Introduction
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

❖ NEPAL: THE CONTEXT

Situated in the northern rim of South Asia, Nepal is a small Himalayan country, full of geographical diversities. This landlocked country is bordered by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China on the north and the Indian Republic on the south, east and west. The country is divided into three broad ecological regions, namely Mountain, Hill and Tarai. Likewise, emphatic ridges that run east-west and the numerous north to south flowing rivers have fragmented the country into different topographical areas, reflecting on bio-climatic, socio-cultural and economic variations.

The population of Nepal, which is estimated to have exceeded 25 million in 2005, is growing at the rate of 2.4 percent per annum, which is the second fastest growth rate (after Pakistan) in South Asia. About 14 percent of the total population belongs to the primary school age group (5-9 years old). Many ethnic/caste and language groups inhabit Nepal. The population of Nepal broadly falls into two categories – Hinduized caste hierarchies and non-caste ethnic groups. The Government has recognized 59 ethnic groups. Among the Hindu caste hierarchies, 23 are identified as dalit caste groups. Muslims, Sikhs, etc are classified as other religious minorities (Gurung, 2005). The Population Census of 2001 has identified 52 castes, 44 ethnic and 4 religious minorities groups (CBS, 2002). There are 92 languages spoken by the people of Nepal as their mother tongue. However, Nepali language, spoken by 48.6 percent of the population as mother tongue and many others as second language, has become pre-eminent both as the lingua franca of the country and the state language.

➢ Political System in Nepal

The political system of Nepal is now preparing for a greatest transition in history. The multi-party parliamentary democracy established after the popular movement of 1990, with a two-house parliament along the line of the West-minster model, was derailed by the last King, Gyanendra Shah to meet his political ambition.
A mass uprising in April 2006 compelled the King to agree on the roadmap of the political parties and restore the dissolved House of Parliament. An Interim Constitution was promulgated until the new constitution is framed by the Constituent Assembly (CA). However, the country's politics remains fluid. Many new issues such as republicanism, federalism, inclusion, proportional representation have propped up the restructuring of the state.

In order to set the legitimate political course, the election for CA was held in April 2008. The first meeting of the newly elected Constituent Assembly held on 28 May 2008 abolished the 240-years old Shah dynasty and declared the country a Federal Republic. The CA, which is also functioning as the legislature of the country, is tasked to complete the framing of new constitution for the Federal Republic of Nepal within a period of two years. The CA consists of 601 members, including 26 members nominated by the government. The President of Nepal, who functions as the constitutional head of the new Republic, has been at post. Nepal is now passing through the most challenging moment of the history. Pointing out the key challenge to the nation and the people, the first president of Nepal, in his first address to the nation, said:

*The days ahead will be crucial to transform the face of Nepal and Nepalese through peace building, social justice, rule of law and inclusive democracy* (The Rising Nepal, National Daily, dated 28 July 2008).

The country is now being headed by the President and ruled by a new republican government. It is a coalition government led by Nepal Communist Party Maoist with Nepal Communist Party United Marxist and Leninist (UML) and Madhesi Janadhikar Forum and few other small parties. The making of the new constitution and managing the transitional affairs of the country requires consensus among at least the major political parties. It is yet to be seen how the country’s political system is designed in a new constitution. But it is expected to be based on democratic principles and values of multi-party competitive politics, and guarantee fundamental rights of the people. It is worth-mentioning here that the Interim Constitution has accepted citizen’s right to education as fundamental right (GON, 2007). The new constitution is also expected to adhere to such commitments of social value.
For the purpose of administration, the country till now relies on existing 5 development regions, 75 districts, 58 municipalities, and about 4000 Village Development Committees (VDC). The present administrative structure might be changed when the country formally enters into federal political and administrative structures. Under the new political structure, education is likely to be provincial affairs since most parties have said so in their electoral commitments. The change in political system, especially from unitary to federal one is likely to have both long-term and short-term implications on primary education.

➢ Economy of Nepal

Nepal's per capita income of USD 270 is one of the lowest in the world and the lowest in the SAARC Region (World Bank, 2007). With a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.534, Nepal ranks 142nd in the group of 177 countries (UNDP, 2007/08). Incidence of poverty is very high and the number of poor is rising. A recent study has reported a head count poverty index of 30.8 percent at the national level (using the per capita annual consumption expenditure of about Rs. 15224 at FY 2003/04 prices as the poverty line), varying between 9.6 percent in urban and 34.6 percent in rural areas (CBS, 2005). It is reported that 54.6 percent of the total poor dwell in the hills and mountains and 45.4 percent of them are in the tarai.

Social characteristics of poverty are evident in low literacy and health standards, especially amongst women and girls. About 51 percent of the population aged 15 years and above are illiterate. The gender, social and spatial gaps in literacy are very wide. Adult literacy rate is 34.9 percent for women as compared to 62.7 percent for men. Adult literacy rate varies between a low of 20.1 percent in Humla district and 73.6 percent in Kathmandu (ICIMOD/SNV and CBS, 2003). Literacy rate for the socially disadvantaged communities (dalits) is as low as 10 percent.

Few countries in the world have embarked on the path of development and modernization with such diverse difficulties and disadvantages as has Nepal done in the early 1950's. The literacy rate was less than 5 percent, and there were only about 300 primary and 41 secondary schools (NEPC, 1956).

Nepal launched its First five-year Plan in 1956 and since then a series of ten plans have already been completed. But, the record of achievement is not impressive. Huge investments in various sectors have not shown much success in accelerating the
growth of the economy in a consistent and stable trend. On the other hand, population has continued to grow fast, resulting in a very slow improvement in per capita income. The country is now passing through a three-year interim Plan (2007-2010).

The growth of GDP has remained slow. In Fiscal Year 2007/08, the growth rate of GDP was 5.56 percent, which is the highest growth rate in the last seven years. In 2007/08 the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors of the economy grew by 5.7 percent and 5.6 percent, respectively. The structure of the economy has not changed much either. The share of non-agriculture sector in GDP is 67.4 percent (MOF, 2008). The structure of employment has also shown a sluggish transformation. On the other hand, economic inequality has widened over the years. It is reported that the value of Gini Co-efficient increased from 0.34 in 1995/96 to 0.41 in 2003/04. This shows that the rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer.

Low income and high population growth are formidable challenges to economic growth and structural change. The growing magnitude of youth unemployment and rural underemployment is a big challenge. While the problem of environmental degradation has become alarming, social inequities and regional imbalances pose threats to national integration and political stability.

By many counts, Nepal is now passing through a critical stage in national development. Problems are many and diverse, but there are also hopes and opportunities. The country has a huge backlog of problems and constraints but there are also opportunities opened up by political and economic liberalization. This has significant implications for education and human resource development.

➢ Education System

The education system of Nepal consists of two broad levels: school education and university education. The **school education system has four tiers:**

- Primary education (grades 1 to 5);
- Lower secondary education (grades 6 to 8);
- Secondary education (grades 9 to 10); and
- Higher secondary education (grades 11 to 12)
Introduction

The official age groups for school education are: 5 to 9 years for primary, 10 to 12 years for lower secondary and 13 to 14 years for secondary levels (MOE/GON, 2008). However, the School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examination held at the end of grade 10 is still considered as the terminal examination of the school level education, which qualifies students for entry into university campuses. Higher secondary education, which has been introduced in recent years, is gradually replacing the first two years of the university education. In recent years, Government of Nepal (GON) has initiated new efforts to promote early childhood development (ECD) classes for pre-primary school children.

