Higher Education in Nepal: Opportunities Obscured by Internal Challenge

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Abstract

In Nepal, as everywhere in the world, the demand of higher education is growing more rapidly than ever before. Nepal’s education policy to provide free education up to secondary level clearly signals that there will be even more high school graduates entering universities in spite of the fact that the government will continue to allocate more of its budget on elementary and secondary school education. At this context, Nepal’s higher education system suffers from confusion and uncertainty reflecting the larger political instability witnessing the Himalayan nation. With the lack of infrastructure, sustainable resources and concrete policy, higher education institutions are struggling hard to cater to the nation’s need of human capital as a vehicle of national development. While looking forward to harness the fruits of globalization at the juncture of challenges and immense possibilities, Nepal needs to leverage its potential ingredients to overcome the current grim aspects and to move on towards desired expansion of access.

Key words: Nepal, Higher Education, Political Meddling, Equity, Access to Education, Diversification.

A Brief History of Nepal’s Higher Education

“With the opening of this college, I have hacked my own leg.” Chandra Shamsher, then Rana Prime Minister of Nepal, reportedly made this remark at the 1918 inauguration of Nepal’s first institution of
higher education: Tri-Chandra College, whose name, ironically, combines the first name of Shamsher himself with an abbreviated form of then king Tribhuvan’s. He, as a member of the autocratic ruling family of the time, was opposed to higher education for the mass, as he saw it as a threat to himself and the other rulers of that time. And, his fear was warranted because a small number of people educated in Nepal could then join hands with the other precious few educated in India in an attempt to topple the Nepalese aristocracy. And, in fact, the Rana’s rule (that began in 1846) was overthrown in 1951, and the monarchy no longer exists in Nepal.

Because the rulers themselves were fearful of education, the history of higher education in Nepal is a short one. Following the establishment of the first college in 1918, a few more colleges opened, most of them in the capital city of Kathmandu and some in other major cities, mostly in the eastern part of Nepal. Moreover, since the country had no university, all these colleges were affiliated with Patna University in India, which conducted all the examinations (State University, 2014).

The year 1959 marked the opening of Tribhuvan University (TU), Nepal’s first independent university. It remains the largest university in the country serving more than 90 percent of the students in higher education. According to the latest figures, 314,952 students attend the 616 community/private, TU-affiliated colleges and TU’s 60 constituent campuses. The latter employ 13,356 faculty members and maintain five institutes - Institute of Science and Technology, Institute of Engineering, Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, Institute of Medicine, and the Institute of Forestry and four faculties - Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Faculty of Management, Faculty of Education, and Faculty of Law. (Ministry of Education, 2010)

Subsequently, the following universities also came into being: (Mahendra) Nepal Sanskrit University (est.1986) with 3348 students, Kathmandu University (est. 1991) with 7110 students, Purbanchal University (1994) with 14,629 students, Pokhara University (1997) with 7,358 students. Lumbini Bouddha
University was opened in 2005, but it is not functional so far. Two academic institutions that are equivalent to universities are: B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (1993) and National Academy of Medical Sciences (2002).

This historical context sets the stage for Nepal’s higher education development. In the following sections, I will attempt to present an outline of the higher education scenario based on my own experience in the field, my conversations with some of the university leaders in Nepal. While the purpose of this paper is to give a snapshot of higher education layout of Nepal, the information presented here may need to be supplemented with other resources to have a full picture of the system.

