

Funding Community Colleges in Nepal: Issues and Mitigation Measures

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Abstract

The regular development grants provided by the University Grants Commission (UGC) to community colleges are the most important financial support to them. UGC is also supporting its faculties and students through fellowship and scholarship schemes which are another milestone to foster the mission of community colleges. Besides, local governments, individuals, student fees, donations, alumnae support, and income from religious works are also sources of funding. These qualitative and empirical methods based on secondary sources with the eyes of social justice theory in education aim to investigate the funding modality of UGC and its impact on access to higher education. It also aims to point out some of the problems, and issues and highlight the implications of funding, in the Nepalese context. It was found that the input-based funding modality which was based on the indicators such as several students, location, programs, pass rate, and many more was insufficient to promote the access, quality, and relevancy of higher education in community colleges in Nepal.

Keywords: Higher education, community college, restructuring, access, quality, Nepal.

Introduction

The trend of financing higher education (HE) throughout the world has seen dramatic changes due to the socio-economic and political instabilities in countries. Its consequences are remarkable for their influences on the financing of HE in the last decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century. These impacts vary among countries. Research shows that the general trend of HE is increasing per student unit cost, costs of instruction; increasing enrollments; high expectations; the low level of governmental revenues; increasing globalization and liberalization, and the resulting decentralization, devolution, and privatization of public and private systems (Johnstone, 2009).

Due to the above-mentioned impact, the trend of public financing is also shifting. This trend is observed everywhere as per their national context and the status of revenue collection. The global trend of financing consists of the decline in public expenditure; efforts on cost recovery; student loans; public universities starting to generate resources from third parties; privatization; and the reduction in public grants to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in many countries also forced them to go across the borders in search of finances (Tilak, 2005).

In the present context of Nepal, where the socio-economic indicators show that Nepal is among the least developed countries in the world, where 25.2 percent of its population living below the poverty line and the unemployment rate for 2020 was 4.44 percent, a 1.59 percent increase from 2019 (Macrotrends, 2021). In 2015, Nepal's expenditure on education was 3.7 percent of GDP and ranked 87 in the world (Moody's Economic Indicators Analytics, 2021). Nepal has an adult literacy rate of 56.6 percent, with a huge variation between males and females, and ranks 4th in the SAARC region. The first three countries were Maldives (95 %), Sri Lanka (92.5%), and India (74.04%). Around 35 percent of Nepalese are still illiterate (Dhakal, 2018). UNESCO education for all global monitoring report-2010 reveals that the world trend of the gross enrollment ratio in tertiary education accounts for (11 to 18) percent, wherein it is 14.5 percent in 2011 and 13.5 percent in 2020 in Nepal (UNESCO, 2021). Besides, the World Bank database (2011) highlighted that the educational achievement of at least a Bachelor's or equivalent in the age group 25+ was recorded at 4.62 percent whereas the share of the male was 7.5 percent and the rest 2.23 percent were female. The global trend of enrollment in tertiary education was (11 to 18) percent (World Bank, 2020).

In this situation, the community colleges have given access to about one-third of the total enrollment with public funding about (4 to 6) percent of the total budget allocated to HE, demanding an alternative way of funding the community colleges for accessibility and making it more quality and relevancy. Besides, an alternative funding policy is needed for the country to overcome the high unemployment rate, illiteracy, social-cultural discrimination, gender discrimination, and underprepared manpower in the country. The new modes of public funding as stated by (Tilak, 2005 a), “‘lump sum’ or ‘block’ grant plus grant supported for enrolments, or subsidization with the performance-related grant, or enrolment based grant plus research grants, or subsidization plus incentive grant, or subsidization plus matching grants” may be applicable in our context.

Besides, PU, KU, PoKU, and other universities are government-funded universities and get the mandate based or the block grants based on the headcounts of the faculties and staff, and the remaining are funding on the ground of cost recovery and cost-sharing popularly known as formula funding (UGC, 2021). Similarly, the community colleges are funded with token grants on an input basis which consists of the number of programs, location, students, and many more as the norms set in the

programs and procedures-2077 (Chimoriya, Dulraj, personal conversation, October 18, 2021). Almost all universities in Nepal are facing the problem of cost recovery with highly influenced by political interventions. Besides, the cost recovery positions of most of the HEIs are at risk as there was always a crisis of financing (Centre for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), 2007).