The Table 1.1 shows the total number of school, Student, teacher and share of private school, student, and teacher at the primary, lower secondary and secondary level in Nepal.

Table 1.1
Education at a glance, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key particulars</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of schools</td>
<td>29,220</td>
<td>9,739</td>
<td>5894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollments (In million)</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers (In thousands)</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of Private Sector (In %): Schools</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollments</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Flash Report 1 (2007/08), DOE, Bhaktapur, Ministry of Education

Among the development institutions of Nepal, the primary school system has the widest spatial network, covering all the Village Development Committees (VDCs) and municipalities. The number of schools totaled 29,220 primary, 9,739 lower secondary and 5,894 secondary schools in 2007, enrolling nearly 4.42 million students in primary, 1.44 million in lower secondary and 0.67 million in secondary grades. The number of teachers employed totals about 166 thousand including about 117 thousand primary, 28 thousand lower secondary and 21 thousand secondary teachers (DOE,
Introduction

2008). The Department of Education (DOE), under the Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for the administration, management and control of the school system throughout the country, with the help of its network of five Regional Directorates (REDs) and 75 District Education Offices (DEOs). There is provision to establish a School Management Committee (SMC) and make it responsible for the management, operation and supervision of schools. But the DOE retains control over the recruitment, placement/transfer and promotion of public school teachers as well as of payment of their salary bills.

The school system in Nepal offers a case of growing participation of the private sector. Private schools have grown fast in recent years. Among the total schools in the country, the share of private schools is 11.7 percent at the primary, 23.4 percent at the lower secondary and 28.7 percent at the secondary levels (DOE, 2008). Likewise, private schools share 10.2 percent of the total students at the primary, 13.0 percent at the lower secondary and 14.9 percent at the secondary levels. Among the total school teachers, private schools share 18.3 percent at the primary, 26.7 percent at the lower secondary and 32.4 percent at the secondary level. The significant place of private sector in school education is evident. However, the private schools are mostly concentrated in the urban and semi-urban locations, providing access to children of relatively better off-families economically, socially and politically.

❖ PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NEPAL

Education is the key to human development and primary education is the foundation. Primary education has been interpreted as elementary education in some countries while in some others it has also been addressed as the first school. The Dictionary of Education defines that "Primary education is provided prior to Secondary Education, and catering for children in the age range of about five-eleven years (Rowntree, 1981). Primary education means the development of the body, mind and heart through which the child learns to adjust himself/herself to the environment at home and society, which brings all children of a country to the path of learning, developing all aspects of life. It also helps knowing something, which would enable the individuals to keep good relationship with the environment and promote the adjustment of children with the society (Asharaf, 1999). Primary education is in essence the first phase of the formal education system received by a person. It
promotes cultural, emotional, intellectual, moral, physical as well as social development in children. In one hand it lays the foundation of further education and on the other, pupils become literate, which enables them to do their work efficiently and systematically, which can be felt in direct and indirect ways.

Every country has plans and programmes for development of their primary education. These plans and programmes deal with the duration, age-group children and intended objectives of primary education. The duration of primary education and their condition varies on the basis of resources, conditions of investment and needs of countries, and, accordingly, the definition of primary education varies in the context of different countries.

Primary education in Nepal is the first stage of formal education, which is of five years' duration and is considered to play a vital role in the promotion of overall development (MOEC, 1992). Primary education is not only considered as the foundation of further education but it is also essential for the quality of life of the people. The activities of such people who have received primary education are more standard than people who are deprived from it (FOE, 1999). For instance, primary school completers are aware of their rights and duties. It is the final formal education for most of the people in the developing countries. In such countries only few percent of the total population have received further education.

Deliberate and organized steps for the development of primary education in Nepal started after the country ushered into the democratic era in 1950. The National Education Planning Commission (NEPC), formed in 1954, defined the broad purpose of primary education as follows (NEPC, 1956):

- To wipe out illiteracy from the face of the land;
- To provide a minimum fundamental education to all of the nation's youth;
- To provide a foundation for the higher education to those who will take the position of leadership in the next generation;
- To provide satisfying and enriching properly directed development of children through their most formative years that they may become wholly effective citizens; and
- To provide to the political, economic and cultural regeneration of Nepal.
Introduction

The objectives of primary education as stated by the NEPC were as follows (NEPC, 1956):

- To develop competencies in the basic skills of communication including language and mathematics;
- To develop civic competencies—attitudes of responsibility and co-operation, appreciation of our struggle for democracy and the contribution of our national heroes, understanding of the working of democracy, skills in civic participation, a feeling of national unity and solidarity, a desire for self-sufficiency and willingness to help oneself, etc;
- To develop economic competency—ability to earn a living on an increasingly higher scale in order to improve one's own condition and contribute to national welfare;
- To develop aesthetic competencies—the appreciation of art and culture, music, dancing, literature and folklore;
- To develop personal competencies—good mental, emotional and physical health, moral and spiritual values;
- To discover latent talents and abilities that when developed will enable the individual to make his maximum contribution to the general welfare of society;
- To develop broad understanding of life, the world, its environment, the universe etc. to enable the child to probe into unsolved mysteries and the unknown, so as to develop a spirit of inquisitiveness, research openness-mindedness and a willingness to experiment; and
- To develop a desire for leisure time and knowledge and practice in the effective use of it.

Development of Primary Education during 1951-1970

Immediately after the political change of 1951, the development of education began with the efforts of government and private sector in Nepal. People began to establish schools even without regular government support. In hilly region literate groups started to run schools. In the Tarai region, teachers from India were invited to run schools. In this way, growing demand for education drew the attention of
Introduction

Government of Nepal to establish more schools across the country. Primary school textbooks were mainly imported from India. There was no uniformity in the primary education system in different parts of the country, mainly due to the lack of a national vision and objective of education. Therefore, the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (NNEPC) was formed in 1954. The commission presented broad suggestions to the government studying the different aspects of Primary Education. It prepared a special plan for curriculum, teacher training, textbook and the expansion of the primary education. Accordingly, primary teacher training commenced in 1954 with the financial and technical assistance from the USA. The five-years' duration of primary education was officially established. Curriculum of different subjects like Nepali language, Social Studies, Mathematics, Art Education, Health & Physical Education, Science, Vocational Education and English language were prepared. A government printing press was set up to publish textbooks based on the new curricula. A new administrative structure at the central, zonal and district levels was set up for the supervision and management of education.

The political change of 1960 brought about a corresponding change in the government policy in all spheres of public activities. The new government evidently an eleven member All Round National Education Committee (ARNEC) under the chairmanship of the Education Minister to outline the new policy of education by keeping view of changed context in the Nepalese politics and governance. The following were the recommendations of this committee regarding primary education (MOE/ARNEC, 1961):

- The Government should adopt a liberal educational policy;
- There should be uniform medium of instruction;
- Primary education should be free and compulsory;
- Pre-primary education should be made available to the children of 3-5 years age group;
- Primary education should be of five-year’s duration for the children of 6-10 age groups;
- In order to improve the standard of education, teachers should be trained and the teaching profession should be made more attractive;
Introduction

- As primary education would prove a terminal education for majority of Nepalese children, a system of Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination should be instituted; and

- Nepal’s topography would require a large number of one-room primary schools with more than one grade. Government of Nepal should provide for the training of teachers for such schools.

