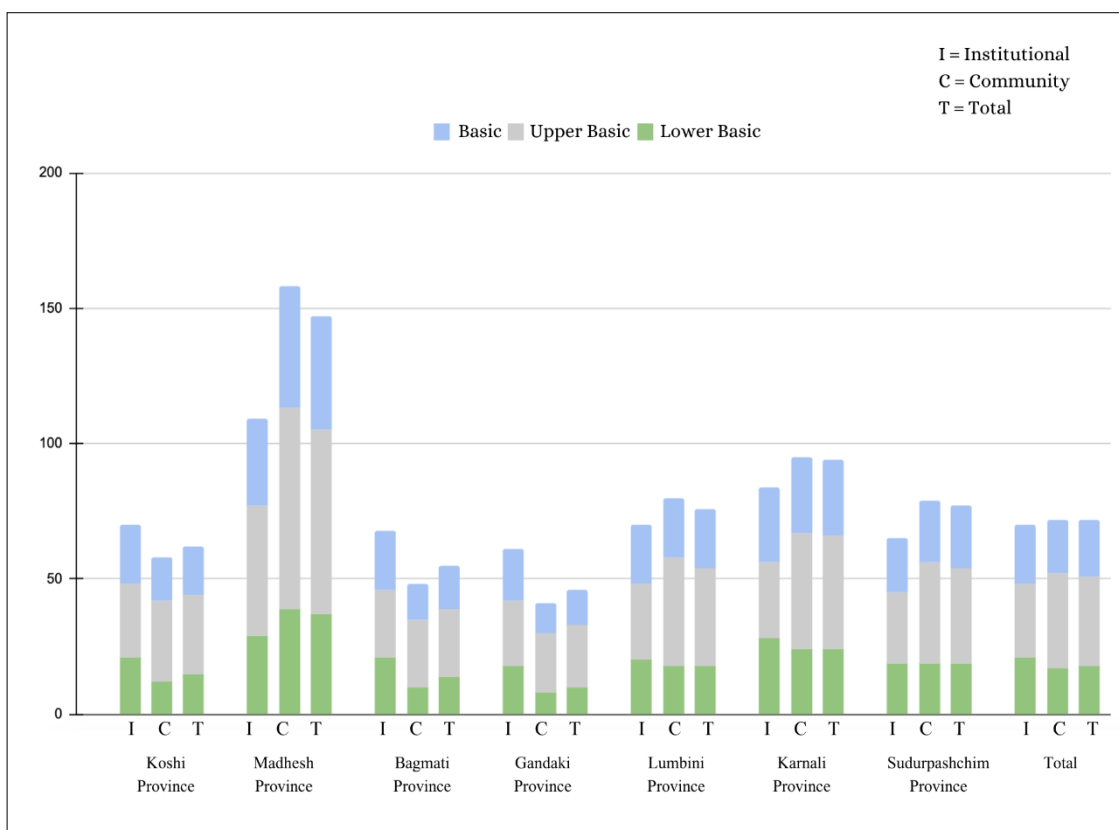
Figure 1 Student-teacher ratio in institutional, communities, in every province of Nepal

Koshi Province: Koshi Province has almost the same distribution of student-teacher ratio in institutional and community schools at all levels. Institutional lower basic is 21:1, upper basic is 27:1 and the combined basic level is 22:1; on the other hand, the community has 12:1, 30:1, and 16:1 at a lower basic, upper basic, and basic level, respectively.

Madhesh Province: The distribution of student-teacher ratio across institutional and community-based schools in Madhesh Province is significantly different from the Koshi Province. The ratio for lower, upper, and combined basic levels for institutional are 29:1, 48:1, and 32:1. When it comes to community-based schools, the ratio is significantly higher: 39:1, 74:1, and 45:1 on lower, upper, and combined levels, respectively. It is possible to compare the provinces and note that the trend in Madhesh is different from that observed in Koshi.

Bagmati Province: The analogous data in the Bagmati Province are slightly lower, and the ratio is comparable to that in the Koshi Province. Institutional schools report lower, upper, and combined basic-level student-teacher ratios of 21:1, 25:1, and 22:1, respectively; community-based schools report 10:1, 25:1, and 13:1.

Gandaki Province: Like Bagmati Province, Gandaki Province has a nearly equivalent ratio of student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutions. At the lower basic – 18:1 and 8:1, at the upper basic – 24:1 and 22:1, and combined basic levels – 19:1 and 11:1 – for the institutional and community-based schools, respectively.