As (Gaulee, 2018), highlighted “Nepal can promote social justice, support the job market, and build a mechanism to reduce poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality by establishing and implementing a community college successfully” which shows the importance of community colleges. However, most community colleges have been in crisis. One of the most important aspects of this crisis refers to funding. The current practices of disbursing the UGC grants for community colleges have raised many questions. The questions are related to its sustainability, relevancy of higher education, needs, affordability, accessibility, quality, injustices, and inequality in the disbursement of public funds, and performance. The recent trends for funding community colleges are also associated with changing perceptions of the policymakers and stakeholders. The umbrella organization of community colleges i.e., Nepal Public Campus Association (NPCA) is trying to provide a national voice and advocacy for the mission of community colleges.

Statement of the Problem

Nepal is facing multi-dimensional problems in higher education like population explosion, lack of financial resources, heavy private investment, lack of skilled manpower, a contradiction in the government policy, political uncertainty, inefficient educational management system, wastage of resources, and poor implementation of program and policy, lack of transparency, and lots of more. (Lamsal, 2021), mentioned that the “Nepali HE system is additionally characterized by weak governance, over-politicization, ineffective management, confusion about the understanding of territory education as a public good or private good, low investment, absence of a research-oriented culture, and poor academic environment ” shows the deplorable condition of higher education.

Despite the various major reforms due to the successful implementation of HERP (2015-2020), some major lapses persisted in providing timely information, lack of knowledge of public procurement laws, procedures to carry out the works, and concrete guidelines were created a big problem to some of the community colleges. A few colleges completed the indicator-wise work but could not get the claim as per their mutual agreement with UGC. As the result, these colleges did not get a claim of about (30 to 50) million, and forcing them to carry a load of debt finally they were pushed backward, resulting in a long-term effect on their respective colleges. It has a long-term negative socio-economic impact on community colleges. COVID-19 impacted the fiscal year, where the colleges were facing the problem

of a high dropout rate, which resulted in a highly decreased internal income. The affiliating University TU has compelled them to pay the renewal and monitoring fees that have not been monitored by TU officials to date. In this situation, there was a high expectation from UGC to support these organizations for their sustainability.

UGC has no proper financing policy. They have their traditional funding modality which has lacked its importance due to less concentration on the quality and relevancy of higher education. A variety of questions arise immediately to mind. How does the funding modality address the problem of social justice of equal disbursement of opportunities and also resources? How does the model promote access to higher education? How does the modality address the current issues and challenges regarding the quality and relevancy of tertiary education? How does the funding modality support the research, and produce skilled manpower as per the market demand? How does the modality provide the access to HE for which millions of students are forced to go abroad for higher education and search for jobs? All these questions have created the disparity faced by the HEIs in Nepal. So the improved funding modality is the cry of the day.

It is believed that the findings of this article may facilitate the academic planners, decision-makers, and also the personnel involved in the innovation for formulating the financing policies and programs regarding the development of HE in Nepal.

Objectives

The general objective of this article was to critically examine the funding modality of UGC and highlight the global trend of public financing and identify the issues and challenges of funding community campuses.

Methodology

As a campus chief of a community college, I have the privilege of attending conferences, workshops, campaigns, focal group discussions, and participating in the movement for community colleges conducted by NPCA and different stakeholders for its sustainability. Some issues/problems can be drawn from the views and documents of NPCA. The primary and secondary sources of the data have been used in the article. The primary source of data included the funding policy-level stakeholders of the MoEST, UGC, and MoF. For the secondary sources, some financing documents, as well as the resources available at UGC, were critically reviewed and analyzed. Further, the related acts and regulations of the universities and UGC as well as some related books, journals, articles, periodicals, previous research reports, and websites were also used. This article has been the result of the qualitative method with empirical evidence from the researcher.

Results and Discussion

Higher Education Funding Modality in Nepal

Although there are four types of HEIs offering higher education, the Government of Nepal through UGC has been funding only the Universities established through the parliament act, or the few autonomous medical institutions and Community Colleges in Nepal. These four HEIs were the constituent colleges; the community colleges; and the private colleges of Nepalese universities. Besides, some other institutions were also running higher education programs with affiliations from different universities around the World.