The ARNEC (1961) had not set any explicit objectives of primary education. It had however listed fifteen good and essential habits to be developed in school students of all levels. The habits are related to the development of personal and social competencies. The committee recommended that most of the listed habits or objectives should be inculcated in primary school children as far as possible (Joshi, 2003). Some of these habits for primary education are as follows:

- To develop the habit of cleanliness;
- To develop the sense of cooperation;
- To inculcate the sense of religious tolerance;
- To foster the sense of gratitude to others;
- To develop the habit of learning virtues from others;
- To inculcate loyalty to the country and the king;
- To foster the sense of respect for law and morality;
- To nurture the sense of respect for God, Parents, Elders, and Teachers;
- To develop the habit of abstaining from lust, anger, greed, attachment, arrogance and jealousy;
- To develop the habit of abstaining from liquor and drugs; and
- To develop the habit doing physical exercise and playing games daily.

After 1961 it was emphasized to implement the primary education program in line with the recommendation of the ARNEC. It was the overall policy to establish a minimum of one school in one Panchayat (now called VDC). A District Education Inspector was appointed for each of the 75 districts. Textbooks written by qualified writers on the basis of curriculum were distributed free of cost. Mobile training centres were established to train teachers. The salary of primary teachers was paid by government. Of course, many efforts had been made for educational development.
since 1961. The opportunities of primary education were gradually expanded even to cover remote districts of the country. By 1971, about 7256 primary schools were in operation and about 449141 students enrolled in primary schools (Shrestha, 1982).

> Development of Primary Education during 1971-1990

ARNEC-1961 could not fully succeed to achieve the goals of primary education as envisaged by the nation. Therefore, the National Education System Plan (NESP) was introduced in 1971. It was also known as the New Education System, which brought about many changes in the primary education sector. During the implementation of this plan, development programmes of primary education were made according to reformed educational structure. The duration of primary education was reduced down to three years, comprising grades 1 to 3. A new national curriculum was implemented throughout the country. The objectives of primary education were confined to basic literacy. The minimum academic qualification of a primary school teacher was determined as SLC pass. The prescribed subjects included Nepali language, mathematics, social studies, physical education, and art & craft. All primary schools were nationalized and the government paid full salary to teachers.

The three-years' duration of primary education became a subject of debate, leading to its extension to 5 years (grade 1 to 5) again in 1981. The government invested a huge amount of money to improve and strengthen the primary education system.

> Development of Primary Education after 1990

The political change of 1990, which restored multi party democracy, marked another significant phase in the history of educational development in Nepal. In 1992, a new National Education Commission (NEC) was formed by the government to lead the educational system towards a new dimension of education and society. The NEC (1992) affirms education has a special role to play as a catalyst for social change and national reconstruction, and that, as such; it should be given a new dimension well in time (Joshi, 2003).

The NEC (1992) stated the objectives of primary education as follows:

The main objective of Primary Education is to develop inherent qualities of children, to develop the skill of 3'R's in children to instill in them the respect for values, norms and beliefs and build up qualities which enable human life and to engender civic, scientific
Introduction and environmental awareness in children.

For attending the above objectives, the NEC (1992) put stress on the following aspects of primary education:

- Inculcate the habit of enquiry by stimulating, inquisitiveness;
- Instill interest in art, beauty and culture;
- Develop competency of expressing ideas in oral and written forms;
- Develop competency in mathematics to solve practical problems of daily life;
- Help to lead a wholesome life by cultivating positive attitude towards health and physical education;
- Build up understanding of the inter-relationship between life and energy;
- Cultivate the habit of cooperativeness and responsibility by fostering beliefs in social values and norms;
- Develop conduct in accordance with democratic values and norms; and
- Help develop discipline and dignified citizenry for the development of nation, nationality and national solidarity.

Primary education in democracy recognizes the inherent potential of children and thereby provides appropriate opportunity for its development. This, however, requires a new culture and good environment for children within the school, which, sadly, is lacking in most of our primary schools (Joshi, 2003).

The government accepted the structure recommended by the commission according to which primary education was divided into two phases. The first three years of primary education were collectively named as ‘basic education’ and grades 4 and 5 as ‘post-basic or upper primary education’ (Joshi, 2003). The official year for entry into primary education was fixed as ‘6 year-old’.

A high-level National Education Commission (HLNEC) was formed in 1998 under the chairmanship of the Education Minister and was tasked to review the structure and content of the educational system and to submit a report containing educational policies to prepare efficient and competitive manpower for the 21st century. Accordingly, the HLNEC prepared national policies and strategies for education and primary education. The commission recommended to introduce ECD as pre-primary education.
The Commission gave the following recommendations on Primary Education:

- To develop in children basic skills most essential for life;
- To develop essential life skill of living;
- To develop inherent potentiality of children;
- To develop useful democratic and social values and norms; and
- To inculcate scientific and environmental awareness.

Basically these objectives did not differ much from the report of the NEC (1992) but its novel feature was the inclusion of life skills.

### Present Status of Primary Education in Nepal

There has been massive expansion of primary education in Nepal since 1951. Number of schools, teachers and students in the primary education has grown tremendously. The school with grade 1 to 5 is considered as primary school. There are three types of primary schools in Nepal i.e. public, private and community. Public schools are those schools, which receive regular government grants in the form of teachers’ salary, administrative cost and support of stationery. Besides, they also receive other supports like teacher training, free textbook, scholarship to girls, *dalit* (socially and economically deprived) and children with disabilities. A community school is established, supported and managed by school management committee (SMC) and local bodies such as Village Development Committee (VDC) and Municipalities. This type of school does not receive regular government grants but runs with support from community, donations from other sources and school’s own resources (*DOE/DEOS, 2003*). Private schools do not receive regular government grant, but depend mainly on student’s fees.

Recently, the government has broadly classified schools into two types, namely community schools and institutional schools. The community schools are the schools formerly called public schools which are fully managed by regular or irregular aid provided by the government provided. Institutional schools are privately owned and managed, and therefore also called private schools (*DOE/DEOS-Flash Report, 2005*). The Table 1.2 shows the total number of public (community) and private (institutional) primary schools in Nepal.
Primary school aged children of Nepal are enrolled in two types of schools, namely public school (community) and private (institutional) schools. The number of public (community) primary schools offering primary education is 25,796, which is about 88 percent of the total schools. Private schools offering primary education are nearly 12 percent of the total schools.