**The Neglect of Higher Education in Western Nepal**

However, as most of the universities and academic institutions tend to be located either in Kathmandu or the eastern part of Nepal, the western part of the oblong-shaped nation remains neglected and lags behind the rest of the nation with respect to the expansion of the higher education that has occurred in the last six decades. Consequently, the people of western Nepal wishing to pursue their higher education have no option but to negotiate mountainous roads in order to travel the long distance to Kathmandu. And, even if they can manage to make the grueling journey, “People of this region are [so] poor,” said Lal Bahadur Rana, “[that they] cannot afford to send … their children … far away to pursue higher education” (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010). Mr. Rana serves as a faculty at TU’s campus in Surkhet, a town located in the middle of western Nepal. Because it is administered by Kathmandu-based TU, however, the Surkhet campus fails to reflect the culture, need and potentials of western Nepal and offers very few relevant programs. For example, there is no agricultural program, where more than 90% people are farmers. Western Nepal is replete with possibilities of fruit and animal farming, natural beauty and precious medicinal herbs. All these need attention of research and utilization.
Indeed, in the words of Pitambar Dhakal, himself the former chief of TU’s Surkhet Campus, “With the burden of poverty, oppression, exploitation, unemployment, malnutrition, superstition, discrimination, and starvation, people of this region carry on the age-old traditional agriculture and husbandry system. And all these shortcomings are crying out the need of Midwestern University in Surkhet” (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010). These people think this new university is needed for the sake of development and prosperity of this region. There is an overwhelming participation of people – all rich and poor – for the cause. “Every man and woman had donated something for the university: as little as a single Nepalse Rupee to as much as NRs 15 million from one family,” said Mahendra Kumar Malla, the secretary of the Preparation Committee of the Midwestern University (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010).

This region has not been able to move forward in spite of its rich natural resources and other potentials. People from Kathmandu and eastern Nepal administer us, who have little knowledge of the region. “What we want is consultants, experts and investors to harness our resources; but what we always get is rulers. We don’t want any more of them” said Mr. Rana. He adds, “If more people from this region were educated, they would better serve the region. But we need to give them good higher education” (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010).

“The state has always been ignorant to our plight. There’s no access to people of this region in the policy level. For this reason also, we construed the need of higher education as the first priority,” said Bhusan Kumar Manandhar, the chairman of the Preparatory Committee of the Midwestern University. People’s age long dissatisfaction over this negligence is clearly expressed in his words: “participation of people from all regions is necessary for the state. Hence the understanding of the fact that we are also Nepalese and that Kathmandu is not only Nepal, we believe education, particularly higher education, is the first condition” (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010).
Ironically, the largest region of the country is the most backward with the lowest literary rate. So development of other sectors like business and economy is out of question. Therefore the campaigners of Midwestern University are committed to make this place a center of education. “We started this campaign 15 years ago for the seamless access to higher education for the very basic class of people, who do not know how to seek their own rights and higher education is still a distant dream for them” adds Mr. Manandhar (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010).

Thus, the people of western Nepal have felt the need for a higher educational center in Surkhet, especially since the concept of multi-university was brought up in the report of the National Education Commission (1992), which was formed by the government established after the restoration of democracy in 1990. The spirit of the concept was to provide more access to higher education in different parts of the country. People of Nepal had high expectations from the democracy and new government. However, the impoverished country witnessed no significant change. At the peak of soaring dissent among the downtrodden people, a conflict broke out between the Maoist rebels and the government troops. Recently, however, some other universities including Mid-Western University, Far Western University are also established.

Impact of the 10-Year Maoist Insurgency (1996-2005) on Higher Education

There are arguments that the conflict between the government forces and Maoists insurgents was an outcome of extreme socio-economic as well as spatial inequality (e.g. Murshed & Gates, 2005). Once the armed conflict started in Nepal in 1996, higher education suffered a lot, all over Nepal. “Teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders were threatened. There was a mental torture of all kinds and punishments or pain or killings affected the lives of people.” Most of the schools and colleges in the rural areas turned into battlefields. This battle between the state and rebels created
such a situation that a fear of death always loomed in the minds of students and teachers. “So the expansion, quality, and access to higher education remained out of question” said Mr. Dhakal.

Nepal Sanskrit University (then Mahendra Sanskrit University), the only university in the western Nepal was burnt down by the rebels. The insurgency created havoc in Nepal. Not only were power plants sabotaged and bridges blown up, schools and universities were also made target (Overland 2002, para. 3). Series of national strikes, called *bandhs*, affected the academic calendars including national examinations. The regular process of recruitment of faculty was stalled. Plans to expand the access of higher education such as the concept of ‘open university’ could not be implemented. “Education became the secondary factor,” said Mr. Malla (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010). “Destruction of physical structure, and threat deteriorated the quality of education,” said Yadu Gyawali, another faculty member of Surkhet Campus (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010).