Lumbini Province: Lumbini Province is characterized by fairly equal provision of student-teacher ratio in both institutional and community schools. At the lower basic level, there are 20:1 and 18:1 schools, at the upper basic – 28:1 and 40:1 schools, and at the basic institutional – 22:1 and 22:1 for the institutional and community-based schools.

Karnali Province: Community-based schools have a larger student-teacher ratio than institutional schools at all educational levels. At the lower basic level, there are 28:1 and 24:1 schools, at the upper basic – 28:1 and 43:1 schools, and at the combined basic institutional – 28:1 and 28:1 for the institutional and community-based schools.

Sudurpashchim Province: Sudurpashchim Province also follows a similar case as Karnali Province, the student-teacher ratio is higher with community-based facilities. Lower basic, upper basic and combined basic levels are 19:1, 26:1, and 20:1 for institutional within the Sudurpashchim Province communities, while it stands at 19:1, 37:1, and 23:1.

Finally, the overall total. In summary, the total proportion of student-teacher in educational facilities in all provinces and levels reveals a similarly balanced distribution between institutional and community-based facilities. The lower basic level has a ratio in institutions and community-based equal to 21:1 and 17:1, respectively. There are, in that order, 27:1 and 35:1 student-teacher ratios in community-based and institutional schools at the upper basic level. For the basic level, there is a 22:1 ratio in institutional and 20:1 ratio in community-based schools respectively. The findings yield significant insights into the unequal distribution of students and teachers in the same class of educational resources through Nepal's several provinces that influence the accessibility and quality of education.

3.1 Test of Hypothesis

Significant difference between mean institutional and mean community schools in various provinces.

3.1.1 For Lower Basic Level

H_0 = There is no significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

H_1 = There is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

Here, $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 1 Test of hypothesis for lower basic level

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Institutional	Community
Mean	22.125	18.375
Variance	16.69642857	96.83928571
Observations	8	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	0.9954283673	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.1727680947	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112923	

P(T<=t) two-tail	0.3455361895	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157158	

H_0 is rejected so there is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

3.1.2 For Upper Basic Level

H_0 = There is no significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

H_1 = There is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

Here, α = 0.05

**Table 2** Test of hypothesis for upper basic level

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Institutional	*Community*
Mean	29.125	38.25
Variance	60.125	260.5
Observations	8	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t Stat	-1.441382269	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.09002440938	
t Critical one-tail	1.812461102	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.1800488188	
t Critical two-tail	2.228138842	

H_0 is rejected so there is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

3.1.3 For Basic Level

H_0 = There is no significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

H_1 = There is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

Here, α = 0.05

Table 3 Test of hypothesis for basic level

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances		
	Institutional	*Community*
Mean	23.375	22.25
Variance	19.125	115.3571429
Observations	8	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	0.2743880578	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.3949902829	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112923	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.7899805659	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157158	

H_0 is rejected so there is a significant difference between the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community-based educational institutes.

Hence, there are significant differences in the mean student-teacher ratio in institutional and community institutions, which has influenced dropout rates.

The following chart represents the evaluation of the rates of repetition and dropout for each grade in Nepal, according to the data for the year 2019/20 which demonstrates light on the pattern of student advancement and dropout throughout the student's academic career.
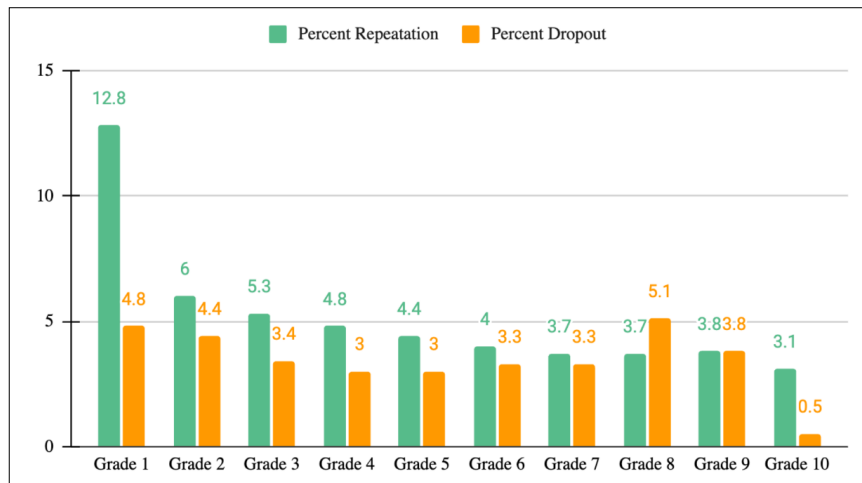
Figure 2 Percentage of repetition and dropout in different grades (1-10), 2019/20.

