

Privatization in Education: Myths versus Reality in the Nepalese Context

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the history of privatization in education in Nepal with the aim of exposing its multilayered negative impacts on different sectors of the country. Critiquing on the different illusions created by those supporting this privatization, an attempt is made to unfold its ugly reality and the way it corrupts different state mechanisms. The irony is that outwardly privatization seems to be playing a positive role in enhancing the quality of education as well as creating job opportunities. But in reality, it is playing a crucial role in the degradation of the quality of education and promoting exploitation in different forms. Moreover, privatization in education is corrupting the mentality of our youth and creating such a social environment where money is regarded as everything. Increased expenditure of people in basic needs like education and health has increased the pressure of earning money in all costs that ultimately leads to corruption. This paper concludes that the privatization of education is the source of multiple problems Nepalese society is facing at present. Therefore, the decision of privatization in education needs to change with critical understanding of the myths created by the supporters of privatization for a better society. This research paper can be helpful for those who are working in the field of education. Following qualitative research design, this study explores data from multiple sources especially from the scholarly papers on the issue.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a politically sovereign but economically dependent state where large numbers of people are still struggling to fulfill their basic needs. Our constitution has declared that the state is moving to socialism. The Constitution of Nepal 2072 has made education a fundamental right. "Every citizen shall have the right to get compulsory and free education up to the

basic level and free education up to the secondary level from the state" (Art. 31, 2). However, the great paradox is the extreme privatization of education here. Education experts say, it is very ironic that capitalist countries have a minimal presence of private schools while a country like Nepal led by socialist or communist parties, has become a fertile ground for commercializing education. People's

earning capacity is low but are compelled to spend their earnings for getting education, a fundamental right. This high cost of education is inviting so many problems in society.

Privatization of education is a crucial cause for the dilapidated condition of community or government educational institutions. On one hand, the private sector is creating the rumor that the government schools cannot provide quality education. On the other hand, they influence the government mechanism with the money earned illegally and show the high result of private sectors. The Government of Nepal spends large amounts of money every year in the education sector. This year the amount is 203.66 billion, which is about 10.01 percent of total budget (Budget Speech 2081/82). But because of the corruptive influence of the private sector, it is being ineffective. The purpose of this study is to clarify that the privatization in education is the main source of multiple problems that Nepalese society is facing at present time. It is expected that this research will help for making community schools friendly policies and gradually free our education system from the grip of privatization.

The significance of the study is to clarify the myths created by the supporters of privatization in education and reveal its corruptive influence on multiple sectors of Nepalese society. Ultimately, this research appeals to the policy makers to free the Nepalese education system from the grip of privatization and guarantee the basic right of all people acquiring quality education. Privatization has multiple sectors but this study concentrates on its influence on the education system of Nepal. Rather than concentrating on a particular area, this study focuses on the overall situation of Nepalese society in a discursive way.

1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section incorporates the ideas presented by different researchers on the privatization of education. The ideas discussed here are diverse and sufficient to identify the research gap of this research.

Discussing the trend of privatization in education in Nepal, Bhattarai (2009) writes, "Currently Nepal is undergoing a significant political transition. At present state of upheavals, it is an interesting question which path Nepal's education system takes as both the public and the private options do not appear to offer solutions. Privatization is much less likely to address social justice, the study reinforces"(p. 54). Bhattarai points out that in the turning point of the education system in Nepal discussions are held about the proper way to mitigate present problems. The clear point is that privatization of education will increase problems more than solving them. She is against the idea of privatization in education.

Lawrence and Sharma (2002) clearly indicate the deviation of the education system from its path of truth and beauty as it is commoditized in the process of privatization. They point:

The instrumental reasoning associated with capitalism has penetrated deeper into daily experience. Political and cultural life has been colonized by instrumental techniques (i.e. accounting and economics) and distorted communications, so that categories of truth and beauty have been replaced by the instrumental knowledge of techno-science. (p. 663)

Present era is dominated by techno-science and capitalism is the dominating trend. Privatization in education is also a form of capitalism that is killing the essence of education and changing it into commercial activity. There is no beauty and mutualness in the relationship between teacher and pupil.

