

CHAPTER XIII: TRACER STUDY OF SCHOOL LEAVERS *

1. INTRODUCTION

In Nepal formal educational opportunities before the 50s were very much restrained, despite the crucial need of education for development. The political change that came with the advent of democracy in 1951 made some efforts to institutionalize educational system to make the opportunities available to a large majority of the people. In consideration of the changes in the educational environment with an increasing demand for education and expansion of opportunities and facilities, the development plans designed thereafter started introducing reforms to improve the secondary education of the country with special attention to the relevance of education to the nation's needs.

Historically, the NNEPC, constituted in 1954, was the first body to suggest changes in secondary education to meet the growing demand for education and the national development goals. The ARNEC, formed in 1961, proposed a vocational course for secondary education. The NESP introduced in 1971 came with an innovation of the national system of public education with vocational courses. This Plan introduced a number of measures for a planned expansion of secondary education and prescribed a set of new curricula and textbooks. A revision of the secondary curriculum made in 1981, however, discouraged vocational courses with the objective to prepare secondary students for general and technical higher education and to develop in them faith in God and loyalty to the country and the Crown.

The HMGN, upon the restoration of democracy in 1990, constituted the National Education Commission (NEC) to restructure the existing education system, redefine the goals of national education, and review all levels of education in the changed context which in its report of 1992 defined the goal of secondary education: to produce citizens respecting dignity of labor, believing in democratic values, and having, proficiency in Nepali, mathematics, science, and bearing a good moral character (NEC, 1992, quoted in Bista, 1996). Thus, secondary education was regarded as the foundation of producing skillful human power needed for the national development efforts.

The questions today, however, have been raised on the quality of schooling, the relevance of curriculum to life skills, and access of the poor and disadvantaged of the opportunity of schooling (SEDP, 2001). Quality, equity, efficiency, and relevance thus have been the major concerns and issues in secondary education (SESP, 2002; Tenth Plan, 2002-7; SEPP, 2001; SEDP, 1997). Further, education providing life skills is an emerging concept aiming at developing appropriate skills for life, for personal development, and for capability to face challenges. The curriculum should not only prepare students for higher studies, but also should be self-contained, adequate, and scientific in content and approaches to fulfill the needs of those who do not have or cannot afford higher education. A major criticism of the present education system is its inability to produce students capable of coping with the rapid social changes. .

* This chapter is based on the report 'Tracer Study of School Leavers' prepared by Dr. Bharat Shrestha for the SLC Study team.

In the present context, secondary education has a dual role. It has to prepare students for (a) the world of higher education and (b) the world of work. Further, the secondary school leavers are required to obtain a number of personal and social benefits from their secondary schooling. The overall policy objective of HMGN in the context of the development of secondary education is to enhance the quality of education.

The goals and objectives of education have changed with increasing demand over the last 50 years or so as to reform the structure, content, and the method. Several high level commissions and committees have been formed to review and recommend reforms in the education sector. Despite the modifications and reforms made in the secondary level curriculum, the questions have been raised on the relevance and practicability of the curriculum. Studies have pointed out the inability of secondary education to cope up with students' daily life and employability because of the general and pure academic nature of curriculum (CERID, 1996; IEES, 1988; IOE, 1984) after completing which a great majority of the secondary school leavers tend to go in for higher education. Several studies have (CTEVT, 1996; New ERA, 1991, quoted in Bista, 1996) been undertaken particularly to evaluate the performance of technical schools, but none of the studies assesses whether the knowledge, attitudes, skills and competencies of the secondary students are relevant to their subsequent engagements: higher studies, jobs, and social roles.

The situation has further changed over the years in terms of the market for job both within the country and abroad. Various options for higher education with new prospects of knowledge, skills, and competencies are available in the highly competitive global and local societies. The secondary school curriculum thus faces acute challenges. As a result, Nepal's school education seems to be at a crossroad. Knowledge- and skills- based education has become indispensable. Therefore, the situation demands for the relevancy of school education to higher education, job market, social life, and personal living. The changing context of the global job market requires a thorough assessment of the secondary education system. There are several compartments in which an assessment could be made of the students to identify the career paths of secondary school leavers, activities engaged in, trend of students pursuing higher studies in different institutions and subjects, access to job opportunities, and earning and possession of social roles. A couple of studies (Bista, 1996; CERID, 1996) till date have been undertaken in small student populations, particularly to find out the answer to these questions in a limited way.

A tracer study was conducted under the SLC Study to generate a database pertaining to the secondary school leavers and to ascertain their opinions on the knowledge, skills, and competencies required for the higher studies, world of work, and personal life. The purpose of this study was to gain insights into the links between secondary education and higher education, on the one hand, and between the jobs market and social roles, on the other, for a long-term strategic plan of secondary education.

The major objective of this study was to trace out the whereabouts of the SLC pass and fail students of the last three years.

1.1 Scope of Work

The study tracer done under the SLC Study was confined to the opinions and views of those involved directly or indirectly in secondary education and employers of SLC pass or fail students. It attempted to answer the questions as to where do the students land on completion of their secondary education; how secondary education is helping them in higher education, if of course they are continuing their studies; how has secondary education been helping them in the job

market if they are employed, self-employed, or wishing to be employed; how has secondary education helped them in their personal, family, and social life; what skills and competencies do the world of work and higher education demand of them; how have the employers rated the performance of SLC graduates and undergraduates in terms of their capacity to work; and how the university or college teachers rate their performance levels.+

For details on Concept, Approach, Methodology and Data collection, please refer to ‘Tracer Study of School Leavers’.

Determination of Sample Size, Strata, District, and School Selection

Twenty% of 452 schools (332 public and 120 private) were taken as a sample from the main survey. The total number of schools thus selected was 90 (66 public and 24 private) from among the *medium* and *large* schools. The sample size for students was 2,160, 24 students from each of the school selected as per their performance in SLC Table 1. The reason behind putting the sample size 2,160 was to see that the number of students being traced out was at least 60% as required by the TOR. The strata were determined in three different categories from each ecological zone of the development regions. Kathmandu valley was treated differently as it is far ahead of other regions in terms of semi-economic development.

Table 1. Student Sample Size for the Sample Districts, Zones, and Development Regions

Strata	Ecological Zones And Development Regions		Sample Districts	Total Sample		Students
				School Public	Private	
Mountains of All Development Regions				8		192
1	Eastern + Central Mountain	(EM + CM)	Solokhumbu	3		72
2	Western Mountain	(WM)	(*)			
		(MWM +	Jumla	2		48
3	Mid +Far Western Mountain	FWM)	Bajhang	3		72
Hills of All Development Regions				24	2	624
4	Eastern + Central Hills	(EH + CH)	Kavre	10	2	288
5	Western Hills	(WH)	Arghakhanchi	10		240
6	Mid + Far Western Hills	(MWH + FWH)	Surkhet	4		96
Tarai of All Development Regions				29	12	984
7	Eastern + Central Tarai	(ET + CT)	Jhapa	15	7	528
8	Western Tarai	(WT)	Rupandehi	9	4	312
9	Mid + Far Western Tarai	(MWT + FWT)	Kanchanpur	5	1	144
Kathmandu Valley				5	10	360
10	Kathmandu Valley	(KV)	Lalitpur	5	10	360
All Total				66	24	2160

Note: The asterik (*) indicates a small school with < 25 SLC appeared students.

The districts for school selection were identified with appropriate representation from each of the strata. However, some of the districts could not be included in the sample due to the fact that the schools too were small in size and had less than 25 students. Selecting these schools would not give 24 students for the interview. In such a case, the district was excluded from sampling; for example, the Western Development Region. Ten districts (see the map) from one stratum each were selected, considering the time and resources.

With the help of the data set of the schools in each of the districts for the year 2000 of the Office of the Controller of Examinations (OCE), schools were further listed and selected. Only the medium and large size schools, both of public and private, were selected to assure the availability of students. Additional schools of similar performance were identified to remain on



the safe side for the replacement of schools. About 13 schools were replaced for various reasons.

Selection of Students

Twenty-four students were selected for interview from each of the school based on their performance. All the cohort groups of SLC appeared students by year were listed on the basis of the records obtained from the schools or the District

Education Office (DEO). The list of all the SLC appeared students was further broken down as per their performance as FIRST, SECOND, THIRD division, and FAIL. Six students of three years, of 2 each, on the basis of their performance by division from the listings, were randomly selected. A total of 8 students each from 1998, 1999, and 2000 were taken as samples and then 2 students each from 4 different categories were taken as samples, thus making a total of 24 students. Interviews were conducted with 40% of those pursuing higher studies, 30% employed, 15% self-employed, and 15% unemployed. Since the design of this tracer study is retrospective, the selection of students had to be made from the past years. Therefore, the cohort group of the SLC appeared students were selected from the three years starting 1998.

