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Current Situation and Countermeasures of Higher Education Development in South Asian Countries

-- Taking Nepal as an example

Wenshuo Yu [1], Zitong Huang [2]

[1] Xinjiang Agricultural University, Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China
[2] Appleby college, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract: In this paper, the level of higher education development is a concrete manifestation of a country's scientific and technological level. As one of the four major civilizations in the world and the birthplace of Buddhism, South Asia has lagged behind in the development of higher education due to long-term poverty, dense population and other factors. Now, in the context of the 21st century, South Asia's economic and social development has entered a fast lane. It is of great significance for the development of higher education in South Asia to cope with challenges, solve the current difficulties in the development of higher education, strengthen cooperation with the world, improve the quality of higher education, and cultivate more high-quality talents. Therefore, we should strengthen international cooperation with foreign countries, make full use of international assistance, adjust the investment structure of human resources internally, strengthen the development of distributed education and multilingual education, and promote the development of higher education in Nepal in a multi-pronged way.

Keywords: South Asia; Nepal; higher education; Difficulties; Countermeasures; Significance.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, under the tide of globalization, more and more countries have welcomed their own development opportunities. Education is one of the most important links. As a relatively poor region in the world, South Asian countries also face many difficulties in their educational development. The situation of Nepal, the representative country selected in this paper, is even worse. Previous studies on higher education in Nepal were mostly limited to exchanges and interactions between China and Nepal, and it was difficult to see more problems from the perspective of Nepal. This paper starts from the current situation of higher education in Nepal, and through tracing, comparison, data analysis and other methods, it can cut into the difficulties and opportunities in Nepal's higher education from multiple perspectives, so as to help Nepal's higher education to achieve better development. Take Nepal as an example to help clarify the current situation and difficulties of higher education development in South Asian countries. It will pay more attention to the education problems of South Asian countries, promote the inclination of education resources to South Asian countries, bring new ideas and solutions to the education problems of South Asian countries, help South Asian regions with relatively backward education to improve the quality of education, and promote the realization of education equity worldwide.

2. Current situation of higher education in Nepal

2.1. Higher education institutions

As of 2022, Nepal has a total population of about 30 million. There are only 9 universities - Tribuwen University, Mahandra Sanskrit University, Kathmandu University, Pokhara University, Purbanchard University, Nepal Sanskrit University, Lumbini Buddhist University, Central and Western University, Far Western University, Agriculture and Forestry University.

Compared with Australia (42 schools) and Malaysia (76 schools) with similar population, its education level lags behind. Among them, Tribune University has 5 technical colleges, 3 professional colleges and more than 60 directly affiliated branches, 5 research centers, and 134 private branches. Kathmandu University, located in the suburb of Kathmandu, is the second largest university in Nepal. Pokhara University is a public university in Nepal. There are 23 academic institutions, including bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctor's degree awarding points. In Nepal's higher education system, there are three years of undergraduate education, two years of master's degree and three years of doctoral degree.

2.2. Higher education enrollment rate

The data shows that the gross enrollment rate of higher education in Nepal has basically maintained about 15%, which is at the stage of elite higher education development. In general, the higher education enrollment rate in Nepal increased from 2011 (14.35%) to 2013 (16.89%), and decreased gradually in 2014 (15.82%) and 2016 (11.80%). Specifically, in terms of gender distribution, the enrollment rate of male higher education in Nepal from 2011 to 2013 (17.84% in 2011 and 18.60% in 2013, respectively, and some data were missing in 2012) was higher than that of female (11.27% in 2011 and 15.34% in 2013). However, from the data of 2015 and 2016, the enrollment rate of female higher education is catching up with that of male, with a difference of 0.32 and 0.8 percent respectively. In terms of educational level, from the perspective of ISED6 , from 2013 to 2016, the enrollment rate of higher education in Nepal has been decreasing year by year, among which the decreasing number of men (57,624) is greater than that of women (30,428) in terms of gender; From the perspective of ISCED7, in 2015,

the number of students enrolled increased significantly (52753 person times more than the previous year) under the condition that the original enrollment rate was decreasing, but this trend could not be continued, and the number of students enrolled in 2016 showed a downward trend (1108427 person times less than the previous year); As far as ISCED8 is concerned, although the number of students enrolled in ISCED8 is relatively small, it has been showing an upward trend (from 183 in 2013 to 963 in 2016) relative to the undergraduate and master level. Among them, the number of men (439) is much higher than that of women (76).