Community campuses are the gateway to higher education for many Nepalese students with low social, cultural, and economic backgrounds in Nepal. However, the input-based funding modality for these colleges consists of the number of programs, pass rate, location, students, etc. (UGC, 2077). This current input-based funding modality can just promote it but cannot be supported the activities to foster the quality and relevance of HE in these colleges. According to (Harris 2014 as cited in Bista & Ghale, 2018), a large number of college graduates from liberal arts, education, and sciences are unemployed, and many of them have gone to India and Middle-East countries for labor. Over 300,000 people leave Nepal each year to find work, much of it backbreaking labor in Kuwait, Malaysia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and India. This needs to be addressed by the concerned authority by introducing the technical and vocational courses for 2 and 3 years diplomas in Nepal. As per the global trend, community colleges were provided access to conduct these courses for accessibility and affordability at a large scale rather than hand over to the hand of the private sector.

Community colleges cater to the poor, Dalits, Janajati, women, deprived groups of society, and financially weak families. Pupils of such communities are getting the token grants which serve the middle and lower groups of Nepal. Most of the features of community colleges like enrollment, curricula, duration of programs, governance, and recruitment policy were all almost similar to those of the consistent colleges in the Universities, except for the modality of public funding. These colleges are going through the legacies of prejudice from the policymakers, marginalization, social exclusion, and denial of funding and are still trapped in the social composition, despite the increased levels of access to HE. The crux of the nation's problems is how to enhance access to quality and affordable HE for all citizens, without discrimination based on class, creed, caste, geography, and religion. For three decades, community colleges are awarding token grants and on the other hand, the funding modality promoting Juice Sanskriti in universities was a big policy dilemma in the higher education sub-sector.

Besides the regular token grants, UGC has been supporting the community colleges for the development of physical facilities, building construction, library, labs, furniture, and educational equipment, and also with special grants for those who are not getting the regular grants (UGC, 2076 BS). It is also supporting the faculty members to upgrade their qualifications through the fellowship programs and students by providing scholarships for quality improvement. The contributions of UGC to the promotion of community colleges are praiseworthy and exemplary around the globe. As (Khadka, 2076), mentioned, the first prime minister and the president of the Nepali Congress Krishna Prasad Bhattarai after the people's movement of 2046/47 BS, guided the UGC officials to allocate funds to support the community colleges. The public funding to affiliated colleges popularly known as Community Colleges were started in 2051 BS. Since then, UGC has been allocating about (5 to 6.28) percent of its budget to community colleges (Gupta, 2018).

The currently launched nurturing excellence in HE program (\$60 million) aims to improve the quality and labor market relevance, scale-up collaborative research and online learning, and expand access to academic institutions for underprivileged and vulnerable students from disadvantaged areas (UGC, 2021). Besides, UGC has approved the budget and the programs for the FY 2019/20 with a total amount of Rs. 16.4614 billion for the operation and development of HEIs. The share of the budget to the community colleges has been proposed to be NRs 0.85 billion (72, 250,000) which is about 5.16 % of the budget allocated to the HE sub-sector while the sharing of students from community colleges to the national coffer was 27.41 percent. This is a disparity and a barrier to quality higher education in Nepal. The following table shows the funding trend of higher education in Nepal.

Table 1

Educational budget flow trend (FY 2010/11- 2017/2018 in thousands)

Fiscal Year	2067/68	2068/69	2069/70	2070/71	2071/72	2072/73	2073/74	2074/075	2075/076
Budget Source	(2010/2011)	(2011/2012)	(2012/2013)	(2013/2014)	(2014/2015)	(2015/2016)	(2016/2017)	(2017/018)	(2018/019)
Share in %									
National Budget	337900000	384900000	404824700	517240000	618100000	819468884	1048921354	1278994855	8901335000
% of GDP	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.5	4.0	3.7			
%Share of education Vs National	17.1 %	63918839 (16.61%)	63431397 (15.67%)	80958080 (15.65%)	86034055 (13.92%)	98642826 (12.04)	116360649 (11.09)	1266421 (9.90%)	(10.20 %)
% budget in HE	13.79	9.02	9.32	9.1	8.19	8.19	8.55	8.26	14360000
% share for community colleges vs Ed budget		6.43	7.52	7.14	9.1	6.08	4.79	6.55	