Primary education is an expanding system in Nepal. The number of schools, students and teachers is on the rise (Table 1.3). However, more than one tenth of the primary school age-group children are still outside the system, which significantly varies across the gender and locations.
Table 1.3
Key Particulars of Primary Education in Nepal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>17842</td>
<td>21473</td>
<td>25927</td>
<td>27525</td>
<td>29220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>2788644</td>
<td>3263050</td>
<td>3623150</td>
<td>4239791</td>
<td>4419000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>71213</td>
<td>82645</td>
<td>97879</td>
<td>91679</td>
<td>116846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female teachers</td>
<td>9181</td>
<td>15885</td>
<td>24770</td>
<td>29715</td>
<td>41475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Teacher Ratio (STR)</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student School Ratio (SSR)</td>
<td>156.3</td>
<td>152.0</td>
<td>139.7</td>
<td>154.0</td>
<td>151.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher School Ratio (TSR)</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Enrollment Rate (NER) (%)</td>
<td>N.A*</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.A*</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>83.4</td>
<td>87.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N.A*</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: School Level educational Statistics of Nepal, various years

N.A* = Not available (Not calculated of official age group enrolment in this year)

Fig. 1.2
Growth of School and Teacher


Introduction

Fig. 1.3
Growth of Students in various years

- CONTEXT OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION (UPE)

Universal Primary Education

The Geneva conference of 1951 under the joint auspicious of the International Bureau of Education and UNESCO was a landmark in the attainment of the goal to providing universal free compulsory primary education (Uprety, 1962). A minister level conference of Asian countries was held in Karachi in 1960, under the auspicious of the UNESCO. A resolution was passed to render primary education free and compulsory. In this context they decided to make free and compulsory Primary School Education by 1980. All the participating Asian countries accepted it. In 1990 a provision of education for all was made under the direction of United Nations at Jomtien Conference in Thailand. The developing countries had accepted Primary Education as first and primary need of the children. In 1990 under the auspicious of UNFESCO a world conference was held at New York and this conference was concluded with the statement that primary education is the birth right of each and every child (FOE, 1999). In 2000, the World Education Forum met at Dakar of Senegal. The conference ensured that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of Primary Education (UNDP, 2000). Nepal is a signatory to the Dakar declaration. The government has already prepared and implemented a national action plan for UPE.
Introduction

Universal Primary Education means making education available to all children belonging to the prescribed age group of 5-9 years. Opportunity for this education may be provided through formal or non-formal means of education. Everyone has a right to education. It signifies education for all not for a selected few. This means all children belonging to the prescribed age-group, boy or girl, rich or poor, living in towns or villages, should be given access to join and complete primary education (Cole, 2000).

At present almost all countries in the world have endeavored to render Primary Education free and accessible to all. Article 26 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: Every one has right to education. [It] shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory... [and] shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to strengthening of respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for maintenance of peace (Cole, 2000). Forty years later, in November 1989, the United Nations adopted the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, defining a child as anyone under the age of eighteen. The Convention reiterated the principles enshrined in the United Nations charter and states that The education of the child shall be directed towards respect for the child's parents his or her cultural identities, language and values [and] the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin... children of minority communities and indigenous population [have the right] to enjoy their own culture and to practice their own religion and language (Cole, 2000).

Basic and primary education is a catalyst of social change and empowerment. It helps to overcome the traditional inequalities based on gender, caste, and class, just as the removal of these inequalities contributes to the sustainable development of education. Education is widely perceived by members of socially or economically disadvantaged groups as the most promising chance of upward mobility for their children. Therefore, a firm commitment to the widespread and equitable provision of the basic and primary education is the first requirement for eradicating social and
Introduction

In consideration of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) asserting everyone has a right to education and in reaction to the setbacks in basic education in the 1980's, the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), held in Jomtein in 1990, declared Basic Education for All as a goal to be attained by the year 2000. The WCEFA articulated the expanded concept of basic education as education that fulfils the basic learning needs of all - children at first level of education, youth who are out of school and adults requiring lifelong basic education support - through a variety of delivery systems such as formal primary schooling, non-formal/altemative schooling, literacy programmes and informal education. These basic learning needs comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions and to continue learning (APPEAL, 1998).

Basic education programmes should cater to diverse learning needs of all - children of school-going age, youth and adults. Basic education in its different forms - formal primary schooling for children, nonformal education for youth and literacy training and adult education for adults - addresses the specific needs of different learner groups (APPEAL, 1998). These three programmes address respectively primary school age children who are going to school, children who should be in school but who are not in due to socio-economic compulsions and illiterate or semi-literate adults needing literacy training and continuing education support.

Formal primary schooling, a predominantly government sector undertaking, is the main delivery channel for the basic education of children in all countries. Being both a basic human right as well as an instrument of development it is made available to all children free and through constitutional and legal enactment. Primary schooling is also for most children the only opportunity of formal education as most who completes it may not continue further schooling.
Introduction

Education For All (EFA)

Primary education plays a critical role in poverty reduction and human development, which is at the heart of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and strategy. Accordingly, GON has set the attainment of universal primary education (UPE) as one of the key development priorities in Nepal. It is evident that Nepal has declared commitments towards UPE both at the national and international levels. At the international level, GON is a signatory to the Jomtein Declaration of 1990 and the Dakar Framework of Action (DFA), 2000 for Education for All (EFA).

The Dakar Framework of Action has set six goals and twelve strategies to ensure equitable access to quality and complete primary education for all. As stated by the Dakar Framework of Action (2000), the six goals of the EFA are as follows:

**Goal 1:** Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;

**Goal 2:** Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;

**Goal 3:** Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes;

**Goal 4:** Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;

**Goal 5:** Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;

**Goal 6:** Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
Likewise, the directly relevant DFA strategies are as follows:

- Mobilize strong national and international political commitment for EFA, develop national action plans and enhance significantly investment in basic education;
- Promote EFA policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework clearly linked to poverty elimination and development strategies;
- Ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development;
- Develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management;
- Meet the needs of education systems affected by conflicts, natural calamities and instability, and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance, and that help to prevent violence and conflict;
- Implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education that recognize the need for change in attitudes, values and practices;
- Implement education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic as a matter of urgency;
- Create self, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environment conducive to excellence in learning, with clearly defined levels of achievement for all;
- Enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers;
- Harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals;
- Systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels;
- Build on existing mechanisms to accelerate progress towards EFA.

The DFA has strongly pointed out the need for reforms towards decentralized management of education. This has important implications in terms of:

- Provision of adequate support from the centre and the transfer of both responsibility and decision-making authority to all levels of administrative hierarchy;
Introduction

• Decentralized micro-planning and delivery for provision of primary education of un-served and underserved populations;
• Extensive training of school leaders and local managers;
• Ensure engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies;
• Develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management;
• Implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education that recognize the need for change in attitudes, values and practices.

Need for a reform towards decentralized management of primary education has important implications in terms of the provision of adequate support from the centre and transfer of both responsibility and decision-making authority to all levels of administrative hierarchy. This requires decentralized micro-planning and delivery with people’s participation on a wider scale for provision of primary education of unserved and underserved populations.

Nepal Towards Universal Primary Education

In Nepal, the need for UPE was realized more than five decades ago. The Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) of 1954 recommended the UPE as the first priority goal of education development and set target for the attainment of the UPE by the year 1985. The subsequent commissions e.g. the All-round National Education Committee (ARNEC, 1962) and the National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971) repeated the old credo with a different time frame. In 1973, the primary education was declared free and the Government started bearing the full cost of teachers’ salaries.

A large number of bilateral and multilateral donor agencies have been supporting the development of primary education in Nepal. A UNICEF/UNESCO-supported project called Equal Access of Girls and Women to Education in Nepal (EAGWN) was launched in 1971. In the 1980's, two innovative projects were piloted - the Seti Education for Rural Development Project (SERDP) and the Primary Education Project (PEP). The SERDP was launched in 1981 in five districts of the Far-western Development Region with the financial and technical support of the
UNDP/UNESCO/UNICEF. The overall thrust of this project was to develop primary education as a force for rural development through a system of primary school clusters and the provision of non-formal education (NFE) especially for out-of-school girls. In 1984, the PEP was launched in six districts with assistance from the IDA/UNICEF. The project embraced many of the successful experiences of the SERDP and further tested new innovative approaches to meet the needs of this sub-sector. Nepal was a party to the Jomtein declaration of 1990, following which Nepal set the year 2000 as the destination to achieve the UPE.