2. SCHOOLING BACKGROUND OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEAVERS

2.1 Features of Sample Districts

The total number of schools within the sample districts is 3,937 of which the share of secondary schools accounts to about 30%. Public schools constitute over 63%. Fifty-four% of girls' enrollment in public schools at secondary level indicates the increasing positive attitudes of parents towards female education, due mainly to the awareness among the parents brought about by social change; increasing trend of urbanization; social pressure; and labor surplus caused decline in time taken in fetching water, forest products, or grazing livestock, etc. The proportion of female teachers in school is only 0.12. Like the female teachers, the ratio of trained male teacher per public school is only 1.37. Such a scenario poses the problem of quality in education in all the sample districts in both rural and urban areas. The contribution of private school to educational development seems to be significant as in 2003, the proportion of students taking SLC from private schools was 31% in the sample districts. Interest in the private schools, have grown due to better physical facilities and good-looking physical environments, regular classes and home works, good results in the SLC, etc.

The overall performance of the public schools of the sample districts in the year 2003 was recorded at 41%, a little below the national average of 46% while for the private schools for the same year it was 79%. Likewise, the performance of girls is on an average fairly higher in the

private school. There is a large variation in the pass percentage of students of public and private schools: vs. 70% in the year 2003. The pass rate of the girls is as low as 15% in the public schools while it is over 66% in the private schools. Only 8.5 of the public schools show 100% SLC results.

2.2 Features of Sample Schools

The profiles of 77 schools out of 90 were collected. There was no private school in the mountains. The average number of students per school is recorded at 739 (girls 45% and Dalits and Janjatis 8 and 29% respectively). Based on the records made available at 77 schools, the average number of students per school appearing in SLC in 2003 was 53 with 31 as pass, average figure for female students per school was 53, with 32 as pass. This indicates an encouraging trend in girl's education. The girls of private schools had better SLC results. Better physical facilities, access to computers, libraries, and sports facilities seem to have been conducive in the private schools. A majority of public schools except in the Kathmandu Valley have no computer and other facilities. One can also vividly notice the difference in the number of class days in an academic year, which is documented as higher by 1.15 times in the private schools.

The income is recorded at Rs. 508,000 on an average per school. The level of income is found to be higher in the mountains than in the Tarai and so is the trend of the expenditures. The fees paid by the students are higher in private schools (Rs. 1311/month in private schools against Rs. 226 in public schools). The fees collected by the schools include charges on items such as admission, monthly tuition, lab, sports, computer, books, examinations, etc. The information on students receiving scholarships does not show their exact proportion, but the figures indicate exiting trend of such facilities.

2.3 Schooling Background and Chosen Career Path of the School Leavers

Students Traced Out

Of the total sample of the secondary school leavers, 1767 or 82% were traced out, about 116% in the hills. Tracing out the school leavers in the rural area was comparatively easier than in Kathmandu Valley. It is evident that the average number of students traced out per school is 21.6 in the mountains, 22.4 in the hills, 19.2 in the Tarai, and 14.9 in Kathmandu Valley. The main reason behind the low trace-out was the unavailability of students in their locations or their hesitation to sit for interview. Over 91% of the school leavers pursuing higher studies were located either at their homes or place of studies. Self-employed were traced out in their locations or at the places of work but the employed were very difficult to visit because they were reluctant to sit for interview, their employers hesitated to permit them for interview, or the appropriate time was not available.

Demographic and Socio-Economic Status of School Leavers' Families

Of the 1,767 school leavers interviewed, about 41% have their permanent residence in the hills while 36.6% live in the Tarai. Likewise, some 12.6% live in the mountains and 9.8% in Kathmandu Valley. Some 78% are students from public schools and 22% from private.

A great majority of the private schools are located in the urban areas, i.e., areas having transportation and other facilities. Unlike private schools, over two-thirds of the public schools among the samples are located in the rural areas.

The average family size calculated among the sample population of the school leavers is estimated at 5.8 with 2.8 males and 3.1 females (Table 2). There is an interesting correlation between family size and performance in SLC. The higher the performance in SLC, the lower the family size, which could be an effect of education.

Some 89% of the school leavers reported father as the household head, 7.5% reported mother, and 3.6% reported grandfather, mother, or elder father. Likewise, the family type as reported by 43.8% is joint, whilst over half of them live in a nuclear family. The joint families are more likely to be seen in the rural areas (45.8%) than in urban area (39.1%).

Figure 1. Ethnic Composition

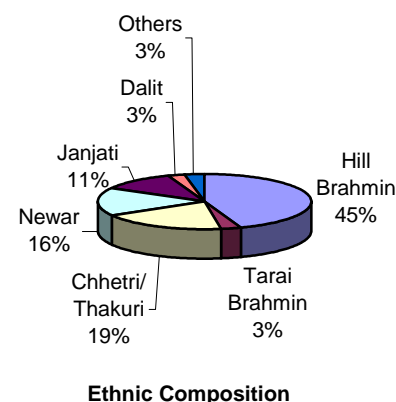


Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Demographic Features

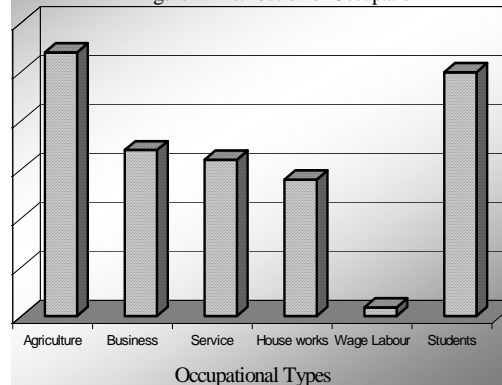
Category	Family Size			Dependency (%)		
	HH of Male Student	HH of Female Student	Total	Children (< 11 years)	Old Age (>65 years)	Total
Eco-Zones				7.6	2.9	10.5
Mountains	6.3	5.8	6.2	9.6	2.6	12.2
Hills	6.3	6.3	6.3	8.8	2.8	1.6
Tarai	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.9	3.1	9.0
Kathmandu Valley	4.7	5.5	5.0	6.2	3.3	9.5
Type of School				7.6	2.9	10.5
Public	6.1	5.9	6.0	7.9	2.9	10.8
Private	5.0	5.5	5.2	6.3	3.0	9.3
Gender				7.6	2.9	10.5
Male	5.8		5.8	8.0	3.0	11.0
Female		5.8	5.8	6.9	2.8	9.7
Location				7.6	2.9	10.5
Rural	6.0	5.9	6.0	8.0	2.9	10.9
Urban	5.4	5.7	5.5	6.7	2.9	9.6

The hill Brahman constitute 44.3% followed by 19.2% of the Chhetris/Thakuris, 16.2 of Newars, 11.4 of the Janjatis, 3.1 of Tarai Brahmins and 2.6 of the Dalits (see figure). About 3.2% of the school leavers were found to have reported other castes such as Marwadis, Sanyasis, Bangalis, Puris, Giris, etc.

The Hindus are the predominant group (91.6%). Buddhists constitute 6.3%, and the rest comprised by 2% Muslims and Christians.

The total literacy rate is calculated at 88.6% with males and females figuring at 93.8 and 83.0%. Female literacy is high in the hills and Tarai, among the high-income groups.

Figure 2. Distribution of Occupation



Agriculture is the prime occupation in the mountains and Tarai. In Kathmandu Valley service and business occupy a major share. Other occupations reported are services in Government, or the private sector (15.7%) followed by trade/business including retail shops (see figure 8.6%) while 14.6% are involved in household work with 34.3% as students.

The average value of assets holding is the highest (3,928,000 rupees) in Kathmandu Valley for the private school leavers 3,632,000 rupees, for the public school leavers, 1,347,000 rupees. Land accounts over 77% as the highest value among the assets holding of school leavers' families. Of the total expenditures, the families in Kathmandu Valley 16.6% for education, 1.4% of the assets holding value, and 25.7% of the total income.

