



Nepal: Patterns of Privatisation in Education.

A case study of low-fee private schools and private chain schools

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Key Findings

- ***Emergence of private sector as a key player in the national education landscape***

Private schools were almost non-existent in Nepal before 1980, but they now account for 15.3 per cent of total students at primary level, 16.2 per cent at lower secondary, and 19.3 per cent at secondary level according to the Department of Education (DOE). The majority of private schools are registered as company schools, i.e. they are established as, and operate largely for profit, indicating a rise of commercialisation of education (Bhatta and Budhathoki, 2013).

However, there are significant gender, geographical and socio-economic disparities in participation in private schools. The gender parity index in basic and secondary levels in private schools is only 0.77 compared to 1.10 in public schools (DOE, 2015), an indication of significant gender disparities in access to private schools. The Tarai region has the largest share of private schools (42 percent), followed by the Hilly region (28 percent) and the Kathmandu Valley (27 percent).

In Kathmandu district, about 78 percent of all schools are private and 70 percent of the total students attend private schools (DOE, 2015). Likewise, 60.1 percent of the individuals from the richest income quintile currently enrolled in school/college were attending private institutions, compared to only 6.4 percent from the poorest quintile (CBS, 2011).



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Moreover, of those enrolled in school/college, 56.1 percent in urban areas were attending private schools/colleges as compared to only 19.6 per cent in rural areas (Ibid.). This has led to a gradual 'pauperisation' of public schools (Bhatta, 2014), in the sense that public schools are becoming residual places for the poor as the rich move to private schools.

- ***Weak regulation of private schools***

As per the Education Act and the Education Regulations, both public and private schools are required to follow the national curriculum, use the textbooks that are developed, prescribed and/or approved by the Curriculum Development Centre, and sit the same board examinations at the end of grades 8, 10, 11 and 12. Private schools are also mandated to ensure that the service conditions of teachers and non-teaching staff are at par with the minimum government norms and standards.

The mechanism for ensuring compliance of private schools to existing legislation consists of regular monitoring visits by field representatives of the district education offices (school supervisors and resource persons, who are also responsible for monitoring public schools). In practice, these represent insufficient human resources and institutional arrangements to effectively monitor all schools.

Furthermore, the role of the Minister of Education has been more reactive than proactive in the case of establishing appropriate mechanisms for the regulation of the private actors. Even if the successive development plans and political party manifestos for various elections have highlighted the necessity and intent to strengthen the regulation of private schools, the manifestation of such intent in Education Act and Regulations has been inadequate and often countered stiff resistance from an increasingly organised and powerful private sector.

- ***Growth of networks and chains, and penetration of transnational actors***

The recent trend of education privatisation in Nepal is characterised by a growing penetration of 'international' education programmes in Nepal's school system, including the growth of franchise schools, and affiliation to international curricula, examinations and co-curricular and extra-curricular programmes.



Likewise, schools under individual proprietorship are gradually being converted into chain or network schools involving mergers, acquisition and partnering, indicating the rise of more organised and powerful groups in the education sector. There is also the growth of both formal and informal clustering of like-minded private schools around a common curriculum and co-curricular activities, often deriving from their claims of catering to a particular social class or status group.

- ***Spread of a very constricted view of education***

The growing infatuation of both Samata and CG schools — and other private schools as well, with a high degree of standardisation in teaching-learning content and processes, and the equation of educational success with student performance in the annual secondary education examinations (SEE) has promoted a very narrow conception of education that limits education to subject-based teaching-learning and adequate training and preparation for the examinations.

This success does not necessarily reflect improved teaching and learning methods or quality in its broadest sense. Rather, it capitalises on the conventional assessment practice that rewards rote-learning and the narrow focus on exam preparation which helps achieve *good results*. Children's overall development and broad indicators of education quality are neither valued in the national education culture nor included as priorities at Samata schools or CG schools. Such a constricted view of education fits neatly with the neoliberal agenda of equating good quality with 'efficiency'.

- ***De-professionalisation of teaching***

The prevalence of uncertified, under-qualified and untrained teachers who work under severe constraints characterised by low salaries, long working hours and congested classrooms has contributed to a general de-professionalisation of teaching in private schools, which undermines the need for teacher education and professional development. Most Samata staff are not certified teachers.

They report they would like to stay in the profession and are committed to contributing to Samata's 'mission' but, simultaneously, are hopeful that an improvement in their school's financial conditions would translate into reward for their labour. For the majority, teaching at Samata was seen as an opportunity to gain some professional experience until a better opportunity is available or until they complete their university education and move on to their desired profession.



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There is an acceptance of the notion that teacher turnover is normal and teaching qualifications are unnecessary, as long as teachers help children achieve good results in the exam.

- ***Gender dimension of teacher recruitment in private schools***

The majority of full time teaching staff in Samata schools were females, whereas most of the part-time teachers—who were mainly hired to teach secondary level students preparing for the SEE, were male. This scenario fits very neatly with the national data, which shows that there are more female teachers at the primary level in both private and public schools, but more so in private schools.

The male teachers were reported to be paid at the same level, if not more, than those working in other average private schools. However, female teachers reported that their salaries were insufficient to make their ends meet. In a gender-hierarchical society such as Nepal, where women have traditionally been confined within home and usually not expected to work in the professional sector, private schools—including Samata—seem to be offering teaching positions that do not require professional qualifications or training. A lack of legal requirement for a minimum wage seems to create an economic environment where historically marginalised social groups are likely to be easily exploited. Clearly, the deregulation of the labour market seems to work against the welfare of workers, and teachers seem to be the victims of this neoliberal framework in the education sector. However, more research is needed to expand the scope of this claim.

- ***Capitalising on the discursive success of neoliberalism***

The public perception of education quality in post-colonial societies is dominated by what modern, westernised education offers—manifested through educational facilities, curriculum and the medium of instruction.

In such a context, education in private schools, provided through English medium and perceived to be of better quality than their public counterparts, fulfils the economic aspirations of families in the global capitalist market. Low-fee private schools have been presented as a pragmatic alternative to both high-fee, commercially driven private schools and free but failing and poor quality public schools (Pherali, 2013). This research demonstrates that the neoliberal trajectories (discussed in Chapter 2) are being manifested through the chain schools and low-fee private schools in Nepal.



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