Nepal restored multi-party democracy in 1990. The Constitution of Nepal, promulgated in 1990, had a commitment to provide primary education to children in their mother tongue, provide free primary education, and prevent children from being exploited by protecting their rights and privileges. A National Commission on Education (NEC) was constituted in 1990 and the Report of this Commission (1992) recommended a five-year cycle for primary education, while the first three grades were defined as the basic level of education. Other major recommendations of the Commission were: recruitment of at least one female teacher in each primary school, provision of mother tongue primary schools, and establishment of a formal equivalency to out-of-school programme with the basic level.

The HLNEC recommended laying special priority on universal access and enrolment, continuity in schooling for all children of up to 10 years and high achievement levels. The targets include 90 percent NER by the year 2002 and 100 percent NER by the year 2007. For this purpose, the HLNEC recommended the establishment of new primary schools and NFE classes on the basis of school mapping (to ensure home to school time distance of 30 minutes or less) and a school merger programme (in the case of low enrolment and close schools). Suggested incentives for the target groups are provisions of free textbooks, school uniform, scholarship and mid-day meal. More importantly, continuous assessment and liberal promotion (for reducing wastage due to repetition and dropout and for enhancing continuity in schooling) have been recommended. With a view to opening up new avenues for resource mobilization, the HLNEC has defined free education as exemption of admission/re-admission fee and tuition fee, and said that the participation of local bodies and communities in school operation and physical facilities development should not be prohibited. It has recommended that the VDCs
and Municipalities should be made gradually responsible for financing, management, operation and control of schools, as per the principle of decentralization.

The Report of the High-level National Education Commission (HLNEC, 1998) has recommended a one-year's pre-primary education as a part of the school education structure and reinforced the implementation of the compulsory and free primary education throughout the country within the next ten years. The enactment of a Compulsory Primary Education Act by the year 2007 had been recommended. Measures suggested for this purpose are;

- extending the presently piloted compulsory primary education programme to all municipalities and capable VDCs;
- providing for universal access;
- control of dropout;
- quality enhancement;
- liberal promotion policy up to grade 3 and introduction of Continuous Assessment System (CAS);
- provision of free textbooks and incentives (day meal, free school uniform, scholarship);
- upgrading teacher's qualification and status, and establishing special schools for specific target groups;
- compulsory recruitment of at least one female teacher in all pre-primary and primary schools; and
- allocation of 17 percent of the total public expenditure to the education sector within the next five years, up from 13 percent at present.

The Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP), which was implemented in two phases during 1992 to 2003, aimed to improve access, quality and managerial efficiency of the primary education system. The project components included classroom construction and rehabilitation, teacher training, construction of Resource Centres (RCs) (training centres) and office buildings, school clustering system, literacy programme, free textbook distribution, scholarship, etc.

The Primary Education Development Project (PEDP) is another effort initiated in the sub-sector. The National Centre for Educational Development (NCED)
has been established to take overall responsibility with regard to primary teacher training and training of the MOE personnel. Primary Teacher Training Centres (PTTCs) have been created in different parts of the country. The Government has introduced a free textbook distribution scheme, under which all primary school children receive textbooks free of cost. Enrolment enhancement schemes like girl's scholarship, dalit scholarship, school feeding programme, etc. are on the move.

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) perceived education as a driving force for poverty reduction and national development. For this purpose, the Plan laid emphasis on providing equal access to education and on enhancing quality, improving efficiency and promoting relevance of the education system. The Plan has admitted the past failure in providing opportunities of pre-primary education and has acknowledged the persistence of social and spatial inequities, systemic inefficiencies and quality degeneration in primary education. It has also pointed out that there were lack of decentralized education management and associated shortcomings. The sub-sectoral objectives of the Plan include universal primary education and enhanced participation of girls and poor children of the disadvantaged social classes and backward areas in education. The Plan defined the objective of primary education as to provide basic reading, writing and numeracy skills, to cultivate a habit of healthy and hygienic living, and to develop a sense of national feeling.

The targets of the Tenth Plan include: attainment of 90 percent NER in primary education, 30 percent female teachers, and 100 percent trained teachers. The key policy strategies adopted by the Plan were:

- To promote equal access through free education with specific emphasis on poor families, remote areas and backward communities;
- To universalize basic and primary education and enhance its quality;
- To make provision for primary education in different national languages;
- To strengthen physical, human and educational standards of primary schools through community participation;
- To provide at least basic training to all primary teachers through distance training, short-term training and refresher courses;
- To decentralize education administration through institutional and structural reforms in the MOE;
Introduction

• To introduce a simple and efficient textbook distribution system; and
• To introduce a liberal promotion policy in grade 1 through 3.

The Tenth Plan also decided to gradually introduce compulsory primary education (CPE) as a strategy for achieving the UPE. The CPE was recently been piloted in two districts (Ilam and Chitwan).

Since Nepal is entering into a great transformation in the system of polity and governance and the drafting of the new constitution of the republican Nepal is in the process, a new five year plan was not formulated to succeed the Tenth Plan which completed in 2007. Instead, a three-year Interim Plan (2007/08-2009/10) has been formulated and implemented. The education sector vision of this plan is to raise awareness, productivity, and efficiency of human resources in line with the national needs and the international opportunities so as to support the cultivation of the norms and values of inclusive democracy and create a basis for New Nepal by enhancing equity and quality in education.

The major objective of the primary education is to guarantee free and universal and quality primary education to all embracing all corners of the country and all groups of the society.

This plan has set up some targets regarding enrolment in primary level. It seeks to raise adult literacy rate from 52 percent to 60 percent with a Gender Parity Index raised from 0.7 to 0.9. Similarly, net enrolment rate (NER) in primary level has been planned to be raised from 87.4 percent to 96.0 percent. The plan has also set some important strategies for primary and basic education, which are as follows (NPC, 2007):

To make primary and basic education free and compulsory to all;

• To guarantee opportunity of education to all people;
• To ensure quality primary education for all by identifying the minimum levels of skill, knowledge, learning achievement and standards for all students;
• To make and implement action plan for compulsory primary education to all;
• To conduct special programme for improvement of teacher’s efficiency;
• To improve efficiency in educational planning and management; and
• To provide child-friendly environment in school.
Introduction

One significant programme of the Interim Plan is to conduct educational programme in 30 districts for pulling back the dropout children to school system. Regular measures like scholarships, midday meals, and other incentives to children for enhancing their retention in school have been continued but with a clear and improved focus on excluded and marginalized areas and communities.

*The most recent policy development in school education is the declaration of the free education up to grade eight by the Government of Nepal on 8 September 2008 (Gorakhapatra, 9 September 2008).*

- **Education For All Programme 2004-2009 (Nepal)**

Inspired from the collective commitment expressed in the Dakar Framework for Action (DFA) 2000, Nepal adopted the *Education for All National Plan of Action (NPA EFA) 2001-2015* in 2003. As a strategic programme document for implementing NPA EFA, the Education for All Programme 2004-2009 was developed, which is being implemented since 2004 with the financial and technical assistance of different donor agencies including DANIDA, DFID, Finland, Norway, World Bank, ADB, JICA, UNESCO, UNICEF, WFP, etc.