Educational Performance of School Leavers

Of the school leavers traced out, about 28% sat for the SLC examination in 2000, 40% in 1999, and 32% in 1998 of which 78% are from public schools with 36.2% girls. The average age of the students is 16.5 years. Over 29% of the students have repeated the exam even over 3 times. Their percentage is about 4.4%. The case is more pronounced in the rural areas and with public schools. Girl students repeat more than boys (Box 1). There is no correlation between the number of exam repetitions and the economic status of the family. About 91.7% sample students passed and 146 or 8.3% were failed. Of those passing 20.9% were first divisioners. A great majority (52.0%) of students passed in the second division and about 18% in third division. Public schools account for about 70.5% pass. The pass percentages of the Janjati and Dalit were 9.8 and 1.7 respectively. The female students were 32.9%. Of the total school leavers, about 25.6% students succeeded in the compartmental examinations.

Box 1: Wasted Efforts for SLC Degree

Ms. Laxmi Kharel, 24, is the resident of Babiya Chaur, Surkhet. There are nine members in her family totally dependent upon agriculture. As the eldest daughter, she has to spend most of her time in farmland and household chores with little time left for her studies. Laxmi first appeared in the SLC exam in 2000 from Bidhya Jyoti Secondary School, Babiya Chour, Surkhet but failed in Math and English. Since then she has attended SLC exam four times and every time she has failed in the same subjects.

Teaching in the school, she said, was not satisfactory since the classes were not regular and the Math teacher was not competent. She was, therefore, weak in Math right from the primary classes. She frankly said that she could hardly differentiate between the capital and small letters of English until she got to class 7. Since no one can be perfect in every subject, she opines that the education policy should not put pressure to study the subjects in which the student is weak. If there were provisions of the subject choice based on the local needs, she is confident that she would have passed SLC at her very first attempt.

She also added that had the school given her vocational education, her condition would have been quite different. She would have started her own business. She regrets her wasteful school education and her efforts that have brought nothing.

The trends of average marks secured have been documented for all the subjects that are compulsory such as English, Nepali, Mathematics, and Science. The average marks calculated for each of the subjects of the pass and fail students show low marks in English and Mathematics (Table 3.).

Table 3. Average Marks Secured by Those Who Passed and Failed SLC

Subject Taken	Those Passed		Marks	Those Failed	
	Total Response	Average Secured		Total Response	Average Secured
Nepali	1,152	51.7		122	32.6
English	1,152	49.6		122	35.0
Mathematics	1,152	50.7		122	23.6
Science	1,152	52.7		122	30.5
Social Studies	339	51.6		48	39.0
Health, Population, and Environment	353	63.7		42	53.3
Optional I	1,145	55.3		119	37.8
Optional II	1,101	58.0		109	43.9
Vocational	838	61.1		91	48.4

There were students over 50% who obtained less than 50 whereas the percentage of students securing over 90 was less than 6%. In the optional and vocational courses, performances in terms of marks secured seem to have helped students to pass the examinations.

Selection of Subjects

Apart from the compulsory subjects, about 49% of the school leavers were found to have taken mathematics as optional I followed by economics (28%) while health has been taken as optional II (41%). The proportions among the school leavers taking the vocational courses are: accounts (52.1%), education (25.9%), and agriculture (19%). Both optional and vocational courses are found to have been chosen by the school leavers on their own but only those subjects were made available to them. For this reason, about 20 and 21% respectively reported that they had wished for other subjects as Optional I and Optional II which were not available in the schools. The subjects they wanted to study were Computer, Economics, Accounts, Geography, Education, Agriculture, Forestry, and Health.

Perceived Level of Education and Occupation

Over 48% wished to go up to the Masters level while about 17.8% had no idea. Likewise, about 41.1% parents were expecting their children to go for Masters degree or above, while about 28% said they did not know. Some 6.5% parents wanted to fund their children's studies as long as they wished (Table 4). Over 39% of the parents wanted their daughters studying for higher education up to the Masters level. The perception of higher education is only vaguely correlated to the economic status of the parents.

It is interesting to note that the perceived occupation of the highest number of school leavers is teachership (22.9%), Government job (18%), medical doctor (12.2%), engineer (8.3%), and college professor (6.7%). While rural, female, and Dalit students have wanted to be teachers, students from the private schools wanted to be doctors or engineers. The parents of Dalit students wished their children to be Government jobholders or teachers.

Table 4. Perceived Level of Education and Profession

Level of Education	Education		Type of Profession		Occupation				
	Own	Parents	Own	Parents	Own	Parents			
SLC	52	(2.9)	94	(5.4)	Professor	118	(6.7)	67	(3.8)
Certificate	112	(6.4)	56	(3.2)	Doctor	216	(12.2)	364	(20.6)
Bachelor	435	(24.6)	258	(14.8)	Engineer	147	(8.3)	148	(8.4)
Masters	853	(48.3)	732	(41.8)	Vet. Doctor	12	(0.7)	6	(0.3)
No thoughts	315	(17.8)	179	(10.2)	Advocate	67	(3.8)	60	(3.4)
Can't say			317	(18.1)	Forester	18	(1.0)	7	(0.4)
Others			113	(6.5)	Agriculturist	41	(2.3)	27	(1.5)
					Teacher	404	(22.9)	271	(15.3)
Occupation:					Pilot	34	(1.9)	5	(0.3)
					Police	22	(1.3)	6	(0.3)
Other category of Students:					Army	83	(4.7)	40	(2.3)
Chartered Accountant, Social Worker, Singer, Air					Government Job	318	(18.0)	512	(29.0)
Hostess, Journalist, Artist, Mechanics, Politician,					Business Person	84	(4.8)	43	(2.4)
Sportsman, Writer					Nurse	64	(3.6)	50	(2.8)
					No Idea	62	(3.5)	100	(5.7)
Other categories of Parents:					Others	77	(4.4)	61	(3.5)
Social Worker, Technical Job, Judge, Capable									
Person, Special Person, Nothing Special									

Note: Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Subjects Facing Difficulties

English was found to be the most difficult subject for over 39.9% school leavers, Mathematics for 21.6%, Science for 8.4% and Nepali for 8.3%. The reason for perceiving Nepali as the most difficult part of the course for many school leavers was grammar (irrespective of the type of school, gender, and ethnicity). English was difficult for them because they had weak language base (rural and Dalit school leavers and students of the public schools) but they liked the subject mainly because it is an international language. Difficult formulae, practice, and weak base made Mathematics difficult for the school leavers of all types of schools (Box 2), but almost one-fourth of the respondents, who liked the subject voted for its usefulness in life and help in securing higher marks.

Box 2: Mathematics the Killer Subject

Ms. Jyoti Pandey, 25, was a student of Public Madhayamik Vidhalaya, Dorannagar VDC of Rupandehi district. She first appeared at the SLC exam in 1998, but failed in English, Maths and Science. Next year, she appeared again, but failed again in Maths obtaining only 22 marks. She again appeared at the compartmental exam the same year, but again failed in Math securing only 26. She finally blamed her luck and gave up the examinations, but after 3 years again sat for the exam under the new curriculum in 2003 on the advice of her teachers. Once again she failed in Maths. She made her last attempt through the compartmental exam, but again secured 26 marks and failed.

Jyoti made her 5 attempts in Maths. Whenever she sat for the examinations, she felt the questions were not so tough, came out of the exam hall with a new hope, but every time flunked.

She said that if she had an alternative for Maths, she would have passed SLC five years ago and would have been a good teacher in the school, which was her dream. But she is not sure anymore whether her dream would ever come true.

Courses, Training, and Other Activities Undertaken by the School Leavers

Of the sample school leavers, 56.1% had taken training (10% from Kathmandu Valley). School leavers from private schools and girl students from urban areas participated more in the training. Mainly, the first divisioners, the students of families holding the highest levels of assets and income have participated in the training. Training on Computer (667 events), Sewing and Knitting (128 events), Language (116 events), Anchoring (80 events), and Teachers Training (65 events) are the areas of training. Apparently, computer training was taken more by the school leavers of private schools from urban areas and by high and middle income groups (girl school leaver's share over 35%). The reason for taking the training were personal interest (35.5%), experience to gain (15.3%), technical skills (11.7%) and for 9.3%, employment. Over 10% of the rural school leavers reported they took training to get employment.