2.3. Overview of Studying Abroad

Since the number of colleges and universities in Nepal is small and the development level of higher education needs to be improved, it is still difficult to meet the needs of local talents, so studying abroad is gradually becoming a major choice for Nepalese students. In general, the number of overseas students of higher education in Nepal has basically kept increasing year by year (see the line chart)

Specifically, from the perspective of professional distribution, currently, Nepalese universities can basically train high-level talents in humanities and social sciences, but most science and engineering students will choose to study abroad. From the regional distribution of overseas students, as Nepal adopts British education, North America, Western Europe and other developed countries are more favored by overseas students from Nepal, followed by countries in South Asia and West Asia. In addition, the potential of the Arab region to attract Nepalese students is gradually emerging (see the bar chart). At present, as a large developing country close to Nepal, China still needs to improve its interaction with Nepal's higher education.

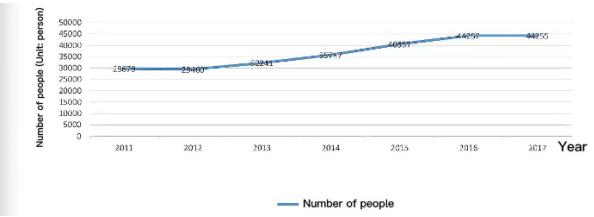


Fig.1 Study abroad for Higher Education in Nepal (2011-2017)



Fig.2 Flow of Nepalese higher education students studying abroad

2.4. Distributed higher education system in Nepal

Distributed education is an educational model that allows teachers, students and teaching content to be distributed in different, non-central locations, so teaching and learning can occur independently of time and place.

The main problems faced by Nepal's distributed higher education include: the relationship between diploma education and employers' needs, the fairness of different social strata 'access to higher education, and the enrollment rate of poor students. The distributed education in Nepal has just started, and some education pilots have tried more flexible curriculum delivery methods. Relevant departments of the Nepalese government show strong interest in distributed education and plan to establish an open university in Nepal. Nepal has a face-to-face tradition, especially relying on lectures, which is a teaching organization form. It is very short of basic education resources, such as books, journals, videos, etc., especially the Internet technology that distributed education relies on. The distance education technology as the basis of distributed education in Nepal is relatively backward. In practice, rural teachers are mainly trained through radio and video tape, and the pilot of distance education is also very limited. In Nepal, most managers and students doubt the value of open education degrees.

Therefore, Nepal's distributed education is based on increasing the flexibility of Internet access, that is, strengthening distance education training, and is concentrated on teacher education. The main purpose of distributed education in Nepal is to train teachers without teacher qualifications and help in-service teachers update their professional knowledge. Tribuwen University set up a one-year bachelor of distance education in 2001. The teaching method is the combination of printed material learning and face-to-face discussion. The distance education course materials are approved by the National Education Center of Nepal. The distance education teaching plan uses radio broadcasting, audio tapes and printed materials to help rural primary school teachers obtain professional development. Although the acceptance of distance education diplomas in Nepal is still very low.

With the development of distributed education, a new situation has emerged in Nepal, namely the rapid growth of university affiliated colleges. This situation is particularly prominent in Kathmandu. Most of these institutions are very small professional teaching centers, which are the centralized learning places for a few discipline preparatory students (such as business management or ICT) of comprehensive universities in a campus of Kathmandu. Many colleges affiliated to universities in Nepal can run face-to-face seminars or provide technical support to them. The challenge faced by the rapid expansion of these institutions is how to ensure the quality of teaching.

In addition, the promotion of distributed education technology in Nepal still faces many challenges, such as the limitations of technology and the impact of mainstream culture, and still has a long way to go.

2.5. Multilingual education development in Nepal

Almost all the basic education systems in multilingual regions of the world use a single language for teaching. Because of the above-mentioned situation that there are many ethnic groups in Nepal and there is no dominant ethnic group, Nepalese people use many languages. But the teaching language in schools is only the official language of the country. But decades of research show that multilingual education is being respected and gradually introduced into multilingual society.

Nepal has signed and ratified international documents concerning education and language rights to support the development of multilingual education.

