

Comparative Study of ICT for Social Studies Education in Public and Private Schools of Nepal

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation and efficiency of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Social Studies education in public and private secondary schools within Bhaktapur Municipality, Nepal. Utilizing qualitative methods—semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation—the study probes students' and teachers' perceptions regarding ICT usage, access, and challenges. Research shows a widening digital divide: private schools have better infrastructure, trained instructors, and interactive digital materials, enhancing learner motivation, higher-order thinking, and digital literacy. Public schools, by contrast, experience limited access to ICT tools, untrained staff, and physical constraints that restrict motivation and learning. Despite this, the stakeholders within public and private schools recognize the potential for change in ICT to foster civic conscience, socio-economic development, and future readiness. The study determines a need for context-based ICT policies sensitive to diverse school needs, especially in less deprived contexts. It also calls for continuous teacher training, peer learning spaces, and technical support to ensure successful ICT

integration. Pupils from both institutions appreciated being heard through qualitative approaches, highlighting the significance of participatory research in guiding education reforms. The study states that bridging the digital divide requires strategic policy actions, concentrated investments, appropriate content and accessible teacher training. These are imperative to foster education equity and empower all students—whether in elementary, middle, or high School—to be active and engaged citizens in a digital society.

Keywords: Comparative study, digital device, teacher training, challenges and integration public and private School

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has been increasing as an excellent tool for educational enhancement worldwide. ICT application in education enhances active learning environments, promotes student-centred pedagogies, and enables the acquisition of 21st-century learning skills such as problem-solving, collaborative working, and digital literacy. Globally, ICT integration into Social Studies instruction is not just being looked at as a method of enriching content but also as a force for enabling critical thinking, democratic values, and active citizenship (UNESCO, 2019). Social Studies is a subject heavily rooted in understanding societies, cultures, and global interdependence, and ICT tools particularly benefit from providing real-time global information access, virtual simulations, digital storytelling, and interactive maps. In industrialized nations, such as South Korea and Finland, ICT adoption in secondary-level education—and more specifically in Social Studies—has enabled students to explore worldwide trends such as social justice, migration, and climate change through data visualizations, online archives and online learning environments (Voogt et al., 2018). Such technologies have facilitated content interaction and pedagogical practice, with students placed in the role of active actors in the learning process. Yet, for all these advances, inequalities in ICT access and application persist, most notably between public and private schools. Private schools in most developing countries also embrace ICT faster due to better financial resources, infrastructural sophistication, and administrative ease of decision-making.

Public schools typically face structural obstacles comprising poor internet connectivity, lack of technical support, outdated computer laboratories, and continuous teacher training in ICT pedagogy (Tondeur et al., 2017). These challenges hinder the effective use of ICT in the classroom and widen the digital divide. This inequality is quite visible in South Asia, where

private schools quickly adopt newer digital technologies. Yet, government schools continue to lag even regarding the basic needs of ICT-based education (Trucano, 2016). Such inequalities can impact academic achievement and future socio-economic opportunities of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Nepal's situation is essentially a mirror image of these international and regional trends. While the Government of Nepal has drafted national ICT in Education Master Plans and encouraged digital learning in school curricula, implementation is uneven. Private secondary schools in urban and semi-urban areas are better equipped with digital projectors, multimedia content, e-learning platforms, and high-speed internet, which are intensively used in teaching Social Studies. These schools also concentrate more on interactive education, virtual excursions, and electronic assessments to foster student involvement (Adhikari, 2021). However, public secondary schools, particularly those in rural and remote regions, continue to have limited access even to the simplest ICT facilities. Most schools lack trained instructors, electricity, and equipment for integrating ICT into Social Studies education. These inequalities in ICT use have created a growing gap in the learning process among students of private and public schools. It is, therefore, essential to compare the availability and utilization of ICT tools in teaching Social Studies, how teachers and students view their effectiveness, and what opportunities and challenges each School typefaces. This comparison will aid in understanding digital inequalities, guide policy in making education more equitable, and allow all students to become knowledgeable, responsible and effective citizens in the present digital era.

Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research helped understand real experiences and complex issues in education by collecting in-depth information through interviews and dialogue (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It helped the researcher explore people's perceptions deeply, which figures could not clarify (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted in Bhaktapur Municipality and included two public and one private School. It involved social studies teachers of both schools. Four students were chosen from each School, two from Grade 11 and two from Grade 12, to ensure a range of perspectives. The study's primary objectives were to examine the use of ICT tools in teaching Social Studies, investigate students' perceptions of their usefulness, and identify the challenges and opportunities associated with their use in the classroom. Data were collected through semi-structured

interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their views openly while enabling the researcher to probe specific aspects of ICT usage in Social Studies education (Kvale&Brinkmann, 2015).

In addition to the interviews, FGDs were also conducted with the teachers and students. The group discussions encouraged the gathering of diverse opinions and encouraged the respondents to elaborate on each other's thoughts. This gave a clearer understanding of ICT-related concerns in education (Morgan, 1998). Data gathered was coded using thematic analysis, which aimed to find common concepts, trends, and points of difficulty in the responses. The study mainly explored issues like the lack of ICT tools and unequal access for public and private schools. It also explored possible areas of improvement, like the development of teaching materials and the integration of more digital tools in the classroom. Overall, this qualitative study offered helpful suggestions to teachers and policymakers on improving the study of social studies in Nepal. It suggested equal access to ICT and better support to public and private schools. This would help develop responsible and informed citizens in the contemporary digital time.

Discussion and Findings

The key findings from the study of the comparative analysis of ICT usage are in teaching Social Studies in public and private secondary schools. It determines differences in access, usage, and impact of electronic resources across the two sectors. The discussion also looks at how these variations influence the engagement of students, instruction, and learning achievement. The ensuing debate and findings are given below:

ICT Integration in Private Schools

The study found that the private School had a well-established ICT infrastructure, including digital projectors, internet access, and multimedia teaching materials, which were regularly utilized for virtual field trips, digital storytelling, and online assessments in social studies classes. This also aligns with Voogt et al. (2018), who highlight how ICT integration in developed learning settings enhances the engagement of students, interactivity, and collaborative learning, specifically in Social Studies classes that deal with global and civic issues. Access to modern ICT facilities allowed teachers to employ more learner-centred pedagogies, through which critical thinking and digital literacy were fostered (UNESCO, 2019). It was found in the research that Private Schools had excellent ICT infrastructure, including digital projectors,

internet, and multimedia teaching materials, which were utilized mainly for virtual tours, digital storytelling, and online quizzes in Social Studies classes. In this context, a student from a public School remarked,

We don't have enough ICT tools, which has made it hard to use digital technology in Social Studies classes. Digital projectors, stable internet, and multimedia materials are either missing or insufficient. Because of this, our learning is less interactive and creative. Teachers often use traditional methods, and we rarely get to do things like virtual tours or online tests. This lack of technology has also slowed our digital skills and critical thinking, creating a big gap between public and better-equipped private schools.

In this contrast, the private school student shared,

I am gaining a lot from the strong ICT setup, which includes digital projectors, good internet, and multimedia materials. With these tools, teachers make Social Studies lessons more interesting by using activities like virtual field trips, digital storytelling, and online tests. This ICT environment has made learning more engaging and interactive, encouraging students to work together.

In this regard, the public school teacher said,

I face challenges in using ICT due to limited infrastructure and school resources. Though there were some efforts to use available technology to deliver social studies, the lack of internet connectivity, digital equipment, and multimedia content limited the scope for interactive and student-centered learning. In most instances, teaching was done traditionally with minimal opportunities for virtual interaction or online assessment. This fact reflects the school digital divide and necessitates targeted intervention to enable equitable access to technology-enhanced learning experiences.

In this contrast, the private school teacher said,

The School was ICT-facilitated with computers, digital projectors, constant internet connectivity, and an enormous range of multimedia learning materials. They were intensively utilized in Social Studies classrooms for virtual field trips, digital narration, and web-based assessment. This intensive ICT use accelerated a shift towards student-centered pedagogies, critical thinking development, and digital literacy.

In conclusion, the inequality between private and public schools regarding ICT access and use in Social Studies lessons is stark. While private schools use digital technology to create robust

learning experiences and foster critical thinking, public schools face outdated infrastructure and limited resources. This underscores the importance of equity of access to technology for all students so that they can have access to modern, interactive, and forward-looking learning experiences.