Planning for Study and Employment Abroad

The school leavers from the urban areas in general and Kathmandu Valley in particular, having secured the first division marks in SLC, have plans to go abroad for higher studies. It is interesting to note that the school leavers from the caste groups, Newars and Tarai brahmins of high economic status were more likely to have planned. The overall percentage of the school leavers either desiring or planning for higher studies abroad is estimated at 19.4. The subjects they have planned for higher studies are Management (31.6%), Computer Science (18.4%), Engineering (14.0%), English Literature (9.1%), Chartered Accountant (4.7%), Hotel Management (4.4%). Some other major subjects chosen for study are Medical Science, Environmental Science, Economics and Mathematics. Students from Dalits and Tarai brahmin groups have chosen Management and Computer Science while other caste groups have chosen Computer Science and Engineering. Female school leavers are found to have preferred Management and Computer Sciences. The most preferred country for over 43.9 percent of the school leavers is the USA followed by Britain (16.4%), Australia, India, and Japan (8-9%). A great majority (59.7%) of the school leavers reported to have planned for higher studies of Masters level and 10% for above Masters degree. Female school leavers are found to have opted for Masters' degree. Of the 342 school leavers planning for the studies abroad, only 0.6% have already submitted their applications, 19.9% are preparing or have taken TOEFL, IELTS, or other examinations. Among those who have prepared for English and other tests are mostly those from the private schools of Kathmandu valley. The proportion of the female school leavers is also insignificant.

Some 307 (17.4%) of 1,767 sample school leavers, mostly males, with a comparatively low performance (below the second division) in SLC expressed their desire to go abroad for employment, for which they claimed expertise in labor-based works (25.6), Computer Skills (15%), Hotel and Tourism (10.2%), Electric House Wiring (7.3%), Driving (5.3%), Nursing, Painting, Carpentry or Masonry (2%). The country preferred for work by over 29.6% of the school leavers is the USA. But the preference given only for good employment and earning are states like South Korea, Japan, Gulf countries, Malaysia, European countries, India, and Israel etc. Notwithstanding the desire for foreign jobs, 68.4% reported to have done nothing for catching up the opportunities while some 11.7% had attended language training, 2.9% hotel training, 11.4% job-related training, and 7.8% computer training. Those performing all these activities are mostly from Kathmandu Valley. Dalit and Tarai brahmins and low and medium income status school leavers are reported to have prepared well.

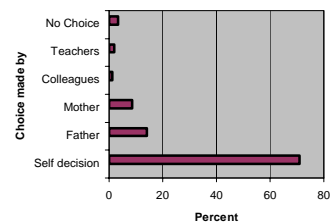
3. SECONDARY SCHOOLING AND SCHOOL LEAVERS PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Choice of Institutions and Faculty

Of the total 794 pursuing higher studies, 55.5% are reported to have joined higher secondary (+2) school/college and 44.5% the university constituent/affiliated colleges. The Faculty of Management has been the center of attraction to a great majority (over 41%) of sample school leavers pursuing higher studies followed by humanities (22.3%), and education (22.3%). There are about 9% school leavers who joined Science and 2.4% who joined Engineering. School leavers from medium level income group and the second divisioners have joined Management, Humanities, and Education. Further, the females have been attracted to Education. Dalits have mostly enrolled for Humanities.

Seventy one% of school leavers made the choice of faculty on their own while 14 and 8.6% respectively did so on the advice of their fathers and mothers (see Figure). Fathers generally chose subjects for the female school leavers.

Figure 3. Choice of Faculty



Over half of the school leavers are currently at the bachelor level (Table 4.1). While 1.6% have completed Bachelor level, about 1.5% have joined the Masters level (one Dalit and SLC first divisioners). It shows that in general better performance in SLC helps to get better career and life. Female school leavers pursuing higher studies were 311, of whom 47% are at the Certificate level, followed by 36% at the Bachelor level. None of the female school leavers have joined the Masters level.

Table 5. Number of Students Pursuing Higher Studies and Reporting Currently at Different Level

Level of Study	Male	Female	Total	% of Total Students
Certificate/+2 on study	109 (53.0)	97 (47.0)	206	26.0
Certificate/+2 completed	37 (53.0)	33 (47.0)	70	9.0
Diploma on study	33 (72.0)	13 (28.0)	46	6.0
Diploma completed	5 (100.0)		5	1.0
Bachelor on study	286 (64.0)	164 (36.0)	450	57.0
Bachelor completed	9 (69.0)	4 (31.0)	13	2.0
Masters on study	4 (100.0)		4	1.0
Overall	483 (61.0)	311 (39.0)	794	100.0

Figures in the parentheses represent percentages.

3.2 Subjects and Performance at Certificate Level

Since a majority of the students opting for higher education have been admitted to the Faculties of Humanities and Management, economics has also been the major subject taken by about 44.8%. Private school leavers and school leavers from the hills and Kathmandu Valley have taken English and Mathematics. Languages like Nepali and English are the common to all the faculties, which are also taken as majors. Therefore, the general subject studied by a majority of 23.89% school leavers is English followed by Nepali (19.75%) and Economics (13.43%).

Accounts is another general subject taken by the school leavers after economics. Mathematics is also a common subject in Science and Humanities, but in the Management Business Mathematics is offered as the general subject.

Average marks in Nepali were 44.8 obtained by the school leavers from urban schools, private schools, male students of mid-income groups and the Janjati and Newar groups. Likewise, the average mark obtained in English was 40.3. The average mark in Mathematics was nearly 50. No differences were seen in the average marks secured by the private and public school students in Economics, but in Science the school leavers from private schools had done better and, much better than the hill brahmins, Chhetris/Thakuris and Janjatis. In subjects like Accounts, BOOM, Optional English, Business Mathematics, female students led on the average.

Sixty-four% of the students faced difficulties in the subjects they studied at the Certificate/+2 level, mostly, the second and third divisioners. The students from the public schools of the mountains and hills, particularly female students, faced such difficulties. It is interesting to note that their difficulties in the subjects arose due to their inability to understand lectures in English and the limited knowledge of English from the school (Table 6).

Table 6. Reasons for Subjects posing difficulties or absence of difficulties

Reasons for Difficulties	%	Reasons for Absence of Difficulties	%
Able to follow lecture in English	51.0	Able to follow lectures in English	56.6
Did not study the subject at school	29.7	Prior knowledge of the subjects	35.3
Limited knowledge of subject from school	46.9	Sufficient understanding of subject	20.6
Schoolteacher didn't teach subjects well	24.8	Teacher/Instructor taught well	18.2
Weak in the subject all along	33.1	Strong in the subject all along	21.0
Inadequate time due to family problems	23.4	Much time for preparation	38.1
In adequate books and reference materials	22.8	I have sufficient books	32.5
Classes not regular in the college	27.4	Classes were regularly taken	49.3
Change of college teachers/irregular classes	14.6		
Lack instructional plans of college teachers	14.4		

3.3 Students and Performance at Bachelor Level

Some 462 or 58.2% reported to have continued their Bachelor level studies (first divisioners and students from private schools, Kathmandu Valley, and high-income families). The number of females doing the Bachelor level was comparatively small.

Nepali and English are compulsory as well as major subjects at the Bachelor level, too. About 56.5% reported to have English as their major subject and 39%, Nepali as their major. Economics is the major subject for 67%. The newly introduced subject of Computer Science is the major subject for 4.8%. Other major subjects of the school leavers are Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Political Science, Biostatistics, Management, Marketing, Finance, and Business Mathematics. Likewise, the general subjects studied by a majority of the sample school leavers are Nepali and English. Accounts is the main general subject taken by 14.4% of the students. Next to Accounts come Economics, Finance, and Mathematics, which are compulsory in the Faculty of Management and Science.

A great majority of the school leavers had secured marks between 40-60% with an average of 46.7 in Nepali, 38.8 in English, 41.4 in Economics, 54.5 in physics, 44.0 in Accounts, 40.2 in Marketing, 48.4 in Finance, and 51.3 in Business Mathematics. There were only a few subjects in which the average marks secured by the school leavers exceeded 60, but in the subjects that are of applied nature they had scored 67.2 in Computer Science and 60.9 in Statistics. There are

examples of the students who did better in higher education despite their poor results in the SLC (Box 3). A majority of the students are poor in Mathematics (average marks computed 47.6).

Box 3: From Low to High Performance

Ms. Rita Kharel, 21, is the inhabitant of Shankernagar - 5, Butwal. She lives with her parents, younger brother and sister. She sat for SLC in 1999 from Shankernagar Secondary School in Rupandehi district and passed in the third division. The subjects which pinched her all the time were by English and Mathematics. She got the third division simply because she only obtained the pass marks in those subjects. Her interest was to become a good English teacher. Because of her SLC result, she could not dare to join Humanities with major English and joined Management.