Bhattarai and Pherali (2017) point to the defect of private educational institutions and their result-oriented teaching. In the pursuit of national level results, they have disregarded the criticality and creativity of our youth. So, they recommend, " Improve the quality of education not just in terms of success in

national exams but also in the development of critical awareness and creativity in young people who are able to shape the development trajectories of Nepal" (p. 7). Bhattarai and Pherali in their study of the different dimensions of the privatization of education in Nepal have reached the conclusion that in the pursuit of national level results private schools have neglected the creativity and criticality of young students who are the backbones of our future progress.

Poudyal (2017) unfolds the ugly reality of privatization in education. He clarifies how the organizations of private schools are disobeying and threatening government mechanisms with the help of the money earned exploiting the teachers and students. Poudyal claims:

The government of Nepal appears to be trying hard to bring private education sectors under the same regulatory framework within the public-school system. But the government has not been successful. Private schools' umbrella organizations, PABSON and NPABSON, are often seen demanding separate laws and/or regulatory frameworks for the operation of private schools. Reality suggests they are just doing this in their self-interest and are violating rules and regulations of the government. (p. 546)

These lines reflect the true reality of the monopoly of private institutions and their access in the state policy making places. They donate to major political parties in the election and through them play in the policy making process.

Koirala (2015) points out different aspects of privatization in education. Specially, he points to the major merit of privatization in education as promotion of quality. He points, "However, private schools are providing better education and challenging the poor performance of public schools and inviting them for the competition to deliver quality education" (p. 7). Koirala highlights the role of private

schools in promoting quality education. Their performance has pressured community schools to do something for better results. Therefore, their role in promoting quality is praiseworthy. Similarly, Datta and Kundu (2021) discussing the privatization of education in India reach the middle line conclusion. They conclude, "So, it can be concluded that privatization is not a subject which can be opposed totally but the state should control the system of privatization whenever they violate any constitutional rights." (p. 357). They are neither totally in favor of privatization nor totally against it. They see certain merits of privatization of education but point that privatization should be controlled by the state not to let it violate constitutional rights.

The discussion above presents the essence of different scholarly researches. It proves that numerous researches are conducted on the issue of the privatization in education in Nepal. Bhattarai has the clear point that privatization in education in Nepal solves no problem but adds the problem and Lawrence and Sharma point how the capitalization in education has killed the essence and beauty of education. Similarly, Bhattarai and Pherali show the defect of private schools in their full concentration on result disregarding the creativity and criticality and Paudyal highlights the disobedience of private schools' organization to the government policies. Koirala seems positive toward the private schools and points to their contribution for promoting quality in education and Datta and Kundu also favor privatization but in state-controlled position. To the best of my knowledge, these researches have paid less attention to clarify the myths of privatization in education and indifferent to expose the negative impacts of privatization in education in different sectors of our society. This is the research gap this research aims to complete.

2. METHOD AND MATERIAL

This research is based on qualitative research design. It uses data from both

library and first-hand experiences of the related field. Both primary and secondary data related to the research problem are used to justify the claim. Critical observation of different academic researches and articles written on the subject is made to grasp the information about the history of privatization of education in Nepal and the overall impact it has put on different sectors of Nepalese society. In the process of data collection, the texts containing ideas of both sides: supporting privatization in education and opposing privatization in education are observed equally. Rather than concentrating on a particular place or institution, overall impact throughout Nepal is analyzed and interpreted in this research in a discursive way. The first-hand experiences of the researcher working as a teacher in both private educational institutions and government educational institutions are the guiding motives for the research.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section includes the major parts of the research paper. It is structured into two parts: history of privatization in education in Nepal and the exposition of the myths or illusions that the supporters of privatization in education have spread in Nepal.