Limited ICT Access in Public Schools

In contrast, public schools lacked the fundamental ICT infrastructure, such as internet connection, up-to-date computer labs, and ICT-trained teachers. Because of this, teachers relied primarily on traditional lecture-based teaching, which limited student interaction and engagement. In this regard, a public school student said,

We usually listen and take notes when the teacher teaches. Some classrooms have smart boards and digital tools, but not all. This makes it hard to understand some topics clearly. Learning through videos and computers would be more interesting and easier to understand. It would help us learn faster and remember things longer. Using technology in the classroom also helps us prepare for today's world, where technology is used in schools, offices, and everyday life.

On the contrary, a Private School student said,

I like our social studies class because we get to watch videos, do quizzes online, and even go places through virtual maps. It helps me remember better. I like learning this way better because I can see and experience what I'm learning, not just read. The videos help make the lessons funnier, and the quizzes help me practice my learning. Understanding where places are and how they connect through Internet maps is also simpler. This learning style also renders the subject more enjoyable and easy to understand.

In this regard, the teachers from the public schools commented,

Our School does not have good ICT facilities. The internet is slow, the computer lab is outdated, and we lack qualified technical staff. Because of these problems, we mainly have a traditional lecture style, which makes it hard to keep students interested and reduces interactive learning possibilities.

On the other hand, the private school teacher stated,

I am a recipient of upgraded ICT facilities such as reliable internet connectivity, modern computer labs, and qualified support staff. This has enabled them to integrate digital

technology and interactive methods into their pedagogy, making learning more student-centred and interactive.

Overall, private school teachers and students receive enhanced ICT facilities, thus ensuring interactive, engaging, and modern learning of Social Studies. Public schools, however, are confronted with outdated technology, poor internet connectivity, and inexperienced human resources, thus preventing them from accessing digital resources. This difference calls for taking immediate measures to improve ICT infrastructure in public schools to facilitate equal and effective learning for everyone.

Student Engagement Differences

The students decided more participation in addition to motivation due to the availability of ICT tools that made learning exciting and interactive. However, students in the public School were frustrated and discontented with limited access to digital resources. This affirms the findings by Trucano (2016), who noted that the digital gap between school levels might significantly affect students' learning outcomes and levels of motivation, where students are familiar with the available technology advantages compared to other students. In this context, the public school student stated,

Frustration and dissatisfaction have been occurred due to their limited access to ICT tools and digital resources. The lack of proper technology in their classrooms made learning less interesting and engaging. This digital gap between private and public schools has dramatically changed how students learn and stay motivated. As a result, students in public schools are missing out on the benefits of ICT-based learning and a better overall educational experience.

In this contrast, the private school student shared,

I often use ICT tools such as computers, the internet and learning apps in class, which keep me motivated and interested in my studies. These tools make learning easy, fun and enjoyable. The classroom becomes more interactive and engaging when students learn through digital resources. Modern technology has improved my learning by helping me stay focused and understand lessons better.

In this context, the public school teacher remarked, "I struggle to get students involved because there are insufficient digital tools and adequate infrastructure. Even with my best efforts, the lack of technology often frustrates and makes students feel behind." The private school teacher said,

"I utilize ICT tools effectively to offer an enjoyable and interactive study environment. This improves instruction and aids in generating more interest in students."

In conclusion, private school students and teachers benefit from the effective use of ICT tools, making learning more interesting, interactive, and stimulating. Public schools, on the other hand, have limited digital resources and infrastructure, which leads to lower student engagement and exclusion. This brings to the fore the need for increased ICT access and training in public schools to create balanced and effective learning environments for all students.

Challenges Identified

Major public school impediments were inadequate infrastructure, the absence of digital learning resources, and the lack of teacher ICT training. Private schools possessed superior resources, but some teachers faced challenges with time constraints and curriculum load, which affected the optimal use of ICT tools. These align with UNESCO (2019), which emphasizes that access is not enough—teachers must be given time, content, and context support to adopt digital tools effectively. Thus, a public school student stated,

I am facing significant learning challenges due to inadequate school infrastructure, insufficient digital learning materials, and insufficient ICT-trained teachers. It is becoming challenging to understand technology on time because we do not have enough digital resources. I know that these issues make my learning lag behind other students in private schools, making me feel like I cannot learn the material in time.