After Nepal became a democratic country in 1990, non-Nepalese people have increased their awareness of protecting their own language and culture, and regard their own language and culture as a symbol of identity. In 1991, the

Constitution of Nepal recognized the status of other languages other than Nepali. The Government of Nepal has prepared some preliminary work in the form of designing curriculum frameworks and standard textbooks. Nepal does not lack the policy of using mother tongue in early education.

Despite these legal provisions, Nepal's existing multilingual education policy still has many problems. For example, there are many imperfections in relevant laws and policies. The concept of multilingual education in legal provisions is vague; All multilingual education supporters did not appear as representatives in the National Multilingual Education Steering Committee, the top organization that formulated multilingual education policies and guidelines; In addition, the lack of supporting textbooks and teaching materials in schools and the lack of relevant professional knowledge and ability of teachers also hinder the development of multilingual education in Nepal .

2.6. Current Situation of International Chinese Language Education in Nepal

2.6.1. Chinese language training in Nepal's public universities

The international Chinese language education in Nepal is due to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Nepal in 1961. The relationship between the two countries is increasingly close. The International Language Institute affiliated to the Chinese Department of Tribuwen University has opened Chinese courses, mainly for social recruitment. At present, there is a Chinese Department. Every year, Hanban appoints Chinese language teachers to teach in the university, and several local Chinese language teachers in Nepal participate in Chinese language teaching and cultural activities. They have trained a large number of talents who are proficient in Chinese language and Chinese culture for Nepal, and they are among the best in the adult groups of the "Chinese Ambassador Cup Chinese Competition".

2.6.2. Confucius Institute of Kathmandu University, Nepal

In June 2007, the Confucius Institute of Kathmandu University was established. Supported by Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters, the project was jointly carried out by Hebei University of Economics and Trade and Kathmandu University of Nepal. It aims to teach Chinese language, spread Chinese culture, train Chinese teachers, organize Chinese proficiency tests, compile Chinese textbooks, and promote cultural exchanges between China and Nepal. At present, it has developed into 4 Confucius classrooms and 14 teaching sites, offering compulsory and optional courses of undergraduate Chinese, optional courses of postgraduate Chinese, adult Chinese training courses, training courses for local Chinese teachers, Chinese courses for primary and secondary schools and other courses at different levels.

2.6.3. The rise of Confucius Classroom in Nepal

In August 2009, the Nepal China People's Friendship Liaison Committee Radio Confucius Classroom (CRI Radio Confucius Classroom) was established, which was jointly run by Nepal China People's Friendship Liaison Committee and China Radio International; In November 2011, LRI International Confucius Classroom was established, which was jointly established by Beijing International Chinese Academy, Beijing No. 80 Middle School and Nepal LR International School.

2.6.4. Chinese teaching in social language training institutions.

There are many language training institutions in Kathmandu, Nepal. The teaching objects are mainly adults and college students, and the training for English and Japanese is the most common. There are two with the largest scale and complete facilities. One is China Information Center, which is run by China Nepal Trade and Investment Promotion Association. It not only offers Chinese courses, but also undertakes various cultural and trade activities related to China; The second is Nepal World Language and Computer College. In November 2006, it applied for volunteer teachers and offered Chinese courses. In December 2006, it became a Chinese proficiency test center, mainly responsible for holding standardized Chinese tests organized by the Hanban of HSK, HSKK, YST and other countries.

3. Countermeasures and development trend

3.1. Optimizing the Investment Structure of Higher Education and Improving the Efficiency of Higher Education

The development of education depends on the increase of educational investment. However, Nepal's economy is poor and its investment in education is limited. Therefore, a more effective way is to improve the structure and efficiency of education investment when the education supply is certain.

First of all, colleges and universities should optimize the professional configuration, simplify traditional majors according to the current economic development needs, develop new teaching disciplines for the development of emerging, basic and key industries, and develop corresponding supporting textbooks and courses in combination with the actual situation and market of Nepal. At the same time, we will vigorously carry out distributed distance education and increase the development of the Internet, the foundation on which distributed education depends.

Secondly, in terms of teacher qualification assessment, the access threshold should be raised, the teaching level of teachers should be strictly reviewed, and outstanding teachers should be selected for higher education. We can strengthen international cooperation, make full use of the talents from other countries to support education, increase subsidies and preferential treatment for foreign teachers coming to Nepal to support education, and attract more international talents. Fully integrate with the international practice, increase Nepal's exposure in the international public opinion environment, and let more people understand and realize the current situation of Nepal.