3.2   Repetition Rates

Repetition rates denote the percentage of students having difficulty in the curriculum and repeating the particular grades.

Grade 1: The repeated rate of Grade 1, which is 12.8%, is the highest, showing that most students have struggled to adjust to the learning environment success. Some students 'socio-economic background, learning disabilities, or lack of solid support may influence their performance leading to repeat in their earliest years of schooling.

Grade 2-5: The rates keep on diminishing from Grade 2 to Grade 5, and it indicates that students are improving and getting well advanced. The continued decrease of this rate to grade 5 indicates that the students are getting useful on how to move to the next level without having to repeat, and that is a positive result and thus, they have achieved the intended curriculum.

Grades 6-7: The repetition rates of Grades 6 and 7 stabilize with minimal wavering. The lack of variation indicates that students are keeping up their academic performance with no major setbacks or need to repeat a grade.

Grade 8: In grade 8, the repetition rises slightly, indicating that there might be resulting academic difficulties or changes before the final years of basic education. The need to repeat this grade may be caused by students not doing well with the increase in the school level or standardized tests.

Grades 9-10: The repetition rates remain quite constant between the two grades, slightly decreasing once Grade 10 is considered. From this perspective, it is quite possible that students are successful in managing their way through the final two years of basic education and are on track to graduate without major interruptions or academic failures.

3.3 Dropout Rate

The dropout rate is the percentage of students leaving school education without completion of graduation.

Grade 1: The rate of dropouts in grade 1 is found to be 4.8%. This percentage increases due to factors like poverty, lack of access to education, family circumstances, etc. In order to encounter this, the support of students 'policies should be retained.

Grade 2-5: The dropout rate is found to be stable in Grades 2 to 5. It also indicates the steady level of dropout throughout early schooling. To boot, the dropout rate is mainly favored by factors like academic disinterest, economic hardships, and social pressure.

Grade 6-7: Barely increased dropout rates due to the transition phase occurred in students 'lives facing challenges in adapting to new academic expectations or social environments. So the school support system may be needed to mitigate the dropout risk during this transition phase.

Grade 8: Surprisingly, dropout rates in grade 8 are highlighted by challenges faced by students in education retention as students are ready to encounter the final year of basic-level education. Academic pressure, lack of support systems, or socioeconomic imbalance contribute to the increase in dropout rate at this level.

Grades 9-10: A slight decrease in dropout rate has been seen as students are aware of educational importance or progression towards graduation. This suggests that measures implemented for the mitigation of the dropout rate and increase in promoting education are effective.

3.3.1 *Coefficient of Correlation between percentage repetition and percentage dropout*

Table 4 Percentage of repetition and dropout in different grades (1-10), 2019/20

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
Percent Repetition (x)	12.8	6	5.3	4.8	4.4	4	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.1
Percent Dropout (y)	4.8	4.4	3.4	3	3	3.3	3.3	5.1	3.8	0.5

Here,

n = 10, $\sum x$ = 51.6, $\sum y$ = 34.6, $\sum xy$ = 193.73, $\sum x^2$ = 337.76, $\sum y^2$ = 134.44

Then,

$$r = \frac{n \cdot \sum xy - \sum x \cdot \sum y}{\sqrt{n \cdot \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2} \cdot \sqrt{n \cdot \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

$$= \frac{10 \cdot 193.73 - 51.6 \cdot 34.6}{\sqrt{10 \cdot 337.76 - (51.6)^2} \cdot \sqrt{10 \cdot 134.44 - (34.6)^2}}$$

$$= \frac{1937.3 - 1785.36}{\sqrt{3377.6 - 2662.56} \cdot \sqrt{1344.4 - 1197.16}}$$

$$= \frac{151.94}{\sqrt{715.04} \cdot \sqrt{147.24}}$$

$$= \frac{151.94}{26.7402 \cdot 12.1342}$$

$$= \frac{151.94}{324.4726}$$

$$= 0.4683$$

The calculated Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.468 which denotes the positive correlation between percentage repetition and percentage dropout upon different grades. This means if the percentage of repetition increases, then the percentage of dropouts also increases.