3.1 HISTORY OF PRIVATIZATION IN EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Education in Nepal officially started from the time of Rana rule. The credit of establishing the first modern school-Durbar High School in 1853 AD goes to Rana family. It was established to provide English education to the members of Rana family. For the public that school was not open and they had to depend on homeschooling and Gurukuls to get education. Before the 1950s education was not available for general people, it was limited to rich and elite families. Therefore, just less than one percent of the population was with the facility of education. Kashi state of India was another famous place from where the youth of rich families used to get education. The pathetic situation of education is

indicated by the literacy rate of the time that was just five percent. From the 1950s, gradually schools emerged but for higher education, there was no institution. The establishment of Tribhuvan University in 1959 is the milestone for the development of higher education.

In the Post-1950s, the education sector witnessed great transformations. The introduction of democracy in the country proved extremely fruitful for the development of education in Nepal. Previous boundaries on education were broken, it was made available for all and there appeared drastic change in the system of education. The slogan 'education for all' became common. Reforms such as the National Education System Plan (NESP) were introduced in 1971, which paved the way for a more modern and egalitarian education system that focused on compulsory public basic education. NEPS brought all community-run schools under national monitoring. The plan attempted to establish a unified system of public education by empowering District Education Offices (DEOS) for running schools. At that time, School Management Committees (SMCs) were not given places.

Adarsh Vidya Mandir was the first private school established in Nepal in 1966 AD. Prior to the nationalization of all schools by NESP in 1971 AD, there were private schools but their motive was not to get benefits. They were run under the motive of 'not-for-profit'- either government-aided or unaided. Only after the reintroduction of Democracy in the country in 1990 AD the mushrooming of private schools took place. The seventh amendment to the

The Education act in 2002 opened the way for registering private schools in companies for profit. The education act further allowed private schools to be affiliated with foreign education institutions. This gave rise to the benefit or earning motive of private schools. Moreover, this gave rise to the wave of privatization in the education sector. Not only schools level education but also higher education is privatized. This introduction of privatization in the education sector helped to increase

the number of schools and colleges and spread the light of education. But the motive of benefit that was introduced in the education sector became the source of so many problems in Nepalese society.

3.2 REALITY VERSUS ILLUSION: MYTHS OF PRIVATIZATION IN EDUCATION

The trend of privatization of educational institutions is increasing worldwide. It is increasing in such a way as if it is a natural course. Proponents of privatization in education claim the efficiency and choices that private schools provide to parents for the quality education of their children. Those who oppose often raise the issue that education should not be the part of a neo-liberal project that favors market over welfare. They point to the gap that the privatization of education is creating in our society between the rich and poor. Our critical discussion of the different arguments in favor and against the privatization of education aims to clarify the issue of privatization in education as a whole.

Those standing for privatization of education claim, private educational institutions are playing a pivotal role in providing quality education in Nepal. What is quality education? Is English medium education the indication of quality education? Is parroting quality education? Is illegal interference in the examination system and securing high-grade quality education? Every sensible person knows the answer. The Action Aid (2017) research entitled, *The Right to Education under Threat by Privatization in Nepal* clearly indicates this. "Our research finds that many private schools focus narrowly on exam results using rote-learning in order to achieve higher pass rate and attract more students" (p. 3). Private educational institutions are producing such students who think that their money can do anything. They feel they are buying education and paying large amounts of money. In association to this issue Ghimire (2022) mentions, "In addition, the earlier aura of teaching and learning in the classroom in many respects has been

declining, and the role of teachers has become just that of facilitators, and the perception of students toward teachers has completely changed" (p. 4). The students who have paid for their education never treat teachers as their guide but just workers employed with their money. Is this quality education? The answer is obvious.

Privatization of education and establishment of well-equipped educational institutions have helped to stop students' flow abroad, they claim. The record shows nearly 100 thousand students go abroad every year. This data proves their claim false. Contrary to their claim, expensive education is the main cause of students going abroad. More than 75% of students going abroad are there not for study but for employment. The main reason behind this is the inability of parents to provide educational facilities to their children by doing simple work here in Nepal as privatization has made education expensive. The realization has compelled them to go abroad after completing twelve class. In reality, it is not the private educational institutions that can stop students going abroad but improved community or government institutions that provide quality education at a cheap price. Teaching Hospital, Maharajung, Pulchowk Engineering College, Thapathali Engineering College, Rampur Campus, Forestry Campus, Pokhara, Shankar Dev Campus etc. are few examples that have done so. If private educational institutions owners called 'mafias' do not interfere in policy making in a seen or unseen manner, thousands of such institutions will be here and they will really stop the flow of students going abroad providing quality education at minimal cost.