More than 12,800 people were killed and an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 people were internally displaced as a result of the conflict. This conflict disrupted the majority of rural development activities. Since a big share of public money was spent on arms on ammunitions, investment of public money in higher education was simply not possible.

In the meantime, there emerged two significant tendencies in higher education. First, there was a rapid increase in the number of private colleges in urban area, due to the deteriorating condition of public colleges and an influx of youth into urban areas to avoid the atrocities of the civil war in villages. These private colleges are however, not affordable for the students of majority of income families. Secondly, students going abroad to pursue higher education soared up. According to the latest report, 26222 students left home for abroad study last year only (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 23).

And unfortunately, the conflict originated from the Midwestern region. Analyzing UNDP human development
indicators, Murshid & Gates (2005) argued that the indicators “… evidence extreme inequality vis-à-vis the capital in parts of Nepal that can be described as the major flashpoints of the Maoist insurgency.” These scholarly analyses are not different from the local leaders. “The feudal rule and culture perpetuated oppression and exploitation of men by men, which culminated to a rebellion” said Mr. Manandhar. He added, “Disease, starvation and poverty has been the destiny of the people of this region and hundreds of people lose their lives due to disease and starvation every year” (Personal Communication, October 14, 2010). Because of the vicious circle of these adversities, this region not only became the starting point of the rebellion, but also a fertile land for the guerrillas to perpetuate for long. We should create opportunities for the youth so that they do not have to indulge in such activities in the future, for which we need an institution of higher education in the center of western Nepal.

**Light at the End of the Long Tunnel: New Universities Open**

With the resolution of the conflict, however, the vision conceived 15 years ago, of a higher educational institution in Surkhet, materialized when finally the government of Nepal was forced to respond to the voice of the people in this area. It has now been decided that there will be a university in Surkhet and it will be called the Midwestern University. It is hoped that this university develops as a partner in regional development. According to the recent decision of the Government of Nepal, three new universities have come to existence in Nepal, which are: Midwestern University in western Nepal, Nepal Agriculture and Forestry University and Siddhartha University in central Nepal. However, given the already ailing higher education system of Nepal, the path ahead does not seem to be an easy one. The government, political leaders and all need to work hard and plan well. Opening of new universities has brought not only joy, but also has posed challenges ahead.
Challenges Ahead

There are many challenges in the higher education in Nepal including access, equity, quality assurance, funding, infra-structure, lack of manpower, political meddling, political instability, lack of concrete policy, social hurdles, lack of diversification and relevance, lack of autonomy and decentralization, lack of change and innovation to name but a few. I will describe them briefly below.

Access

According to a latest report of World Bank, only 10% of the total population in age group of 18 to 23 has access to higher education so far. The good news in this respect is that new universities are opening and it can be hoped that these new universities will open up more doors to higher education to offer a variety of subjects for the students in different parts of the country.

Equity

While the growing enrollment rate in higher education shows progress, there is an equally grim aspect of the trend. The bottom two quintiles’ share in higher education is less than 2% (World Bank, 2008). Currently, higher education enrollment is expanding primarily in the private sector. This expansion is likely to restrict the access to higher education even more for poor segments of the population including Dalits, Janajatis and many other ethnic groups, who are still largely excluded from higher education. Equally important, there is a significant gap in gender equality with a gender parity index of 0.64 (World Bank, 2007). Due to rampant inequality with a large poor population, most of the public investment in higher education benefits students from few already rich families because they can afford to prepare enough to pass entrance examination as a ticket to enter colleges with potentially high demand jobs e.g. medical, engineering, and agriculture.
Quality Assurance and Success
The quality of higher education is not satisfactory. Dinesh Ghimire, Planning Officer of University Grants Commission (UGC), the regulatory body of all universities in Nepal pointed out, “Quality assurance is the biggest challenge after the access. Quality assurance and accreditation system virtually do not exist, except for a rudimentary system in place in professional education like engineering and medicine” (Personal Communication, October 29, 2010). A serious problem in maintaining the quality of education is rooted in excessive political interference in the recruitment of university leaders. As a result, country witnesses a big exodus of students going abroad for higher education every year.