Third, education departments and teachers should constantly update teaching methods, teaching models and teaching concepts, and learn from international advanced education. In addition, we will focus on training students' practical ability and combine theory with practice to meet the requirements for talents under the current economic situation.

Fourth, improve the efficiency of teaching links, and pay attention to the cultivation and development of students' knowledge innovation ability. Education departments and teachers should improve the quality of lesson preparation, impart more useful knowledge to students, and improve students' ability of independent thinking and innovation.

Develop students' open thinking in the form of "brainstorming", at the same time enhance students' interest, stimulate students' desire for independent learning, and develop the habit of continuous learning.

Fifth, promote the atmosphere of respecting knowledge and talents, make more families aware of the importance of higher education at the supply side, and make more families voluntarily increase their investment in children's education; On the demand side, more enterprises will improve the employment treatment of higher education job seekers, thereby increasing the enrollment rate of higher education.

It was also important to include the private sector and enterprises broadly in human resources development plans. The private sector and enterprises should be encouraged to partner, sponsor, donate and provide soft loans to potential students and research projects. Academic institutions can also be granted greater autonomy. With autonomy, we can build more independent colleges and gradually separate the affiliated colleges of our school. Tenth, finally, increased experience has shown that cooperation with different Asian universities should be constantly strengthened to promote the exchange of teachers, research skills and knowledge, and even students.

Finally, the problems in development that are closely related to education, especially poverty and inequality, exclusion, exploitation and marginalization of different groups, environmental problems and data gaps, cannot and should not continue. One by one, Asian countries are creating miracles of economic development. Countries have sufficient resources and wisdom to effectively deal with these challenges in the process. When Asian countries assume more leadership roles in global affairs, it is also an opportunity for Asian education to play a global leadership role, so that Asia can lead the trend of knowledge by virtue of future economic development.

3.2. Under the background of "the Belt and Road", Nepal's higher education development ushers in new opportunities

Zhou Shengping, a reporter of Xinhua News Agency, wrote in "The East Wind of the" the Belt and Road "Blows into Nepal's" China City "that walking on the narrow streets of Tamil, a tourist distribution center in the urban center of Kathmand, the capital of Nepal, Chinese slogans are everywhere. After the then Prime Minister Oli of Nepal visited China, Chinese people engaged in cultural business also gradually hid. Chinese training institutions, Confucius Institutes, classrooms and Chinese departments of universities together promoted the prosperity of Chinese culture in Nepal.

In order to highly align with the national "the Belt and Road" initiative, expand people to people and cultural exchanges between China and South Asian countries, and promote the localization of Chinese language teachers in South Asian countries, the Confucius Institute Headquarters/Hanban has set up the Confucius Institute Scholarship Chinese Language Teacher Class Project for South Asian countries, which is open to applicants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and other countries. The categories of enrollment are: Chinese language international education undergraduate, preparatory plus undergraduate (1+4). This project is one of the priorities of promoting the foreign exchange of Chinese culture and strengthening the international dissemination of Chinese language under the framework of the national "the Belt and Road" initiative. It has been implemented since 2016.

To develop international Chinese language education in Nepal, we should not fear difficulties, meet challenges, give full play to the advantages of all parties, and gradually solve the current problems. For example, strengthen the training of local teachers and volunteers; Solve the problem of using and abbreviating textbooks; Improve students' learning motivation and arrange learning time reasonably; Improve teaching conditions and improve the living conditions of volunteers.

3.3. Other international assistance

Under the trend of globalization, it is a rational choice for the effective implementation of educational policies to solve the problems in the policies with the inclusive thinking of globalization. Therefore, it is necessary to actively establish exchange projects between countries, commit to practice, regularly organize exchange visits, and actively encourage countries with similar language conditions to strengthen dialogue and information exchange, so as to help Nepal's higher education achieve further development [10].

International organizations have provided a lot of assistance in Nepal, especially NGOs. How to effectively and scientifically use these aids is an important topic. A large amount of funds and different organizations are carrying out support plans. The government should cooperate with these organizations to make scientific investigations, analyze the specific national conditions, understand the current situation and difficulties of education development, and formulate effective solutions.

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