It is claimed that private educational institutions are providing jobs and helping to decrease unemployment. It is correct outwardly. Thousands of teaching and non-teaching staff are getting jobs. However, the reality is different. Private educational institutions are the sites where extreme exploitation of human labor is taking place and helping to create negative sentiment in the society. "Private school

teachers have been organizing themselves and demanding their rights according to ILO convention 110, which guarantees the salary, leaves, and other benefits and social security of school teachers" (Subedi, Subedi & Shrestha, 2012, p. 19). However, their demands are never listened to. The owners behave like merciless butchers. They fire those teachers from the job who demand value of their sweat. Regarding this situation Paudyal (2017) opines, "The staff participants' viewpoint suggested that they were experiencing exploitation from the school owners. Staff exploitation was due to lack of proper government regulation" (p. 540). According to Paudyal, the teachers who were interviewed during his research complained about the exploitation in private schools. Under this system of privatization, a limited number of 'mafias' are earning; but a large number of parents and workers are exploited. The immoral activities that are taking place at private educational institutions are polluting the social environment. If only 25% of parents' expenditure is utilized properly, many employment opportunities will be created and community institutions without the sense of exploitation will provide proper education.

The most crucial matter is the disobedience of law by private schools' organizations. They are out of control in the absence of strong monitoring authority. Observing this issue Gautam (2018) in The Kathmandu Post writes, "Two days after the federal parliament endorsed the act on compulsory and free education, private and boarding schools' organization (PABSON) slammed the provision in law" (p. 3). The owners of the private schools are so powerful by the money earned illegally, they defy the government. They influence policymaking and if failed to do so, go for protest against the government. Similarly, Paudyal (2017) highlights the disobedience of government laws by private schools in the name of not including them in the process of policy making. He points:

The government of Nepal has constantly been framing rules and regulations related to the private

education sector without any success in implementing them. The private education sector violates the government's policies and regulations, arguing that the government did not involve them in framing the policy and regulations and so they do not have to follow them. (p. 545)

These lines depict the reality of the Nepal Government. Before private school owners or education mafias, even the government is powerless. They claim that the government should consult and address their interest in the process of making plans and policies. By hook and crook, they influence the government system.

There is a strong influence of education 'mafias' in the educational policy making process. They have accumulated much money, sufficient to buy posts in legislature as well to secure their participation in executive. Around 45 members of the second Constituent Assembly were directly involved in running private schools, colleges. Even in the current parliament, there are about two dozen lawmakers who own private education institutions. 'Education Law' is prepared for endorsement in parliament many times but because of the interference of education 'mafias', it is being delayed. This failure to bring new law as per the need of changed political situation, many progressive activities are hindered in the government education system. Spending the exploited money, the 'mafias' reach to different posts of community and government educational institutions. Then they work to defame them. At present, the biggest higher education institution of Nepal TU is facing this problem extremely. Such 'mafias' are responsible for different immoral activities that defame TU. Moreover, they even invest money in a certain group of people to go on strike in different names. In one way or another, they attempt to destroy the faith of people in government institutions and promote private institutions. Wagle (2013) points, "Due to such ongoing debates and the inability of the incoming government to

properly regulate private schools in the country, there has been continuous academic and political pressure on the government for proper monitoring and systematic operation of such schools" (p. 7). Wagle stresses the failure of the government to monitor the private schools and shows the need of making a strong monitoring mechanism. Otherwise, they destroy our community and government education institutions.

Privatization of education is the hidden cause of the corruption that is taking place in our country. Everyone desires to provide good education for the children. However, the privatization has made it expensive. With the thought of failing to provide good education to children, people prefer collection of money. This motive of collection ultimately leads to corruption. Government workers as well as others are compelled to follow the corruptive method of earning, due to expensive education in our country. If quality education and health service is provided, free of cost from government level, corruption will be controlled automatically. Another important fact is that privatization of education has created the environment of preferring money and regarding it everything. This attitude is greatly responsible for corruption in our society. Until and unless we become able to change this mentality, corruption is not going to be stopped. Therefore, privatization of education, which is solely responsible for the degraded mentality of people, is the hidden cause of corruption.