% Share of govt national budget	77	76	78	77.84	80.11	74.87	91.12
% Share of foreign national budget	23	23.78%	19.63%	22.08%	13.36%	14.68%	8.8^%

Source: MOEST Financial Admin Section; Budget & Program Section Report; DOE Budget & Program, Sec. 2074/075 and UGC-EMIS (2011 to 2019)

Table 1 reveals that the education sector of Nepal has received an average of 14.5 percent of the total national budget during these 13 years. Though the volume of the national budget is increasing, in reality, the total percentage contribution to education is decreasing.

Global Trends in Financing Higher Education

Public financing in HE in South Asia countries is a very critical issue to meet the international goal of education for all. The trend of public financing in HE varied differently in these countries which is shown in the following table.

Table 2

The trend in public expenditure on education in South Asia Countries

Country	Years						Average
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
	Percentage of public expenditure						
Bangladesh	0	16.8	15.6	13.8	0	15.6	10.30
India	11.7	13.7	14.1	14.1	0	0	8.93
Nepal	16	18	17.4	18.2	18.3	17.1	17.50
Sri Lanka	8.6	9.1	8.4	9.3	10.8	11	9.53
Bhutan							
Pakistan							
	Percentage of GDP						
Bangladesh	0	2.1	2.2	2	0	2.2	1.42
India	3.3	3.7	3.9	3.8	2.8	2.8	3.38
Nepal	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.5	4	3.7	3.73
Sri Lanka	1.7	1.8	1.5	1.6	1.9	2.2	1.78
Bhutan	4.12	4.76	0	5.72	6.04	7.59	4.71
Pakistan	2.28	2.22	2.13	2.49	2.46	2.65	2.37

Source: World Bank Data (2015) and UIS Data (2015).

Compared with these countries, the proportion of GDP dedicated to education in Bhutan is higher whereas, in Bangladesh, it is lower than that of India, Pakistan, and Nepal and relatively equal to that of Sri Lanka. Moreover, allocations to education as a percentage of GDP, in Asian countries are lower than the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 4.8 percent (World Bank, 2019) which Bhutan is near the target. Located in Paris, OECD is an international organization of 36 countries committed to democracy and the market economy.

Growth of HEIs

The growth of HEIs in Nepal is very tremendous in its short period. The table mentioned below shows the growth of HEIs in Nepal.

Table 3

Trend of growth of HEIS in Nepal

FY	Types			
	Consistent	Community	Private	Total
2018/19	147 (10.27%)	538 (37.56%)	747 (52.16%)	1432
2017/18	137 (9.6%)	508 (35.6%)	780 (54.7%)	1425
2016/17	99 (6.97%)	532 (37.81%)	777 (55.22%)	1408
2015/16	98 (6.97%)	532 (37.81%)	777 (55.22%)	1407
2014/15	98 (7.16%)	433 (31.63%)	838 (61.21%)	1369
2013/14	98 (7.16%)	432 (31.56%)	839 (61.28%)	1369
2012/13	96 (7.56%)	429 (33.62%)	751 (58.86%)	1276
2011/12	90 (7.9%)	343 (38.2%)	701 (61.8%)	1134

Sources: UGC EMIS Reports (2012 to 2020)

This table reveals that within 8 years the growth rate of HEIs in Nepal was about 26 percent. A drastic growth rate of about 66 percent was observed in Consistent Campuses while a very nominal about 6 percent growth rate seemed in the expansion of private colleges in Nepal.

Enrollment in HE

The number of students enrolled in tertiary education is an indicator of a region's future potential for its skilled labor force. A highly educated labor force is a major factor in determining regional competitiveness in the knowledge-based economy. Universities in a region are also important assets in developing an integrated regional innovation system. In 2015, the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education for Nepal was 14.9 %. Before the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education in Nepal started to increase to reach a level of 14.9 % in 2015, it went through a trough reaching a low of 4.2 % in 2000 (Bank, 2021). The trend of student enrollment can be shown in the following table.