In this regard, private school students mentioned,

I have access to digital learning tools such as computers, laptops, and mobile phones, which enable me to learn. However, some teachers believe that despite these benefits, they still do not make the most of such resources. They justified that limited time, crowded curriculum, and inadequate training hindered them from capitalizing on technology. For this reason, students feel that even though we have upgraded digital tools, they are not used optimally in our studies.

In this regard, a public school teacher reported, "Structural issues such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of digital learning materials and limited ICT training have hindered the integration of ICT in teaching". In this contrast, a private school teacher noted, "Due to widening of curriculum and limited time, we are finding it difficult to make the most of technology in

teaching. To benefit from technology properly, we also need sufficient time, materials, and support."

In summary, although students in private schools have better access to ICT tools, teachers and students both believe that the tools are not always optimized because of time constraints, a dense curriculum, and inadequate training. Both public school teachers and students face even greater problems, including insufficient infrastructure, inadequate digital learning material, and inadequate ICT training, that further widen the gap between public and private schools in learning. This considers the need for greater teacher support and infrastructure in all schools to make technology work efficiently and adequately in education.

Opportunities for Improvement

The public and private school stakeholders agreed that ICT has the potential to transform social studies education, provided that there is ongoing investment and capacity building. Suggested improvements were government investment in ICT facilities, context-driven training modules, and locally relevant digital content. This is buttressed by Creswell (2014), who argues that qualitative findings show actionable policy recommendations when stakeholders' lived experiences are analyzed in-depth.

In this regard, public school students said,

Our schools have started investing more in ICT tools to improve how Social Studies are taught. Teachers are being provided with digital materials and basic training. This shows that public schools are slowly trying to close the gap with private schools so that we, too, can learn competitively and effectively like private school students.

In this context, a private school student said,

It's essential to have better access to ICT in Social Studies. If all teachers get regular training in using technology, ICT can become a powerful tool for effective teaching. I believe this will help us gain knowledge and become skilled and competitive. That's why using digital content that connects with our local culture and geography is also important.

In this context, the teacher from the public School supported,

I am trying to advance learning by leveraging ICT in teaching social studies, but I face enormous challenges based on poor infrastructure and limited school resources. Without continued government support in providing basic ICT equipment and locally made training, making meaningful progress becomes difficult. My classroom experiences, I

believe, should guide policy, especially in crafting digital content that mirrors my students' settings and my needs as a student.

In this regard, the private school teachers said,

I utilize ICT to improve students' learning and make social studies interactive and more meaningful. However, even with some exposure to digital tools, I still need adequate training that fits my teaching environment. I have also noticed a lack of digital materials that reflect our local realities. With adequate support and government investment in training and equipment, ICT can truly revolutionize the way I teach social studies.

In conclusion, both private and public schools agree that ICT has great potential to support teaching Social Studies if supported by appropriate training, accompanying digital content, and investment. While private schools have some technological access, they still face localized content and teacher preparedness issues. Public schools are worse hit by inferior infrastructure and unavailability of resources, with the imperative of drawing attention to the urgency of government action to bridge the education gap

Digital Divide is real and growing

Findings validate international and regional research demonstrating the growing digital divide between private and public schools (Tondeur et al., 2017; Trucano, 2016). The digital divide not only equates to disparate learning outcomes but also limits socio-economic progress in the end for students in the public sector deprived of digital tool access. In connection with this, the public school students pointed out,

The widening technology access gap is now affecting education. Students in public schools are made to feel that they are behind students in private schools because they do not have enough digital devices and equipment. Most of them contend that not using enough technology makes it harder to acquire essential digital skills, affecting their education and future roles at work and in life.

In this contrast, the students of a private school revealed,

Using sophisticated digital tools at School has made me more capable and confident in learning. Therefore, through access to technology, students are more likely to enrich their learning and be better prepared for later life and career success.