There is also a high rate of examination failure. While there is high success rate in technical areas of study, overall college success rate is meager. More than two thirds of students fail exams every year. Many students do not attend colleges regularly but only appear for final examinations relying on some substandard notes cheaply available in the market during the periods of final examinations.

Declining Share of Higher Education (%) in Education Budget

Funding
Funding higher education seems to be a challenge everywhere. After analyzing the situation of community colleges in the United
States, a professor of higher education management said, “Funding for higher education will be a struggle for years to come” (Sutin, 2010).

In Nepal, total public expenditure in the whole sector of education in 2008 was about 3.81% of GDP, while the share of higher education was squeezed to 0.49% of the GDP (World Bank, 2008). “Greater amount of public money needs to be infused to higher education,” said a teacher and political activist of Surkhet (K. Thapa, personal communication, October 14, 2010). Most of the public higher education institutions are struggling financially in the lack of sustainable financial source in this country, where more than one third of the population is “below the poverty line” (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). However, the national policy of the government is to reduce government assistance by adopting cost-recovery approach in higher education (National Planning Commissio, 2007). In line with this policy, the share of higher education out of total education budget is decreasing every year for several years now as shown in the adjacent chart.

**Infrastructure:**
The need of infrastructure can never be understated in higher education: be it in Nepal or elsewhere. One of the US college presidents as quoted in The Iron Triangle (Immerwahr, Johnson, & Gasbarra, 2008) succinctly endorsed the need of infrastructure:

We couldn’t get a bidder on a building, and in the year timeframe, the cost of the building increased by about 10 million dollars. If you’re going to be on the cutting edge, you’re going to have to invest in your infrastructure. You’re going to have to invest in your library, and technology, and equipment, in salaries, both for your faculty and your staff, in order to run an effective ship (p. 13).

The Nepalese scenario of infra-structure, however, is more demanding than that. Paradoxically, the impoverished country not only lacks buildings, libraries and equipment, it also lacks a good road network. “Lack of transport infrastructure makes it
difficult for people in outlying (due to the uneven terrain) regions
to reach colleges easily”, said Mr. Lekhnath Baral, former Principal
of one of the most reputed higher secondary schools in Surkhet
(Personal Communication, October 15, 2010). Prof. Awasthi, who
heads subject committee of English and other foreign languages at
TU, said, “As you know, the subject committees under our faculty
do not have their own offices” (Awasthi, 2010). And the worst
thing about infrastructure is that, often times, the properties and
facilities of colleges are vandalized by politically agitated students.

Lack of Skilled Manpower:
Access to higher education should imply access to quality higher
education. For that one of the most important aspects is manpower.
At present, the existing centers of higher education are not
contributing to ‘creating’ learning. We need to develop manpower
by providing professional development opportunities to the
existing manpower. Besides this, problem of ‘brain drain’ persists.
There is an acute shortage of individuals with technical skills or
knowledge. The flight of human capital has resulted in a big need
of technical expertise.

Political Meddling
Unnecessary political intervention is one of the burning problems
of higher education in Nepal. In the words of Bhattarai (2007),
“Politicization of higher education has been one of the serious
problems that our universities have been facing. Almost every
political party in Nepal has a student wing as its sister organization
and students’ organizations are often used by the parties for political
purposes” (2007, p. 93). Party leaders often tend to misuse their
political power for petty interests. In every political movement
or activity schools and colleges are frequently and badly affected.

Since the elections of student unions, held every other year in
colleges, are taken as the harbingers of the next national election, all
political parties concentrate on colleges, making them the hotbeds
of political activities for several months. Neelakantan (2008)
reported in the Chronicle an official with Nepal’s regulatory agency for universities as saying, “The universities tend to make wrong academic and administrative decisions under political pressure, thus adversely affecting the quality of education.” And again, often times, influential political leaders make extemporaneous remarks impacting serious higher education issues. For example, a former minister’s decree to award degrees to rebels who passed up studies for armed struggle in the Maoists’ armed conflict stupefied the academic world a few years ago (Neelkantan, 2007).