EFA draws its programme components from the six policy goals of the Dakar Framework for Action and strives for ensuring access and equity, enhancing quality and relevance and improving efficiency and institutional capacity of primary education. The essence of the programme warrants that each child has a right to receive quality basic education and the nation has the obligation to ensure that no child is denied with such education.

Decentralization and inclusiveness are the major strategies of EFA programme, which encompasses the transition of the home language in primary schools to promote the quality of primary education.

- **ISSUES IN THE CONTEXT OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION**

Seven years have elapsed since Nepal signed the DFA, but the country is still quite far from the attainment of the UPE. Some critical issues in this context are as follows:

- **Inequitable access and participation:**

Nepal's primary education has remained an expanding system over the years. The number of schools, students and teachers has grown tremendously. In 2007, there
were more than 29 thousand primary schools in the country enrolling over 4.4 million students and employing about 117 thousand teachers (DOE, 2008). On an average, there are about six primary schools per VDC, with almost every ward having a primary school in towns and dense settlements. But, despite a substantial increase in the number of schools, students and teachers, the gap, which remains to be achieved for the universal coverage, is still very wide. Nearly 11 percent of children in the primary school age-group are still out of school, which significantly varies across gender, space and socio-economic strata. The primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER) for girls is only about 87 percent as compared to 91 percent for boys. Likewise, there is a wide regional and social variation in NER. The Tarai region records the NER of 84.8 percent against 93.9 percent in the Hills, and 93 percent in the Kathmandu valley (DOE, Flash-I Report 2007/08).

The NER is extremely low in the case of girls of poor families in geographically and socially disadvantaged communities. Location of schools has not always been within the convenient distance for girls and small children, particularly those in the interior villages and less developed communities, in societies with restriction on the movement of girls, and in hills and mountains. Many children of poor, ethnic, backward, and disadvantaged communities do not have an easy access to a primary school. The problem of social access to primary education is acute, which is also intrinsically linked to factors that impose constraints on the participation and regular attendance of children. The insurgency problem has further imposed barriers in access to school. UPE cannot be attained without providing space to all those excluded children.

➢ Inefficiency:

Nepal's primary education system is inefficient. Repetition and dropout rates are alarmingly high. Although the entry age for primary school is 5 years old, a large number of under-aged children are enrolled in grade 1, leading to their huge dropout and repetition at this grade. Only about 51 percent of the children enrolled in grade 1 move on to grade 2, leaving behind 30 percent children to repeat and 19 percent children to dropout from school. Therefore, the primary school completion rate is very low.
Introduction

- **Poor Quality:**

  Poor quality of education provided by the community primary school system has demotivated many children and parents alike. The Student-Teacher Ratio (STR) and Student-School Ratio (SSR) in community primary schools are 61 and 212, whereas the Teacher-School Ratio is only 4. The general condition of most of the community primary schools is not congenial for good learning. Poor physical facilities, lack of educational materials, teacher absenteeism, and traditional teaching methods constitute barriers to improving the quality of the primary school system. Despite a huge investment on free distribution of textbooks, majority of students, particularly in rural and remote areas, do not get a full set of textbooks within the first week of the school calendar. Very few students use additional teaching learning aids. Although the DOE statistics show a pass percentage of about 86 percent at the district level grade 5 examination, student achievement remains at a low level.

  On an average, a community primary school does not have more than 4 teachers. Only about 66 percent of the community primary school teachers are trained. The proportion of female teachers in community schools is only about 38 percent of the total. Despite the Government's stated policy of recruiting at least one female teacher per primary school, students in many schools have not seen a female teacher. Inadequate teacher preparation accompanied by a lack of recurrent training and weak supervision has contributed to ineffective classroom teaching.

- **Weak School-Community Relationship:**

  School-community relationship is very weak. The SMCs have not been able to play an effective role in mobilizing resources, monitoring school operations and enhancing the efficiency and quality of education. Due to lack of social mobilization, people's participation has remained poor. Parents are less concerned in sending children to school.

- **Under-Financing:**

  The Government is spending about 3 percent of GDP and 15 percent of the total public expenditures on education sector, and the share of primary education in the total education expenditure is around 62 percent. But, a large chunk of funding is used for paying teachers’ salaries and increasing school facilities to provide space to
Introduction

growing enrolment, leaving only a negligible fraction for teaching learning materials. The free primary education policy, which waives off tuition fees to all students regardless of the income of parents and has forced the community schools to operate under severe financial constraints (Baidya, 2000).

➢ Public-Private Dichotomy:

Quality of education in community school system is consistently deteriorating. Although institutional primary schools have grown very fast in recent years, sharing about one-tenth of the total enrolments, these schools are mainly concentrated in the urban and semi-urban locations, catering to the needs of the children of the relatively better-off families. If the rich and the poor children have a different place and pace of learning, the goal of social transformation towards an equitable society would eventually end up as a big frustration (Baidya, 2000).

❖ KEY CHALLENGES TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

The achievement of Universal Primary Education is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by the UN system. In compliance with this goal, the target set has been to ensure UPE by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary school (Baidya, 2000). But, in the Nepalese context, the attainment of UPE has posed many formidable challenges. The burning issues of primary education in Nepal are systemic inefficiency e.g. high dropout and repetition. Besides, access and equity, quality degeneration, lack of school community relationship and under-financing are other issues of Primary Education (Baidya, 2000). An issue relating to systemic inefficiency, a particular huge dropout is a great barrier in the achievement of UPE. There is a great need to remedy the problem of dropout in primary education.

❖ CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DROPOUT AND RETENTION

For the last over four decades, the problem of dropout has been recognized as a great hindrance in universal primary education by UNESCO. Likewise, member countries have been aware that dropout has been an obstacle to the achievement of the targets set out by the Karachi conference in 1960 (Sattar, 1984).
Introduction

The term 'school-dropout' has emerged from growing concern in the internal efficiency of education system. According to Castellanos (1988), internal efficiency of education is concerned with the relationship between inputs (teachers, educational materials, curricula) and output (pupils scores on achievement tests) within the education system. The issue of internal efficiency is concerned with the flow of students through the education system, with minimum waste, dropout and repetition. Better the internal efficiency of an education system, higher will be the retention and completion of school education by students enrolled in the system.

Student-flow analysis views education as a system, which receives inputs in the form of new entrants, transforms these inputs through certain internal processes, and finally yields certain outputs in the form of graduates or cycle completers. Student Flow Rates show the internal efficiency of an education system. In order to trace the flow of students through an education system, it is helpful to ask the question at the beginning of each school year: What has happened to the students who were enrolled in a particular grade say grade 1 in the previous year? There are three possible answers, which are mutually exclusive, such as:

- They are promoted to the next higher grade (Promotion) or
- They are repeating the same grade (Repetition) or
- They have dropped out (i.e. no longer in the school system) (Dropout)

**Flow of Students from Grade 1 in 2007**

![Flowchart of Student Flow from Grade 1 in 2007]

DOE/MOES (2003) states in their statistical report that the number of students that enters in a certain grade and the number that completes that grade is considered as input and output of the system, respectively. While the promotion demonstrates the efficiency, the dropout and grade repetition show the inefficiency of the education system. The students who leave the system without completing a grade
or level are called dropouts. Primary school dropout rate is the percentage of pupils enrolled in given grade or cycle or level of education in a given school year who are not enrolled in any grade in the following school year.