Total 4*Number of students in different FY*

FY	Community	Constituent	Private	Total
2018/19	121099(27.4%)	159209(36.03%)	161511(36.5%)	441,819
2017/18	127251(30%)	140691(33.18%)	167289(39.4%)	423,996
2016/17	105646(28.46%)	121241(32.66%)	144297(38.87%)	371,184
2015/16	110895(30.71%)	121772(33.72%)	128410(35.56%)	361,077
2014/15	128853(31.58%)	127964(31.37%)	151087(37.03%)	407,904
2013/14	150344(32.78%)	144008(31.4%)	164269(35.81%)	458,621
2012/13	172095(30.2%)	209893(36.84%)	187677(32.94%)	569,665
2011/12	150167(33.74%)	157561(35.40%)	137266(30.84%)	444,994

Source: EMIS Report Varies Year (2013 up to 2018).

The enrollment rate in higher education during these 8 years seemed to be slight ups and downs. The enrollment rate in community colleges is decreasing while there was an increasing trend in constituent colleges. Student enrollment in private colleges is also increasing.

Sustainability of HEIs

The issues of sustainability of HEIs in Nepal are generally referred to the community-based and privately run institutions. The issues are associated with the financial status of institutions. The private institutions opened with the view of profit-making organizations have comparatively conducting the cash programs of universities and CTEVT while the community-based colleges were focused on general education and management courses of TU with low student fees which is even not covered the 12-month low payment of the staffs associated with the community colleges. There is no question of financial sustainability for government-funded constituent colleges of Nepal as UGC bearded most of the expenses. For the sustainability of HEIs in Nepal, the public-private-community partnership (PPCP) is a need of the country. Various reports claim that these three stakeholders are sharing almost 33 percent of a load of higher education in Nepal. It's also a reality that the Government of Nepal alone cannot bear all the costs of higher education due to the nature of financing higher education. It requires a new partnership among the stakeholders of higher education.

Conclusion and Implication

The HEIs in Nepal are facing so many challenges. They were: the growth and expansion of HEIs without mapping and needs, the dilemma of Higher education policy, the lack of proper financing modality, the growing demand for higher education, and increasing inequality, quality, relevance, and sustainability in terms of financial stringency. Due to the lack of a concrete funding policy, the allocation and distribution

of government funds vary widely across universities and community colleges as a whole. The funding modality of UGC is still following the traditional modality and safeguarding the interest of mandate-based universities. The result is creating disparity and injustices in funding the HEIs with the view of social justice in education.

A study that might be analytical and systematic to assess the cost-effective and cost-sharing modality, and determine the precise financing requirements of higher education, supported by the national goals, would be a powerful, pragmatic step toward reconfiguring financing practices of the higher education sub-sector. Such a study would be also helpful to identify the funding sources that might support immediate and long-term plans for HEIs and especially community colleges. There should even be a framework for cost-sharing modality among the stakeholders of higher education users.

Recommendations

- The higher education policy should be revised to promote the cost-sharing modality of financing and structural change for meeting the cross-cutting demand of technical and vocational education to develop the skills of Nepalese people and foster social justice in education.
- The structure of HE should be revised and the community colleges should be authorized to design, implement and conduct the junior-level technical and vocational 2 and 3 years diploma courses of CTEVT to minimize the gap in HE and make the technical and vocational courses affordable, accessible and quality-oriented.
- To qualify for public funding, the completion of the QAA cycle should be made compulsory for all HEIs. The indicators of QAA should be revised to promote the minimum standard to foster growth in student achievement, and quality but not the fashionable infrastructure.
- The role of UGC should be redefined to make it functional in its monitoring role. The disbursing the public funds with fixed norms and less flexibility to consider the unethical demand of funds and determination to maintain the high standards of academic discipline for all HEIs.
- The government will have to increase the funds to reach an adequate level. The current trend of growing enrollment and development will thus have a strong impact on government budgeting.
- To achieve the financial sustainability of community campuses, it needs to maintain or increase internally generated funds that are regular, without future compromises, which is difficult due to the decreasing trend of student enrollment in community colleges.
- The affiliating university should revise its regulations for the clear identification of Consistent, community, and private colleges.
- Without a clear sustainability plan, the university should stop its new affiliation with community colleges.

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