**Political Instability**

Since important university officials are politically appointed, the university leadership always looks upon the ministry for every tiny decision. Most often, they do not have their own plan or vision for the institution they are supposed to lead. The fluid political situation makes it even worse. When there is a change in the leadership of the government, university authorities also tend to change accordingly, sometimes leading to the destabilization of the university. “Tribhuvan University’s vice chancellor, the rector, and the registrar, resigned after demonstrations by students and staff members prevented them from entering their offices for almost a week,” reports Neelakantan (2006) to The Chronicle. These officials were appointed by then King Gyanendra.

**Lack of Concrete Policy**

Bhattarai (2007) said, “Despite the government’s efforts from time to time, no concrete policy has been framed on higher education so far; now we need a clear-cut and concrete policy of the government to make a new Nepal in the aftermath of the People’s Movement II” (p. 93). Agreeing to this statement, Khaniya (2007) adds, “The problem with our system … is that its reform initiatives are not based on systematic rationale thinking. The reforms so far were not based on research, [but] rather on how the people who were involved in operation and policy making felt and how the donors felt about it” (Khaniya, p. 38).
Lack of Professional Incentives and Reward System
There exists a litany of social hurdles like caste system, mass poverty, widespread illiteracy, lack of awareness, fatalism, superstitious beliefs, exploitation, discrimination, and inequality. Although gradual positive change is witnessed over the last few decades, these hurdles are still to be addressed with serious consideration and attention. An incentive system to highlight the successful projects and rewarding change agents is desperately lacking. Hence the society has become more and more insecure and even intellectuals and scholars do not find themselves secure enough to work independently. This lack of academic freedom makes scholars afraid of expressing candid opinions or work independently and professionally because there is widespread feeling that they would ultimately need some political clout to secure a position, reward, or even recognition.

Lack of Diversification and Relevance
The existing system of education is not addressing the need of people sufficiently. There is widespread disappointment that many educated people are unemployed. Some rebelling political parties including the Maoists have long been disapproving the existing system of education and have labeled it as ‘bourgeoisie’ system of education as there is a huge disconnect between the need of society and the education provided in colleges and universities. This has also been a main factor of dissent among people. There are telling stories of people who have spent everything to acquire education only to be disappointed at the end when you realize that your hope of education was not going to be fulfilled. “You’ve sold your water buffalo and your goats to pay for your education,” reportedly said a graduate student from Michigan State University “Now what do you do?” Most graduates hope to find positions in government offices, the main employer of the nation. Few available jobs in the business market are taken up by the graduates from private expensive colleges which average people cannot afford to attend (Overland, 2002).
Lack of Autonomy and Decentralization

In spite of much ado about the autonomy and decentralization in the governance, over-centralization is still a major problem in Nepal. One has no option but to go to Kathmandu if there is any issue with a transcript of a student—even a student’s 12th grade certificate. In a study conducted by CEDA on *Financing the Higher Education of Nepal*, 86.4% of the officials (Campus Chiefs/Account Officers) reported that the decentralization in higher education would improve the quality of education and 91.8% of the respondents of private campus agreed with that remark” (SANEI, 2007, p. 133).

Lack of Change and Innovation in Teaching Learning Culture

In Nepal, timely changes in higher education are not taking place. The curricula do not change for decades. Lack of professional development opportunities for teachers makes it hard for them to keep up with the current professional trends. Higher education in Nepal hasn’t yet asserted itself as a change agent. In a study carried out thirty three years ago, Pfau (1977) said, “Nepalese teaching, observed and descriptively presented, conformed to what many educators would consider to be traditional, teacher-dominated classes, consisting mostly of ‘chalk and talk’ interspersed with periods of recitation” (p. 265). What Pfau observed more than three decades ago remains the same in the majority of the classrooms in Nepal. There is not only an acute lack of interaction between students and teacher, but also students do not express their own ideas and viewpoints very frequently, and consequently, teachers make little use of students’ ideas. Ironically however, Nepal is one of those abodes of the sages who invented interactive methods of knowledge construction in ancient times by stimulating students to think (Sharma, 2013).
Recommendations

I have made some recommendations to address the challenges mentioned above. These recommendations are directly based on the same sources that I have used and my own experience of the field of higher education in the country.