Another important vice of privatization in education is creation of two types of people. One educated in private institutions with personal expenditure and another educated in community institutions with government expenditure. "So private education further aggravates existing inequalities between the rich and the poor, and marginalizes the underprivileged group of population" (The Right to Education, 2017, p. 4). Socially also it is hindering the assimilation of people, which is essential for harmony in the society. Discrimination leads to enmity in unconscious level resulting

different crimes like robbery, rape murder etc. which are destroying peace and harmony in the society. It is also creating hierarchy and feeling of otherness. Actually, privatization in education has killed the essence of education, which is to empower people to fight against all types of discrimination and lead to universal goodwill.

Private educational institutions are focusing on English medium and western patterns not only in study but also in other activities. This is killing the concept of patriotism, love of one's own culture, custom, rituals etc. This pattern is grooming students with such habits and attitudes that ultimately make them inappropriate for their own nation or soil where they were born. Phayak (2017) rightly indicates, "The mentality of regarding percentage as quality, has greatly limited the scope and objective of education. Schools (private) have focused on exams rather than effective learning. Thereby creativity, curiosity, and socialization process has been hammered cruelly" (p. 4). Their socialization process has been disregarded totally. That is why; they go abroad and are lost there. They are brought up here but at the productive age, they go abroad and contribute to the foreign economy. When we observe data, more than 80% of workers in Nepal are the production of community or government educational institutions. So, a big question for private educational institutions is, for whose interest are they serving? The answer is obvious.

Privatization of education in the context of Nepal is the great unequalizer. Bhattarai (2017) stresses this issue and points, "It institutionalizes inequality. An obscure pattern emerges – there may be a negative correlation between privatization of education for profit and the country's state of economy. The "rise" of private education may be associated with the "fall" of public education."(p. 53) Privatization of education in Nepal has resulted in the inequality in the society. The fall of public education deteriorates the situation of poor people. This expansion of inequality leads to

so many serious problems in society. Man Prasad Wagle (qtd. in Ghimire, 2018) an education expert and professor at the Kathmandu University, presented a report suggesting that, "The government should gradually phase out private schools while facilitating a shift towards technical education or university education. The suggestion made public in April said the phasing out process should start from the first grade, which will take 12 years to end the private sectors' presence in the education sector"(p. 3). Therefore, we should go for the alternatives of the privatization of education in Nepal.

As a whole, privatization in education is the key issue of the discussion in Nepalese society and its influence is widespread. It seems in surface level that without private education institutions providing quality education is not possible. However, the actual reality is different. Private education institutions are the great barriers for providing quality education for all Nepalese citizens and guarantee the just society.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The discussion of the multiple aspects of privatization in education leads us to the conclusion that the ethical service of the private sector in education can be accepted. However, the situation has reached such a terrible condition that privatization in education has become the vital cause of multiple problems in the country. It has become the main spot where educated workforce is exploited. By means of the money earned unethically, they are promoting so many unethical works. The private sectors are crippling the government mechanism and creating the situation where they openly disobey government policies. In another word, they are corrupting the whole government mechanism of education and paralyzing them. Moreover, they are promoting the culture of foreign study, foreign stay, and foreign love; and creating hatred in youths toward our culture and nation. This situation is leading Nepalese society towards the path of disintegration.

Discrimination, exploitation, corruption and crimes are the byproduct of privatization in education.

Thus, I recommend, for a corruption free, progressive, harmonious and patriotic society; privatization in education should be totally stopped. Every member of the nation should have the right and capability to acquire quality education. The provision of equality in educational rights will lead to equality of so many other aspects in the society. It needs great determination but without the implementation of equality in educational rights, other steps for creating just society are baseless. Until the nation gets freedom from the evil of privatization in education, all other welfare programs become failures. Education for all without discrimination is the first condition for establishing a just state.

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