Regarding this, the public school teachers said,

My students rarely get to utilize computers, the internet, or smart classrooms. So, I make do with whatever resources I have. But these limitations do not allow my students to compete in today's modern age and will enable me to contribute to skilled human resources in the contemporary environment."

Likewise, a private school teacher said, "Many times, I use ICT regularly in my classroom, and my students are becoming more confident with technology. This is setting them up nicely for university and the workforce."

In conclusion, access to digital technologies significantly increases students' confidence, learning capabilities, and readiness for future careers. Private schools receive constant ICT integration, while public schools face enormous challenges under limited resources, thereby the looming gap in learning opportunities. To ensure equal learning and preparedness for future careers, it is equally crucial to provide all students with access to technology and assist teachers in incorporating it successfully.

ICT as a Tool for Citizenship Education

ICT facilities in Social Studies foster critical thinking, civic awareness, and global engagement through exposure to current issues, diverse perspectives, and interactive learning environments (UNESCO, 2019). Private school students in this study benefited from such exposure, which is vital in shaping informed and responsible citizens. In this respect, the student from the public School stated,

Although the opportunities to learn ICT tools for social studies are limited compared to their peers in private schools, they believe that they could develop critical thinking skills and a stronger sense of civic responsibility with greater access to digital resources. They recognized the importance of ICT in providing access to current events and diverse perspectives. However, due to financial constraints and low investment in technology, students, teachers, and schools face significant frustration and limited use of ICT. Therefore, they emphasized the need to increase investment in ICT in government schools to bridge the gap with private schools, ensuring equal opportunities for all students to become educated and active citizens.

Concerning this, the private school student noted,

ICT tools in social studies education have positively impacted students' academic performance. It is key in strengthening critical thinking, civic awareness, and global

sensitivity. It was further noted that exposure to modern educational challenges, diverse perspectives, and virtual learning platforms is helping students become more informed and responsible citizens—capable of using ICT effectively and competitively in alignment with the demands of the modern era.

In this regard, a public school teacher stated,

I firmly believe that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has the potential to make social studies more interactive and meaningful. However, due to our School's lack of adequate ICT facilities and a shortage of trained teachers, our students cannot access current events or explore diverse perspectives. As a result, they are deprived of opportunities to develop into informed and responsible members of the modern world.

On this subject, a private school teacher expressed,

In my School, integrating ICT tools in social studies significantly contributes to students' development by allowing them to explore contemporary events, global issues, and diverse perspectives through interactive platforms. Through this exposure to technology, they are becoming more informed and globally aware—an essential quality in today's interconnected world.

In conclusion, ICT tools have a significant role in enhancing social studies teaching by promoting civic responsibility, global awareness, and critical thinking in pupils. As much as pupils in private schools are advantaged by computer availability and interactive learning, public school pupils are hampered by a lack of proper ICT facilities and infrastructure. Bridging this gap through training and investment can make all students well-informed, responsible, and globally conscious citizens.

8. Need for Context-Specific ICT Policies

Nepal launched the use of ICT in education by putting into place various policies, pieces of training, and infrastructural support. Efforts like OLPC, online study material, and connectivity have also been undertaken. However, ICT is used primarily for administration, given that insufficiently trained teachers and quality electronic content are available. Although the Government of Nepal has developed ICT Master Plans, their regular implementation is not seen in rural and inadequately equipped schools. This proves the need for ICT policies that match real School needs in different regions. Adhikari (2021) also observes that context-specific ICT policies such as these are essential in the Nepali education system. Nepal has recognized the

importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education, implementing policies and programs to promote its use. Computer and ICT subjects have become part of general and technical education, and ICT teacher training is provided through radio programmes. Bachelor and Master Levels courses in Computer Science, Engineering, and ICT are offered by universities, and Tribhuvan University offers a B.Ed. Course in Computer Science. One Laptop per Child and e-materials of digital learning are undertaken by the Ministry of Education (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education. (2013). In this connection, a public school student said,

We are facing several challenges in using digital learning materials. Although the Government of Nepal has introduced an ICT Master Plan, we are not able to implement it effectively in our schools. As a result, we lack adequately trained teachers, limited access to quality digital resources, and unreliable internet connectivity. Therefore, the existing ICT policies need to be revised to reflect the actual conditions of schools. If these policies are tailored to the specific needs of different sectors, they can help bridge the digital divide and enhance our learning opportunities.