Invest More in Higher Education

As mentioned earlier, in the section of challenges, the investment in higher education in Nepal is very low (0.4% of GDP). It seems the government is putting money as expenditure, and not as investment. There has been a demand of budget for the access, quality and affordability of higher education everywhere. It is also argued in Public Agenda reports—Campus Commons? and The Iron Triangle—that rather than regarding higher education as a private good, it should be considered a public investment (The Lumina Foundation, 2009; Immerwahr, Johnson, & Gasbarra, 2008).

In a developing country like Nepal, it is but natural to not have enough capital to jumpstart the development process of the country. Currently, the World Bank is funding in the higher education sector through the Second Higher Education Project with the objectives such as enhanced quality and relevance of higher education and research through a set of incentives for promoting effective management and the financial sustainability of academic institutions, along with improving access to academically qualified under-privileged students—including girls, dalits, and educationally disadvantaged janajati—seeking access to higher education through available financial assistance (World Bank, 2007). Judicious utilization of such international support can be instrumental in gaining momentum in the development of higher education in Nepal.

* Janajati is a term used to identify ethnic and tribal groups, historically marginalized from mainstream political culture in Nepal.
Increase Access to Higher Education: Open Doors for All

For financial accessibility, it would be necessary to waive tuition and to provide scholarships and loans on the basis of need, merit, and inclusion. For social and economic justice, poor, brilliant, or needy students from the marginalized *dalit* and *janjati* groups should be encouraged to acquire higher education. There should be a special provision for this, however. In a survey conducted by SANEI, the majority of the students (91.3%) were in favor of the student loan (SANEI, 2007, p. 19). On the other hand, building roads and opening more colleges in different parts of the country are required for geographical accessibility. Also, starting a diverse range of programs and majors to be chosen from for programmatic accessibility, and preparing students for academic success in secondary schools are some of the measures to be considered for increased access to higher education.

Gender parity index (0.64) shows that we still need to work on increasing the participation of women in higher education. In contrast the gain in women’s college participation in America has been one of the most astounding stories of higher education in recent years (Heller, 2001, p. 7). The access to higher education in Nepal needs to establish itself as ranking among those countries already providing for gender parity. And neither should socio-economic status bar the access to higher education. Rather, affirmative action should be taken to increase the inclusion of all genders and ethnicities. Besides, there exists an endangered community of people in a nomadic state in Midwestern Nepal called *Raute*. Such a community also needs to be included into our national scenario.

One of the objectives of the Second Higher Education Project is to ensure the “… improved access for academically qualified under-privileged students, including girls, *dalits* (oppressed class of people) and educationally disadvantaged *janajati* (ethnic groups) to higher education through financial assistance and the enhanced capacity of higher secondary schools” (World Bank,
The procedures of this scheme should be made easily available to all targeted groups of students.

Make Concrete Policy of Higher Education

Nepalese higher education system has been directionless so far. There are so many issues that need to be addressed by a concrete policy such as how to harness the existing resources, how to encourage people with some education to stay put rather than going abroad, how to give proper honor and recognition to those people who contribute in the region, what kind of manpower to be envisaged, what is the ultimate goal of higher education, how to finance higher education and so on and so forth. “The reform process of Nepalese higher education has not been successful and does not seem to follow smooth path,” wrote Khaniya (2007), “It is therefore necessary to bring about change in the university education as a whole through policy intervention” (p. 109).

Make Universities Autonomous

There should be an understanding between political parties to depoliticize education. A huge majority of students are also not satisfied with the political activities going on campuses. In a survey conducted, Majority of the students (64.3%) remarked that the class-room environment should be peaceful, non-political and motivational (SANEI, 2007, p. 98). A professor of TU, who has also served as the vice chairman of Higher Secondary Education Board, wonders, “Whether the parties are interested in promoting their influence in the university or in the development of higher education in Nepal” (Khaniya, 2007, p. 144).