Rao (1996) mentions that the Indian Scenario of ‘enrolment by itself,’ as noted by the Plan of Action of India’s National Policy in Education (NEP), ‘is of little importance if children do not continue beyond one year. A great problem faced by a large number of developing countries is that many of the students, though enrolled, do not see school for more than a few days. This is the problem of school-dropout. He further states that repetition is often a precursor to dropout.

Panchmukhi (2004) stated in his article that the term dropout is interlinked with the wastage of education. The phenomenon of wastage at different levels of education brings out the importance of socio-economic factors in education. Wastage, linked with dropping out of children from education before completing a certain duration of an educational course (class, or stage), would amount to wrong use of teacher resources, infrastructure and also time resources of children. Likewise, Rajawat (2004) also highlights the relationship between wastage and dropout. She has emphasized that universal and compulsory education has faced the problem of universality in dropout. A child, though enrolled in a school, leaves school, for a variety of reasons, after spending a few years there. This incidence of dropout leads to extravagance and wastage of resources. The term ‘wastage,’ in this context, means the dropping out of the child from the educational process. Rajawat has also identified the factors causing dropout. As she has stated, dropout of children at the primary level of education is due to poor school facilities, irrelevant curriculum, poor teaching method and household poverty. Therefore, re-orientation of teacher-training could help to tackle these causes of dropout, to a large extent. Besides, many other programmes like provision of student-incentives, improvement in school facilities, enhancement of community awareness, strengthening of curricular relevance, flexibility in school seasons and hours, utilization of local and community resources, and introduction of ‘earn while-you-learn scheme,’ etc. would help to reduce dropout and improve retention in school. Therefore, emphasis has now been shifted from more simply recording more enrollments in school to higher retention of students in school to attain basic elements of learning.
Introduction

According to Asharaf (1999), a child who abandons a course of study on which he or she has embarked before its completion is called a dropout. Thus, dropout refers to those children who are enrolled in school but who fail to complete the relevant level of the educational cycle. In the context of the primary level, this means that a dropout child fails to reach the final grade, usually grade 5. Likewise, according to Price (2007), the term dropout refers to an event, such as leaving school before graduating the cycle or without attaining an educational status. As a student leaves a school without completing the set course of the education cycle, he/she is called a dropout.

Sattar (1984) defines a dropout child as one who enrolls in a school but fails to complete the relevant level of the educational cycle. At the primary level this means that the drop-out fails to reach the final grade, usually grade V or VI. Sattar further states that dropout represents a staggering loss. Although it is found at both primary and secondary levels, it is more crucial at the primary level, because an early school dropout means sooner return to the state of illiteracy. Sattar has identified certain factors that influence dropout and retention of children in school and classified them as: ‘internal’ and ‘external’ to the education system. Those factors that are shown as internal to the school system are inadequate school facilities, traditional pedagogical methods, inadequate trained teachers, poor organizational practices within school, lack of learning/teaching materials and equipment, avoidance of use mother tongue as the medium of instruction, and lack of incentives for students. Likewise, among the external factors, which stay within children’s socio-cultural milieu, the most crucial are the economic and social conditions of the family. It is found that most of the victims of dropout are children belonging to poor and deprived sections of society. Therefore, ethnic or social status of family seems to have tremendously influenced school dropout of children from school. It is stated that, although there are many apparent external variables causing dropout or affecting retention such as parental illiteracy, poor health and nutrition of children, rural or urban residence, child-age and sex, and so on, all these factors spring up from the one main cause, i.e. parental socio-economic conditions.

While dropout is a major problem of efficiency in education system, retention of students in school is its evident solution. Rao (1996) states that retention of students in school may be achieved mainly in two ways: first, by reduction of dropout
rates between class I-V, and secondly, by improve school facilities so as to provide quality education. Roderic (1994) has said that grade repetition may influence school dropout, as high dropout rates are found among students who repeat grades. Grade repetition is, therefore, a great hindrance for efficient education system.

Mehata (2007) states the concept of retention rate in his study. According to him, retention rate, which is also known as survival rate, is different from the apparent survival rate. The most common and simple method of assessing retaining capacity of the primary education system is to compare the enrolment in grade V in a given year (say 2008) with the enrolment in grade I, four years back (say 2004). If the number of repeaters is not considered in calculation, the rate obtained is known as Gross Retention Rate.

Rajawat (2004), explaining the major problems of retention, has stated that lack of joyful learning or effective methods of teaching, family environment, poor condition of family, limited capacity of school system, class repetition, under-age and over-age enrolment of children, and lack of student-centered curriculum are the major obstacles in students' retention in school. Therefore, these problems need to be solved so as to increase efficiency of primary education system.

It concludes that dropout is a phenomenon which indicates and perpetuates the inefficiency of education system. Dropout is an alarming factor, as it causes huge wastage of resources and energy. A person who has withdrawn from all courses or grades and who leaves school entirely is known as ‘dropout’.

❖ PARAMETERS OF QUALITY EDUCATION AT PRIMARY LEVEL IN NEPAL

According to Marope (2000), quality in education constitutes the basic conditions that have to prevail if learning outcomes are to improve, or these are the factors that ensure an enabling learning environment. Here, environment includes diverse inputs and processes and the ways they are mobilized to ensure learning achievement of students. Education inputs include, among other things, fiscal resources, physical resources (such as classrooms, ablution facilities, desk-bench, curriculum materials and equipment) and human resources, especially learners, teachers, parents and communities.
Baidya (2000) has observed that the quality means improving the overall performance of students to better prepare them for higher grades, to help them socialize better and to improve their aptitude to better adapt to the real world. He has stated that poor physical facilities in school, lack of education materials, teacher absenteeism and unattractive classroom teaching are key factors that jeopardize the quality education at primary level.

Rao (1996) states that the quality of education is inextricably linked with the availability of learning materials, the structure and organization of curriculum, and change in conventional classroom teaching. He has argued that teacher is unquestionably the key factor in improvement of school system.

Quality of education is a challenging issue in primary education. By quality education we mean an education system that is learner-centered, developmentally appropriate, discovery-oriented, gender sensitive, flexible, and adoptable to local conditions as well as individual’s learning needs. Quality education includes development of teachers and learning materials, and improvement in classroom environment and learning process. So, there is need for innovative measures to enhance the quality of education and to ensure that learning environments are supportive to children’s over-all development. As quality of education is achieved, dropout is likely to fall in its own accord. Then, retention will rise, completion will enhance, and the goal of Education for All will be achieved.

Concept of quality of education, aspects of quality primary education and determinants of good quality primary education are discussed in detail in Chapter VII.

❖ SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Nepal is a developing country and the population below poverty line is about 31 percent, which is one of the highest among SAARC countries. The adult illiteracy rate of Nepal is 48 percent, and most of the illiterate people are socially and economically backward, living in inaccessible rural and remote areas (NPC, 2007). An efficient primary education, with negligible dropout among others, is required to enhance literacy rates (6 years and above) to reach 76 percent by the year 2010 as stipulated by the Interim Plan (NPC, 2007).

Though the NER of primary school has been found about 89 percent in recent years, this is not the whole of the story. The percentage of children completing
primary education is as low as 50 percent. It shows that the systemic inefficiency of the primary school is enormous. If the current dropout is not checked, achievement of UPE in the present sense of the term may remain a wishful thinking for a long time to come. Therefore, finding out the causes of dropout and poor retention across rural and urban areas and across gender and socio-economic strata of the population and their relationship with quality of primary education would render substantial contribution towards policy making and programme development for UPE at the government and non-government levels.