The below line graph compares the number of males and females in each level of studies. The level includes lower basic, upper basic, lower secondary, upper secondary, bachelor, master's, MPhil, PhD, and PGD.
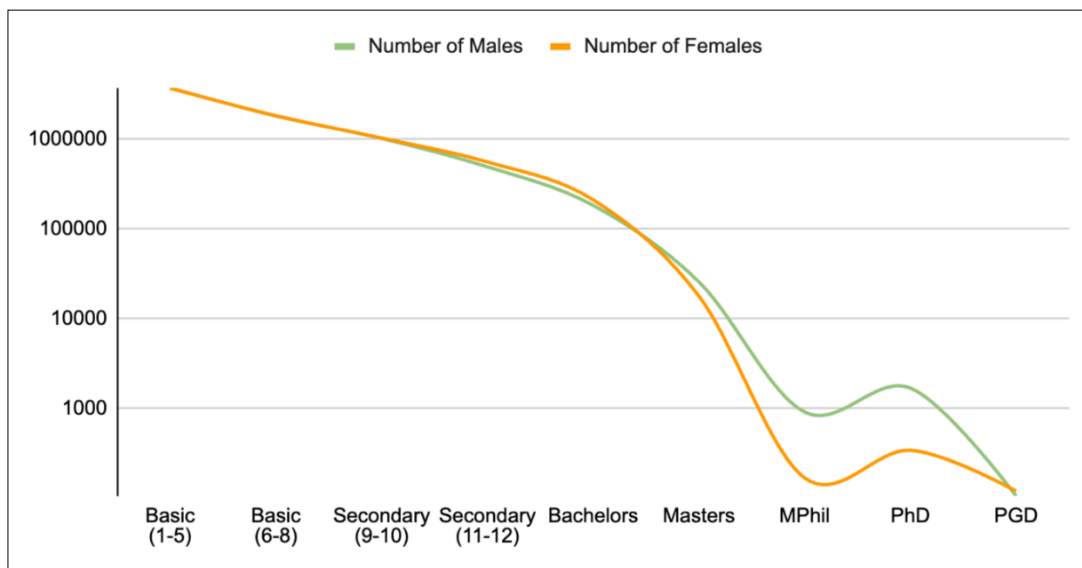
Figure 3 Percentage of repetition and dropout in different grades (1-10), 2019/20.

Basic Education (Grades 1-5):

The foundational stage of education depicts relatively balanced enrollment numbers with 3,750,820 males and 3,710,384 females. It advocates equitable access to education. However, this rate is influenced by various factors like socio-economic, and geographic disparities.

Basic Education (Grades 6-8):

There is a slight decrease in enrollment compared to previous grades. Despite this decline, there is a fairly equal distribution based on gender. It should be noted that various factors such as early marriage, and economic constraints have reduced the enrollment rate at this level.

Secondary Education (Grades 9-10):

There is a higher number of female enrollment than males because most males quit at this level because of their socio-economic background. This can also be because of increased awareness and promotion of girls' education. Still, the total enrollment is decreasing compared to the previous level.

Secondary Education (Grades 11-12):

The gender gap widens significantly with a notable decrease in male enrollment. This dropout raises a remarkable question about the causes of the decrease in the male number. There are potential areas for inspection including career, and parental expectations.

Tertiary Education:

The enrollment pattern varies at different degree programs. As the female population is higher than the male in bachelor's programs, the reverse is observed at the master's level. We can conclude that females show greater interest than males in pursuing postgraduate studies. However, a significant decrease in females number in MPhil and PhD is observed. It underscores challenges in promoting women's participation in research and academics.

Postgraduate Diploma (PGD):

There is a relatively equal number of both genders in post-graduate diplomas sharing an interest in specialized postgraduate studies.

The detailed analysis of enrollment data reveals the tangled interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Comparing the data on enrollment, there is a significant rate of dropout. A total of 7,461,204 students are enrolled in grade 1 where 3,750,820 and 3,710,384 are male and female respectively. By the time of post-graduate specialization, the number is reduced to 224 where 105 and 119 are male and female respectively. A great decline in enrollment is seen after the master's program.

4 Conclusion

Nepali education and school dropout rates are driven by various social, economic, and environmental factors. Most notably, cultural norms and early marriage, as well as poverty, illiteracy, lack of transport and materials, and climate factors contribute to children's non-attendance of schools in Nepal. Rural areas present multiple challenges, including school-to-home travel and economic restrictions. Student-teacher ratios vary between institutional and community schools, with the latter presenting higher rates. Girls 'education is negatively impacted by socioeconomic conditions, poor family planning, and cultural trends such as early marriage. In general, institutional schools demonstrate better performance. Moreover, certain measures need to be taken to support at-risk students. This can be achieved through the following comprehensive strategies, including but not limited to improving infrastructure, provisions of economic support, teacher training, and general education consciousness in the community.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest is to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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