Improve Quality

Nepal’s higher education is literally deteriorating. TU has grown so huge that it can neither raise the fees from students, nor think about the quality of education. “The improvement of academic quality in higher education is a big challenge to us. We have already become a member of WTO and in the changed global context we
must be competitive to survive and meet the national requirements” (Bhattrai, 2007, p. 94). Professor Awasthi, who was led the task of changing the curriculum for B. Ed. and M. Ed. recently, is wary of “plagiarized bazaar notes” available in the market on the eve of examinations that encourage the ‘tourist student’ who do not attend classes and depend on these substandard notes (Awasthi, 2010). Empowering and activating UGC for quality control could be an option. UGC has been established in Nepal since 1993 as a regulatory body of all universities in Nepal but the government is not using it in proper way.

**Improve Examination System**

The existing examination system of Nepalese Universities needs to be revamped and modernized; it should be made more scientific. The central system of examinations especially in TU has been in place for too long. There have been many experiments but the results have been paltry. A serious discussion among the experts is necessary to orient examinations towards more real life situations. Examinations need to be more decentralized, more frequent, and more relevant.

**Diversify and Connect to Defined Market**

Universities should produce manpower that can be absorbed by the market once they graduate (Khaniya, 2007). With the exception of a precious few private institutions, most of the higher education institution thinks that their responsibility ends with the award of a degree or certificate. These institutions neither know nor care where their graduates will go and what they do after graduation. Institutions need to identify and establish relations with potential employers from home and abroad and make necessary changes in their curricula, examinations, and evaluation systems to align with the job market. Institutions should establish new offices and provide career services to their graduates. Alumni’s databases need to be prepared and utilized for the benefit of the new graduates.
Create Opportunities for Professional Development for Faculty

Universities should provide training, orientation and research opportunities to teachers to update their knowledge but university teachers in Nepal hardly get such opportunities and they follow the traditional method of teaching. In the changing context they should be trained, updated and encouraged to introduce new teaching methods in the classroom. Research should be encouraged and rewarded. More emphasis should be on addressing the practical issues at home rather than in foreign theories.

Create Gender Balance

Access of girl students to higher education is very poor; it has to be increased as it has spillover effect to the family and community. Moreover, according to a recently published report of UNESCO, “Once women gain access to higher education, they tend to exceed men in grades, evaluations and degree completion” (UNESCO, 2007, p. 71). Unfortunately, the same report reflects that Nepal is one of the five countries, where “Disparities are largest” along with Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran” (p. 29).

Develop and Trust Academic Leadership

The beautiful country with a pleasant climate has a high potential of becoming an educational destination for the students from all around the world. There are so many ways of cost containment, income generation and bringing about quality change. Leasing TU’s unused land for earning money could be one example. Therefore, a strong visionary academic leader is necessary to “find a way to win” to borrow Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Harold “Hal” Moore’s words. Too much political intervention and lack of financial support from government is preventing educational leaders to come up with forward looking ideas.

Encourage Research, Technology and Innovation

It is necessary to keep pace with the rapid changing world. Therefore, research, technology and innovation should be in the heart of every
educational system. Universities in Nepal are not in a position to make timely revision and improvement of the courses of study because of the lack of resources. Timely revision and improvement of courses taking into consideration the fast changing world of knowledge are of paramount importance.

Conclusion
Nepal’s higher education is at a crossroad of challenges and opportunities. The Himalayan nation has survived many upheavals in its short history of higher education including the recent decade-long civil war and ongoing political changes that have obscured the possibilities of immense growth and development. In spite of these perpetual issues, the higher education system is making headway with the increasing demand coupled negatively with low purchasing power of people. In the midst of many such hurdles facing, there are opportunities for the country to harness. The strategic location of the nation between the two superpowers of Asia, international support, growing presence of supportive diaspora of intellectuals, and the demonstrated enthusiasm and energy of resilient youth at home can be leveraged to create a momentum. Now it is high time for Nepal’s higher education leaders to begin conversations on how they can overcome the widespread access gap to higher education. The beautiful nation known for exotic tourist destination has immense potentials to become one of the higher education destinations in the changing context.

References