Apart from the above, the methodology and instruments developed and used in this study would offer important reference for similar future studies in different conditions, groups and settings.

With reference to the resolution passed in Dakar conference "Primary Education for all by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. In the existing situation of high dropouts and class repetition rate in primary education (about 35%), this can be achieved. High inefficiency is the national average, which spectacularly varies across geographical regions, socio-economic strata and rural urban locations for many and varied reasons. It is necessary to delve deep into these variations in the dropout scenario and their causes so as to support the adoption of required policy measures for the achievement of UPE in Nepal.

Though the NER of primary school at the national level has reached about 89 percent in 2007/08, there are wide disparities across gender, space, and social and economic classes of people. Cases of school avoidance are still high among the backward social classes living in disadvantaged circumstances. Therefore, the access to primary education is not universal and equitable. There are many instances of systemic inefficiency. The incidence of dropout is high, and, therefore, the proportion of children completing primary education is low.

**The concept of UPE has three key implications:**

- First, all boys and girls of primary school age group should be brought into the school system to assure universal and equitable access;
- Second, all those who are enrolled should be able to complete the primary education cycle; and
Finally, those who complete the cycle should have gained useful and relevant knowledge and skills.

Internal efficiency is a critical factor in the attainment of UPE. Very recently, the DOE has announced the liberal promotion policy i.e. to promote all children appearing in the final examination, with effect in grade one in the year 2006 and gradual implementation to cover all primary grades in the next five years. This will solve only one aspect of inefficiency, i.e. it will reduce repetition and ultimately cut down the school size. But, the UPE will not be achieved unless the dropout is controlled.

Therefore the goal of UPE needs to be more than just putting the students in the system. It should also check the dropout of the enrolled children, and ensure quality learning and the completion of primary schooling by all in a period of five years.

In order to control dropout, it is required to make an in-depth study of the problem and identify the causes of dropout. Such an inquiry will help to draw realistic and result-oriented policies and actions so as to check dropout and pave a smooth road map towards education for all. This research work is therefore on humble attempt of the investigator to investigate different parameters of dropouts at primary education in Nepal.

❖ STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The research problem reads as follows:

A STUDY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PARAMETERS OF DROPOUTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH RETENTION AND QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN NEPAL

❖ DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The focus of the present study is on the social and economic parameters of dropout children in primary education and on the relationship between the quality of primary education, and the incidence of dropout and retention in primary schools. The study has been carried out within the delimitations as follows:
Introduction

- Historical review of the development of the primary education policies and programmes in Nepal has covered the period from 1951 to 2007.

- In-depth analysis of quality of primary schools and magnitude of dropout children are based on 72 selected primary schools, including 36 rural and 36 urban schools, in two selected districts for study.

- Macro level analysis is primarily based on available data from secondary sources and on information and insights obtained through consultation and discussion with relevant officials and stakeholders of the primary education system.

- Socio-economic parameters of dropout and retention have been based on the household situation of 430 dropout children sampled for the study.

Objectives of the Study

The overall purpose of the study was to make an inquiry into Social and Economic Parameters of Dropouts and their Relationship with Retention and Quality of Primary Education in Nepal. The study has been undertaken with following specific objectives:

- To examine the status of class-wise dropout at primary education level in respect of gender, geographical region, and rural/urban location;

- To review government policy and programmes geared to check dropout and enhance systemic efficiency in primary education;

- To identify and analyze the social parameters of primary school dropouts and poor retention across gender, geographical region and rural/urban location;

- To identify and analyze the economic parameters of primary school dropouts and poor retention across gender, geographical region and rural/urban location;

- To identify the school-related and non-school related causes of primary school dropouts and relate with poor retention and quality of primary education, based on the interviews and discussion with parents, students, teachers and school related functionaries;

- To study academic quality of primary schools of Nepal and its association with dropouts and retention; and
Introduction

• To suggest suitable measures and actions for reducing dropout and improving retention in primary schools.

❖ DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPT

The definitions of key terms used in this study are as follows.

Age-specific Enrolment Ratio (ASER)

Age-specific Enrolment Ratio gives enrolment ratio for a particular age. It is the division enrolment in year ‘t’ in age group ‘a’ at all the levels of education in any grade by a population of particular age ‘a’ in that year ‘t’. ASER is useful to the planners and policy makers, especially when information on coverage and non-enrolled children in a particular age is required.

Apparent Intake Rate (AIR) in Primary Education

Number of new entrants into grade 1, regardless of age, expressed as percentage of official entrance age (5-year old)

Community School

Schools, which receive regular grants-in-aid from GON for teachers' salary and for other administrative purposes and stationery support (besides, they also receive other supports like teacher training, free textbook, scholarship for girls, dalit and children with disabilities).

Institutional School

Schools, which do not receive any grant support from Government of Nepal and they are privately owned and managed.

Completion Rate

Completion rate refers to primary education cycle completion i.e. output or promote of grade 5 expressed as a percentage of input i.e. enrolment in grade 1.

Dropout

A child who is enrolled in school but fails to complete the grade or level of the educational cycle.
Dropout Rate

Dropout rate is the percentage of students who drop out from a given grade in a given school year or who are not enrolled in any grade during the following year. In other words, those students who leave the school are described as dropouts from the school system.

Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in Primary Education

Number of students enrolled in primary grades (grade 1 to 5), regardless of age, expressed as percentage of the official school age (5-9 years old) population.

Gender Parity Index

Gender Parity Index refers to ratio of female to male rates.

Literacy Rate (Adult Literacy Rate)

Literacy rate is the number of literate adults expressed as a percentage of the total adult population, 15 year of age or older.

Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in Primary Education

Number of students 5-9 years old children being enrolled in primary grades (grade 1 to 5), expressed as percentage of the official school age (5-9 years old) population

Net Intake Rate (NIR) in Primary Education

Number of new entrants belonging to the official age for grade 1 (5-year old) who are enrolled in grade 1 expressed as percentage of official entrance age (5-year old) population

Primary Education

Formal education from grade 1 to 5 having prescribed national curriculum, textbook and school hours (This includes primary grades offered in primary, lower secondary, secondary and higher secondary schools)

Promotion Rate

Promotion rate is the percentage of students in a grade promoted to next grade in the following school year.

Quality Education

Quality education refers to a school system from which all children emerge successfully prepared for their lives ahead, due to teaching rendered by trained, skilled and motivated teacher; children learning in a safe, attractive and peaceful
Introduction

environment; and children gaining appropriate knowledge, skills and outlook through a children-centred curriculum.

Repetition Rate

Repetition rate is the percentage of students who are enrolled in the same grade in the following school year.

Retention Rate

Retention rate is also known as survival rate which is different than the apparent survival rate. In the most commonly used method of assessing retaining capacity of the system, enrolment in grade 5 in year (say 2007-08) is linked to enrolment in grade 1 four years back (say 2003-04). If the number of repeaters is not considered in calculation, the rate obtained is known as Gross Retention Rate.

Survival Rate to Grade 5

Percentage of children enrolled in grade 1 who eventually attain grade 5. Therefore, survival rate means the percentage of a Cohort of pupils who are enrolled in the first grade of an education cycle in a given school year and are expected to reach a specified grade regardless of repetition.

Universal Primary Education (UPE)

Enrollment of all primary school-age children in school, actual completion of primary education cycle by all children enrolled in school, and children completing primary education gaining satisfactory learning outcomes.