During this time, her desire to learn more of English and Mathematics got intense. She began to work in her parents' medical hall where she was compelled to learn English words (medical) and developed some mathematics problems. She also started reading English papers, books, materials and put lots of effort in textbooks too. All such efforts brought her to greater interest in English and Mathematics, for which she secured first division marks in Certificate exam. Currently, she is in the second year of Bachelor in Business Studies. Her colleagues come to her to learn English. She is happy that her efforts in Mathematics and English bore fruits.

3.4 Relevance of School Subjects to Higher Education

Secondary education is the base for higher studies. Therefore, the curriculum requires support for the studies in terms of contents and contexts, skills, and competencies for higher education and employment. In this context, students pursuing higher studies were asked to assess the extent of relevance of the subjects they studied in the secondary school to their higher education. Table 7 provides the documentation of this assessment. The general assessment made by the school leavers of the subjects showed relevance as reported by 70.9%. Less than 12% students reported high relevance.

Table 7. Percentage of Response on Extent of Relevancy of School Curriculum to Higher Education

SLC Subjects	Extent of Relevancy			
	Very Relevant	Relevant	Relevant to Limited Extent	Not Relevant
Nepali	29.7	45.6	21.4	3.3
English	32.0	46.6	19.4	2.0
Mathematics	20.2	36.2	25.7	18.0
General Science	9.7	16.0	21.5	52.8
Social Studies	4.3	21.4	38.7	35.7
Health Population and Environment	8.6	23.0	29.5	39.0
Optional 1	21.3	29.2	28.3	21.2
Optional 2	18.5	21.6	22.7	37.2
Vocational	15.6	19.6	22.1	42.7

In languages like Nepali and English relevancy was high for less than only 32%. In other subject like Mathematics, Optional, and Vocational subjects, relevance was not so high for 20%. Half of the students have found SLC science not relevant to their current studies because a majority of them joined either Management or Humanities. On an average, over one-third of the students rated the relevancy of subjects like Social Studies, HPE, Optional, and Vocational subjects as

zero. There must be some relevancy in Optional and Vocational courses although the assessment made by the students is negative, but it is the time to critically consider the question of relevance in view of the high investment and ambitious policy objectives.

3.5 College Teachers' Assessment

Teachers have assessed their students in different areas of skills and competencies, in which 12% of the responses ranked up communication ability in Nepali and learning attitudes while 20% skills in communication ability in English. However, teachers in general have rated the students weak in English. The level of basic understanding of the subject matter is low or very low as perceived by 48% of the teachers and so is the case with the ability to comprehend the subject matter, problem solving capability, analytical mind, and ability to work independently. While these are the major factors that enable students to be competent, teachers have assessed them at low level, indicating the low quality of students and low level of education at the secondary level. Yet, they have been rated very low in the areas of innovativeness, use of reference materials, ability to plan studies, communication ability in English etc. This poses a critical question to the curriculum and methods of teaching at the secondary level and the performance of the students as citizens for tomorrow.

Overall, 576 responses have provided answers related three specific competencies required to learn the subject content: inquisitiveness (23.1%) followed by hard work (17.2%), discipline (14.2%), good knowledge of English (13.5%), habit of regular studies (12.9%), and pre and basic knowledge of the subject matter (7%) each. Female teachers emphasized inquisitiveness, good knowledge of mathematics, habit of performing exercises on a regular basis. About 7% have even opined that the possession of competencies is very low. This is a serious threat to secondary education as perceived by the college teachers, where the policy concerning curriculum design and methods of teaching should be critically reviewed. More importantly, the monitoring of the school activities and evaluation of the teachers requires a bold step.

Table 8. Academic Performance of Different Categories of Students

Categories	Performance Rating				
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Does not Apply
Janjati ethnic groups	1.0	18.5	56.8	6.6	17.2
Dalit ethnic groups	0.3	12.2	51.8	13.2	22.4
Ethnic groups	5.0	41.6	36.6	0.7	16.2
Students from private schools	9.6	59.1	22.1	0.7	8.6
Students from public schools	2.3	23.4	61.7	6.3	6.3
Students from urban areas	5.3	40.9	43.6	2.6	7.6
Students from rural areas	3.0	30.3	54.1	7.6	5.0
Male students	1.3	38.0	54.5	1.7	4.6
Female students	4.0	34.7	51.8	4.6	5.0
Students from well off family	1.7	30.7	52.5	5.0	10.2
Students from poor family	3.0	26.4	45.9	12.9	11.9

Attempts have also been made to assess the academic performance of the different categories of the students pursuing higher studies by their teachers in colleges and universities. Teachers have made a good assessment of the students from private schools, the ethnic groups, female students and students, from urban areas, although to a limited extent (Table 8).

3.6 Strengths and Weaknesses of SLC Graduates

Assessments made by the teachers with regard to the strengths of the SLC graduates are based on overall quality, knowledge, and performance. The strengths of students of public and private schools seem to be different in terms of ability, skills, and knowledge. There were 516 responses related to strengths of the public school leavers, Some 30.4% response viewed industriousness as strength followed by discipline (26.7%), desire to learn (17.8%), and friendliness (13.2%). They have also the quality of respecting others and good knowledge of the Nepali language. Unlike the strengths of the students from public schools, the strengths of the students from private schools consisted of good knowledge of English according to 37% of teachers.

Likewise, the weaknesses of the students of public schools were weak knowledge of English as opined by 31.4% of the teachers. Some 16.5% of the teachers pointed out the lack of basic knowledge of subject matters. Inability to use reference materials was reported by nearly 8%, irregular attendance in schools (9%), and lack of expressing capability (5.6%). As English was weak in the case of public school graduates, so was Nepali weak in the case of private school graduates as reported by 13% of the teachers. Private school students are also blamed for low discipline (16.8%) as egoistic (10.2%), having the habit of rote memory (8.6%), lacking helpfulness (8.3%), and dependent on teachers (6.6%).

3.7 Competencies Required for Higher Education

College teachers have also offered the suggestions with regard to the competencies required for higher education. According to them, good knowledge in English is the prime competence required for higher education (17.8%). Good moral character (15.5%) is another quality indirectly required for education. Ability to express, management of time, creativity, regularity on studies, dedication, and basic knowledge and skills are other assets.

3.8 Required Role of Secondary Schools

How to acquire these competencies from secondary education was another concern shown by the teachers. In response, 14.2% of the teachers emphasized good educational environment in the school followed by discipline, ethics, and physical facilities (11.6%). They have also pointed out the need for efficient teaching and use of reference materials (10.2%), organization of extracurricular activities (9.2%), and hard work and good relationship between school administration, teachers, and parents (8.0%).

3.9 Reforms Required in Secondary Level Curriculum

For quality in the secondary education, university and college teachers have suggested some reforms in the curriculum. The contents of the course as stated by 14.9% should be made comprehensive so that students could develop long visions. Some 27.1% laid stress on ethical education so that students themselves could decide what is right and wrong. Addition of technical education was named by 8.3%; intensive courses in Science, Mathematics, and English right from the primary level by 8.9%; and inclusion of courses directly relevant to higher education were some effective measures for curriculum reform suggested.

4. SECONDARY SCHOOLING AND SCHOOL LEAVERS IN THE WORLD OF WORK

4.1 Status of Employed School Leavers

Types and Location of Employing Institutions

The private sector is found to have been the prime source of employment for a majority of the school leavers because two-thirds (229) of them are employed in this sector. About 18.6% are in Government service, 11.5% in non-Government organizations, and 2.1% in semi-Government and international organizations. The private sector covers agriculture, industry and manufacturing, business, and consultancy. Half of the employed school leavers are associated with educational institutions. In manufacturing companies and business firms, 21.9% are employed. Media has attracted 5% and, social sector institutions like I/NGOs have absorbed some 12.4%. Of the employed, 37% are female with a majority of them from public schools, 39% are hill Brahmins followed by the Chhetris/Thakuris (24.6%), Newars (17.5%), Janjati (14.2%), and Dalits (2%). Over half of the employed have second division in SLC.