In contrast, private school students reported,

We are learning a lot through the use of ICT facilities. Our School has qualified instructors and high-quality digital materials, and it effectively integrates technology into classroom teaching. This allows us to understand the subject matter clearly and practically, helping us apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations.

In this-contrast, the students of private Schools reported,

I am learning more from the ICT facilities. Our School has qualified instructors and good-quality digital materials, and it effectively utilizes technology in class. This enables us to understand the lessons the instructors taught easily and usefully, following the curriculum. In this, the instructor of the private School testified I have started using digital learning materials and internet tools in classroom teaching. Nevertheless, ICT is still used primarily for office work because the training I get is not so practical and useful for the classroom. I need training that allows me to use ICT in real classroom settings, not theoretically.

Similarly, a public school teacher said,

I have observed that the government places importance on ICT and has introduced programs like One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) and the Digital Learning Initiative. However, in our resource-limited School, such programs are not effectively implemented. We rarely receive proper training or the necessary infrastructure to integrate ICT into teaching. Although I have read about the ICT master plans, their implementation is weak. ICT has great potential to enhance classroom teaching, but it isn't easy to use under these conditions.

In conclusion, the application of ICT in schools is affected by poor facilities, lack of proper training, and poor infrastructure, particularly in government schools. Though private schools have better access to ICT resources and trained personnel, government schools suffer from poorly implemented government policies and poor support. To bridge this digital gap, ICT policies must be thoughtfully created and executed for the specific needs of different schools so that access increases and there is on-ground training for the students and educators.

Teacher Training is Crucial

Both school groups needed regular ICT training, peer learning environments, and technical assistance, asserting that teacher capacity building must be prioritized (Voogt et al., 2018). Even if ICT tools are available, unless they are equipped with adequate training, their pedagogical benefits cannot be utilized appropriately.

In this context, a public school teacher said,

Although digital devices are available in schools, their quantity is limited. Some teachers do not utilize even available devices effectively due to a lack of proper training. For many, short-term training is not sufficient to use ICT tools effectively. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our School provided brief training sessions, but they were not very effective. What we truly need is continuous, hands-on training to develop practical ICT skills. Additionally, the absence of technical support further hinders the use of new ICT devices in the classroom.

In this regard, a private school teacher said,

We have ample ICT resources in the School, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted online classes, for which the School arranged ICT training for all teachers. As a result, almost all teachers can use basic ICT tools effectively. However, they face difficulties with advanced ICT, so additional training is needed to use these tools more

effectively. Only then can the ICT resources available in the School be used to their full potential, which helps prepare a competitive workforce.

In conclusion, the effective use of ICT tools in education is limited by insufficient frequent and experiential professional training for private and public school teachers. While teachers in these schools are exposed to technology, they struggle to integrate it into classes without frequent professional development and technical support. To fully utilize ICT in education, there is an excellent need for repeated training and peer learning environments to enhance teachers' digital pedagogical competencies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a vast digital divide between private and public secondary schools in Nepal regarding the implementation of ICT in social studies teaching. The private schools, which have better infrastructure, trained teachers, and internet services, efficiently employ equipment like projectors, videos, and computer-based tests to increase students' interaction, analytical thinking, and computer proficiency. On the contrary, public schools are characterized by main drawbacks like insufficient school infrastructure, bad internet services, and inadequate teacher training that result in outdated, low-interactive teaching styles and low student motivation. Both areas identify the potential for ICT to transform learning, but its impact is skewed due to structural inequities. State school students observe the value of computer-mediated learning content but are hampered by inadequate access and facilitation. In addressing this deficit, there must be an ongoing investment in ICT infrastructure, ongoing and locally situated teacher development, and locally pertinent digital content creation. Strengthened government efforts and coordinated strategies are needed to enable level playing fields and effective integration of ICT in all schools. Besides, the study highlights the value of qualitative data in documenting students' voices, giving better insight into policy and practice. Closing the digital divide is central to providing inclusive, future-fit education and equal opportunity for every Nepalese student.

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