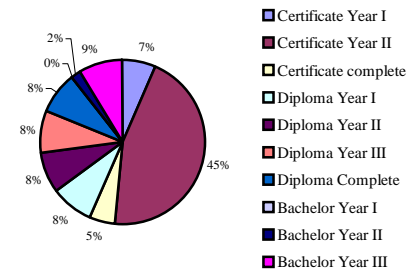
Employed School Leavers Pursuing Higher Education

The highest degrees currently possessed by the employed school leavers are Certificate/+2 (53%) and Bachelor (5.6%). Some 7.4% of the school leavers below SLC level have entered jobs for survival. Some (60.7%) have continued their education, 40% at the Bachelor level and others 16.6% at the Certificate+2 level. Only 3 out of 205 have joined the Masters level. Faculties chosen by 42.4% school leavers are Management followed by Education (27.3%) and Humanities (25.9%). Nepali and English are compulsory in all the faculties. The employed school leavers pursuing the Certificate courses have taken Mathematics, Chemistry, and Physics in Science; Accounts, BOOM, and Mathematics in Management; Foundation and Pedagogy in Education; Social Studies, Hotel Management, Economics in Humanities. At the bachelor level, the subjects taken are Business Principles, HRM, Marketing, Mathematics, and Taxation in Management; Foundations and Methods of Teaching in Education; and Sociology, Economics, and Population in Humanities. A majority of the school leavers have thus taken subjects which are relatively easy and can be studied on personal efforts.

Transition, Preparation and Search for Work

Overall, the average time taken to obtain the current job is 15.7 months. About 74% of them did nothing to obtain job while others took the relevant courses and attended preparation classes. Some obtained job through personal contacts or on basis of self-preparation. On an average, the school leavers applied to two institutions for job and faced two interviews. The reasons cited by the school leavers for not having been selected for job was the lack of personal contacts and rampant nepotism and favoritism. Some school leavers considered their poor performance in SLC as the barrier. This indicates the inadequacies in them of life skills and of qualities like quest for knowledge, communication and inter-personal skills, and critical and innovative thinking that

Figure 4. Highest degree when selected for job



Some school leavers considered their poor performance in SLC as the barrier. This indicates the inadequacies in them of life skills and of qualities like quest for knowledge, communication and inter-personal skills, and critical and innovative thinking that

support performance in the interviews. A majority of the students possibly have no idea of what skills they require and what skills they really lack for personal development.

Reasons for Opting for the Work

Survival imperatives and inability to afford education were the basic reasons for opting for jobs respectively for 38.6 and 32.3% of the school leavers. The reason why they chose the present jobs was that they had no other options (for over 45% school leavers). Nearly 44% obtained the current jobs two years after SLC or while they were in the second year of the Certificate level or +2, while another 25.2% got the jobs after four years. At what level in terms of the academic degree the respondents obtained the job is shown in Fig. None of the school leavers except the two diploma holders started their job after they completed the Bachelor studies.

Relevance of School Subjects to Current Work

The assessment of the extent of relevancy of subjects studied by school leavers at the secondary school level to the world of work has two considerations to follow. First, the school leavers might have little capacity to assess the relevancy of the subjects to their work and second, the work position and nature of work could render some help in working. The school leavers who were interviewed were at least four years after their SLC and were, therefore, expected to have been mature to assess such relevance. The school leavers' assessment Table 9.

Table 9. Relevance of SLC Subjects to Current Work/Occupation

SLC Subjects	Extent of Relevancy			
	Very Relevant	Relevant	Limited Extent	Not Relevant
Nepali	19.5	50.6	21.6	8.3
English	39.9	36.1	10.2	4.7
Mathematics	26.0	42.9	24.3	6.8
Science	12.1	28.4	33.7	25.7
Social Studies	13.0	35.7	36.2	15.1
Health, Population & Environment	13.8	30.9	38.2	17.1
Optional I	14.9	26.4	30.9	27.8
Optional 2	11.7	24.5	38.1	25.6
Vocational	16.8	24.8	32.7	25.7

Only a few school leavers have rated relevance at less than 20% of all the subjects except English and Mathematics, which also were not very high. The assessment of relevance does not seem to have been made in terms of the skills acquired, but in terms of the content. Over one-third of the school leavers sought the relevance to some extent and one-fourth assessed the optional and vocational subjects and found them not relevant. Consequently, they did not seem to have been satisfied with both the subjects as useful to their work.

Types of Job and Earning

Over half of the employed respondents entered jobs with a minimum of SLC qualification followed by Proficiency Certificate (24.3%). There were 17 school leavers who entered job after they received the bachelor or Masters degree. Those, who failed in SLC, became schoolteacher (46.8%). The other jobs that the school leavers did were as accountants (9.5%), office assistants (8.9%), health educators (5.9%), salesmen (5.0%), etc.

The gross annual salary drawn by the new entrants was between NRs 20,000 – 40,000 as reported by 53.9% which was increased on an average between NRs 40,000 -50,000 as reported

by 26.3% and NRs. 30,000 -40,000 (23.2%). The average annual gross salary drawn by the employed school leavers is computed at Rs. 41,077 whilst the increased average is calculated at NRs. 55,724. Some school leavers have good employment positions and received good salaries (Box 4).

Box 4: Employed and Earning

A 21 years old energetic young boy, Raju Ghimire, is residing currently at Siddharthanagar-8 of Rupandehi district in a family of 6 members. He took SLC in 1999 from Bhanu Madhyamik Vidhyalaya and passed in the first division. His mother, a SLC graduate, is a service holder.

Raju joined the Certificate level in Management and started searching for a job to support his mother. He finally got a job in PR Upadhaya Audit Company. He worked and studied simultaneously. In 3 years, he was promoted to the position of Senior Audit Assistant, and at the same time obtained first division marks in the Bachelor in Business Studies (BBS). He earns over NRs 60,000 annually and invests some of it for his younger sisters and brothers.

Raju aims to be a good chartered accountant, for which he possesses top educational background and practical experiences. He says that what counts is not the type of school (public or private) but personal commitment and efforts. He, however, believes that secondary schools must provide skill-based education to students.

Contributing Factors

About 51.2% of the respondents rated their school education as high followed by hard work (40.4%) and intelligence (34.3%) to acquire current job. About one-fourth thought that their training and personality helped them to acquire the job. Overall, academic degrees followed by personality, intelligence, and personal hard work are found to be the key factors for school leavers to obtain job.

Education, hard work, and intelligence were rated as high by the first divisioners from urban areas. Personal relations, luck, and source-force did not contribute much to obtain job. Some other factors as reported that helped to acquire job were the experience gained initially through volunteer service as teacher and the capacity to sing or ability in music.

Job Satisfaction

Economic hardship being the main reason for job seeking, about 71% reported to have been satisfied with their jobs. Jobs were a satisfactory move to girl students and school leavers from urban areas. Several reasons were given for job satisfaction. Those jobs were the most satisfactory which helped them to learn a lot which were prestigious in nature and tallied with personal interest and future prospects. Few school leavers were satisfied with their jobs despite low salary, while 86.7% reported dissatisfaction because the salary was low. The other reasons why the school leavers were satisfied with their jobs were liberty to express personal ideas, good relations with the boss, etc.

Training Needs and Future Plans

School leavers wanted the further training to acquire better skills in job for better employment opportunities. Almost two-thirds of the leavers from public schools of the rural areas felt the need of relevant training. Janjatis and Dalits felt this need more. Priority for training in teaching practices was reported by half of the respondents from the Tarai and by those in the hills and Kathmandu Valley. The next priority for training as sought by 13.7% was in computer work. Accountancy and managerial skills were other training needs (10.5%). Training on teaching practices has been the demand of the employees of all the sectors (location, gender, type of school, ethnicity, household income level, and performance in SLC).

About 133 or 39% of the employed school leavers are not currently studying. About 55% of them had no plan to continue their studies, but 45.1%, particularly those from public schools and a good number of female school leavers from rural areas wanted to resume their studies. Education was the major area intended to study by a majority of the school leavers followed by Management (25%) and Humanities (20%).

Employer's Perception on Employed School Leavers

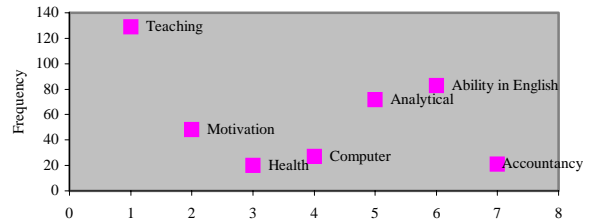
Supervisors were asked to assess their employees on the areas that need skills and competencies of different scales. A high level assessment was found to have been done by almost two-thirds of the supervisors on Nepali and writing ability. The assessment made by the supervisors seems to be encouraging. Supervisors have also made assessment in terms of punctuality, aptitude, service orientation, and learning ability. A majority of the employers have evaluated their employees as above average, ranging from the lowest by 40.7% to the highest by 70.6% in terms of all the indicators (Table 10). The notable fact is that the low performance as indicated by the supervisors pertained to analytical capability, writing and speaking ability in English, innovativeness, and risk taking capability.

Table 10. Performance Assessment of the Employed Students by Supervisors

Indicators	Very High	High	Low	Very Low
General level of understanding	26.8	70.6	2.1	0.5
Writing ability in English	15.5	46.9	22.7	13.9
Writing ability in Nepali	56.7	40.7	2.1	0.5
Verbal ability in English	13.9	40.7	21.7	21.1
Verbal ability in Nepali	64.4	33.5	2.1	
Punctuality	37.1	59.3	2.6	1.0
Ability to work independently	16.0	66.5	13.4	4.1
Ability to work in Group	28.9	60.3	9.3	1.6
Aptitudes	36.1	55.7	5.7	2.6
Learning ability	38.1	53.6	6.7	1.6
Analytical mind	14.4	47.9	26.8	10.8
Service Orientation	35.5	54.5	8.5	1.6
Risk taking capacity	7.7	40.7	38.7	12.9
Innovativeness	13.4	47.4	28.4	10.3
Job competence	22.7	62.4	13.4	1.6
Mathematical operational ability	16.0	63.4	9.3	3.6
Problem solving capability	14.4	61.9	15.0	7.7

Some 32.33% of the supervisors opined that the employee should have the knowledge of teaching since a majority of the sample school leavers were on the job in the schools (Figure). The required competencies as prioritized by 20.80 and 18.05% of the supervisors were skills respectively of English both in writing and speaking, and analytical skills. About 76% of the supervisors pointed out possession of lot of such skills but 20% reported very little skill.

Figure 5. Responses of Competencies Required



Opinions on Secondary Education

The strength of school leavers, as reported by 10.4% employers, were possession of theoretical knowledge base, ability to work in group (7.9%), ability to solve problems, hard work, discipline, innovativeness, personality, language skills, adaptability, and health (5% each). Other strengths accounted were self-confidence, feeling of responsibility, ability to work independently, planning for future life etc. On the contrary, the weaknesses identified by 20.8% were the lack of practical skills, weakness in mathematics and English (8.2%), lack of ethics, inability to create new things, lack of skill (over 7% each).

Some 57.9% of the employers suggested technical and practical skills that would help the school leavers to be self-employed or to make themselves marketable for jobs. Such technical and practical skills could be used in agriculture, cottage crafts, tailoring, sportsmanship, etc. The school leavers should have positive attitudes. The employers for policy revision with regard to secondary education offered suggestions. In fact, 42.1% responses suggested the inclusion with curriculum of practical, vocational, and technical courses that would help the students obtain job. In order to impart such education, sufficient subject-based training should be provided to the teachers so that they would be able to impart practical and skill-based knowledge to their students.

4.2 Status of Self-Employed School Leavers

Location and Nature of Ventures

Grocery shops, restaurants, medical halls, etc are the main business ventures of over 71% school leavers. After business comes agriculture in which some 7.6% school leavers have been involved. Other school leavers have started the hotel and tourism (6%), manufacturing, and education (3%). Social work, media, workshop, etc. are also the areas where the school leavers have been working. Female school leavers are involved in agriculture, hotel, and tourism. Dalits and janajats are involved more in agriculture than in business.

Study Details

The highest academic qualification possessed by 52.3% of the self-employed school leavers is SLC. Some 16.9% have less than SLC or 10th grade pass. However, about 28.2% school leavers have completed the Certificate or +2 level, 3 the diploma level, and 5 others the Bachelors level. More than one-third of the school leavers are currently pursuing higher education - Tarai brahmans and Newars, male school leavers and product of urban private schools. Majorities of the self-employed are in the last year of Certificate or Bachelor level. Management is the faculty

for 53.8%, Humanities for 22.6%, Education for 17% and Science for 6.6%. About 19.1% have taken economics followed by accounts (14.0%), Nepali (12.7%) and English (12.1%). Likewise, the major subjects chosen at the Bachelor level by the self-employed school leavers are Accounts (16.8%) followed by Economics (16.0%), English (9.9%), Finance and Marketing (7.6%), Sociology, Human Resources Management, and Mathematics (3.8%), Nepali, Environment, Political Science (2.3%).

Opting for Self-Employment

Majorities were self-employed within 2-4 years. As expected, self-employment was difficult for Dalits and low-income groups. In order to be self-employed, 61.8% made direct investments, 37.8% prepared through apprenticeship, 22.2% attended training, and 13.8% did vocational courses. Personal preference for self-employment and family advice were found to be the major reasons why the sample school leavers initiated their ventures. Survival imperatives basically to support the family (39.4%) and good prospects of earning money out of the business (37.4%) were other important reasons for self-employment. The reason why the self-employed chose particular business was high possibilities of good income. Forty one% followed the particular venture because that was the family business whilst 38.4% of the respondents said, they had to live jobless.

Relevance of School Subjects to Current Venture

Questions were asked about the extent of relevance of different secondary school subjects to the business and activities that the school leavers are currently involved in. Only a few respondents pointed out a high degree of relevance of Nepali and Mathematics. About 15 to 16% stated the relevance of the optional and vocational subjects such as agriculture, accounts, handicrafts, etc (Table 11). The optional subjects offered in schools are also not relevant as opined by 32%, English by 23, and vocational courses by 24%.

Table 11. Relevance of Subject Studied to Current Work/Occupation

SLC Subjects	Extent of Relevancy			
	Very Relevant	Relevant	Limited Extent	Not Relevant
Nepali	21.2	47.7	18.2	12.9
English	12.3	28.5	35.8	23.5
Mathematics	29.1	43.1	18.2	9.6
General Science	5.3	18.5	27.8	48.3
Social Studies	4.9	30.3	42.6	22.2
Health, Population and Environment	7.1	23.9	38.7	30.3
Optional 1	8.5	24.3	34.4	32.8
Optional 2	15.7	21.1	30.0	32.2
Vocational courses	16.1	26.5	32.7	24.7

A considerable number of the self-employed have underscored the relevancy of many subjects taught at the secondary level, which indicates that the existing secondary curriculum has not been fully successful in meeting the needs and aspirations of the different sections of the society.

Investment, Earning, and Employment Generation

The average investment of the venture as reported is about NRs 150,000. Over half of the school leavers started their business with an investment not exceeding NRs. 0.1 million, but some (18.9%) invested over NRs. 0.25 million. With this investment, the initial monthly income reported is less than NRs. 5,000 (50% of the school leavers) and above NRs. 25,000 (5%). The initial income of NRs 5,000 per month has been reduced by 20% and the monthly earning of over NRs. 25,000 has been increased by double from 5% to 10% (Box 5).

Box 5: Good Earning from Self-Employment

Krishna Prasad Bhandari was born 21 years ago in Kotehawa-4, Rupandehi. He belongs to a Brahman family of 8 members. His grandparents and parents are just literate and run a business. As the elder son of the family, he was first to pass SLC in 2000 from Pashupati Madhyamik Vidhalaya in the first division with 69 percent marks. Currently, he is in the first year of Bachelor in Business Studies and has secured the first division marks at the Certificate level.

He started a restaurant a Manakaman Bhojanalya - at the crossroads near the bus stop, with an investment of NRs. 100,000. Initially, his annual turnover was NRs. 250,000. In five years' time the turnover increased to NRs 900,000. He has employed 8 people as cooks and waiters. Krishna feels happy when his school and college teachers come to his restaurants. He feels no regret at starting business. Rather, he wants to pass on the message that work is god and that no profession is of low prestige.

Job Satisfaction

A good majority of 68.9% school leavers are fully satisfied with their ventures. The reasons behind the satisfaction are nature of the job liked (65.4%), easy pull-on of life (64.9%), pride of being the boss (57.7%), ability to invest as required (56.3%), high earning potentials (46.2%), expansion of business (45.2%), social prestige (30.3%), enhancement of social authority (28.4%) etc (Box 6).

Box 6: Job Satisfaction from Self-Employment

Tilak Raj Hitang, 23 of Fudbang village of Arghakhanchi, first appeared in SLC in 1998 from Chandra Prabha Secondary School, but unfortunately failed. However, he was not disappointed. Rather, he thought of bringing up his deep interest and skills into play. He went to Butwal, received photography training for about a month, and started his own venture in the name of Star Photo Studio in 1999. In the beginning, he made an average income of NRs 4,000/month but within six months, he increased it to NRs. 4,800/month. Tilak says he is fully satisfied and happy.

He regrets his failure in SLC because he knows education is essential for any task in the present world, but at the same time, he believes that passing SLC does not mean everything. He feels happy comparing himself with his friends, who have passed SLC, but have no income sources of their own. He plans to earn NRs 10,000-20,000/month, build a house, and buy a vehicle, and is quite busy with his customers all the time.

His success was the result of his interest and choice of vocational training. He says that such training should be given by secondary schools. Since he failed in a subject which was not directly related to his interest and choice, he believes school education should provide employment-oriented skills and knowledge necessary for further study and feels vocational courses should be included in the curriculum.

Training Needs for Self - Employment

Before starting the venture, about 26.2% of the self-employed school leavers had participated in trainings of various types and those who participated were from urban areas (males and females in equal numbers). Training in courses on medical services of CMA types was attractive for 21.1%, beautician for 20%, computer for 17.8%, JTA for 7.8%, and photography and house wiring for 6.7%. Nearly 43% school leavers have felt the need of training to make themselves efficient for the promotion of their venture. They opted for training on marketing strategy (25.7%), general management skills (20%), accounts (9.5%), JT/JTA (6.7%), and sewing and knitting (10.5%). The findings suggest that policy makers and curriculum designers should carefully note the types of courses and training requirements based on practice and reality at the ground level. However, details and comprehensive studies on need assessment would, be necessary for re-designing secondary curriculum.

Plan of Study and Faculty

Among the 196 self-employed school leavers, who are not currently studying 27.6% or 54 plan to continue their studies in one or two years of time. The female leavers of public schools of urban areas look more enthusiastic about further studies. Of these 54, 18 wished to join the Faculty of Education, 11 Humanities, 8 Management, 4 Medicine, 3 each Agriculture and Science, 2 each Law and engineering, and 3 forestry.

4.3 Status of Unemployed School Leavers

Unemployed and Their Occupational Interests and Positions

The total number of sample school leavers still unemployed was 333 who were looking for jobs for the last 6 months. Government job, as reported by 27.6% of the unemployed school leavers, was found to be of top interest. Teaching profession (24.6%) occupies the second position closely followed by the technical field (23.4%). The reason for interest in Government jobs is social prestige and job security. Teaching job was possibly easier to obtain.

Study Details

A majority of school leavers are yet unemployed since 61.9% have not yet received degrees beyond SLC. While 21.3% have the Certificate or +2 level qualification, 13.8% have less than SLC. Bachelor degree holders constitute less than 3%. A majority of them are also not currently studying. About 25.6% of those studying are from wealthy families, first divisioners, and higher caste groups, of whom 65.9% are at the Certificate or +2 level, 31.8% at the Bachelor level, and 2.4% at the Masters level. Of the 85 unemployed school leavers continuing their studies, 34 have joined the Faculty of Management, 25 each have joined Humanities and Education.

Transition, Preparation, and Search for Job

Of those who were unemployed, 83.8% are found to have tried for jobs by submitting applications and others doing so through contacts without going through any formal process. Only 65.8% school leavers have sat for examinations. The percentage of school leavers who faced interviews in the course of searching for job was 56.2. Job scarcity and the resulting high competitions and low qualification might be the major reasons for their inability to get employment. Concern should, thus, be centered more on competency, intelligence, and skills of the candidates which can help them tackle the situation in the face of difficulties.

Training Needs for Employability

Approximately 71% of 333 respondents felt the need for training to be employed. Among the school leavers who had failed in examinations, Dalits and Tarai brahmins and the school leavers from high income family groups emphasized training needs such as computer (38.4%) followed by sewing and knitting (19.8%), skills development (15.8%), teacher training (15.3%), and English language (9%). Educational policy thus requires to be revisited, keeping in view the demands of various sections of the society. The curriculum could be based on location and local culture and it may require a series of region-based need assessment studies.

Plan of Study and Faculty

Of the 333 unemployed sample school leavers, 248 (74.2%) are not currently studying. About 46.4% reported having plans to continue studies. Female school leavers are more enthusiastic about joining colleges for higher studies. Of the 115 respondents, 29.6% wish to join the Faculty of Management; 28.7%, Education; 20.9%, Humanities; and about 5% each Science, Medicine, and Agriculture. Female school leavers and students from Janjati groups are more interested in joining Education.

Table 12. Characteristics of Failed School

Leavers	
Details	Proportion of failure
Students from the Hills	41.8
Students from Tarai	39.4
Public School	91.1
Male students	59.5
Medium and low income status	74.1
Low expenditures in education	78.1
Hill Brahman	39.7
Janjati and Dalit	30.8

Failure Students

It was not easy to find out the failed school leavers in their location. Of the 146 school leavers traced out under the category, about 50% were from the year 2000. Table 12 presents other characteristics of the failed school leavers by location, eco-zones, income status, gender, and type of school.

None of the failure students are found to have gone in for higher studies. About 16.4% of them are employed, 32.2% are self-employed, and half of them are still unemployed. The frequently failed subjects are Mathematics as reported by 72.2% followed by English (42.0%) and Science (46.7%), etc. Failed students have perceived the need for additional training in skills that can fetch better employment opportunities (52.1%).

Employment, Position Holding, and Earning

Of the SLC fail students, 16.4% are employed and 32.2% are self-employed. Those employed work mostly in the private business as support staff and in education as teachers. Those who passed SLC later have obtained the positions of accountants and health educators. They had taken additional training to be employed. Their annual income is estimated at NRs. 50,000. About one-fourth of them earn over NRs 60,000. Of those who are self-employed, 55.3% have started their business with an average investment of about NRs. 100,000 and, earning annually between NRs. 150,000-300,000, whilst about 10.7% earn over NRs. 300,000.

Perception on SLC Courses

The performance levels of the employed and self-employed school failures, if measured in terms of income, was found to be fairly high. Secondary schools should motivate them and guide them towards the appropriate career paths since school leavers, whether fail or pass, require additional

skill training to add value to their school education and to start ventures. Table 13 shows failure students have assessed the relevance of SLC courses to their present job and self-employment needs.

Table 13. Relevance of SLC Subjects to Job as Perceived by Employed fail School leavers

SLC Subjects	Extent of Relevancy			
	Very Relevant	Relevant	Limited Extent	Not Relevant
Nepali	8.3	58.3	25.0	8.3
English	16.7	25.0	33.3	25.0
Mathematics	16.7	33.3	41.7	8.3
General Science	4.2	20.8	33.3	41.7
Social Studies	7.7	15.4	46.2	30.8
Health, Population and Environment		45.5	45.5	9.1
Optional 1	5.6	16.7	44.4	33.3
Optional 2	5.9	5.9	47.1	41.2
Vocational courses	12.5	18.8	50.0	18.8

School failures see less relevance in the SLC subjects except Nepali. They assess English and Mathematics as relevant to their jobs as helping them in expression and simple mathematical operations.

5. ASSESSMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLING FOR ENHANCEMENT OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

The opinions of secondary school leavers were sought on various areas to evaluate the quality aspects of schooling and the capacity of the school to provide to students life skills to support their social and personal life. This chapter, therefore, makes effort to document and analyze the responses of the school leavers with regard to secondary school education vis a vis their present occupations.

5.1 Opinions of Sample Students

Quality Assessment of Schooling

School leavers were asked to give perceptions of their school. About 88.4%, particularly those from the public schools of hills, talked about their school with pride. Female school leavers and SLC third divisioners did so more than others. Over 90% were positive about what they acquired from their schools, particularly in terms of subject knowledge, moral character, and discipline. Those who spoke about decent education, hard work, ability, and intelligence ranged between 73-77%, while only 48% were positive about sportsmanship.

Perception on Relevance of School Education to Social and Family Life

Where poverty is widespread and survival has become the primary need, life skills for employment and earning potentials become the key issues to be addressed through appropriate and relevant education and training at the school level (Box 7). School leavers need to enhance their individual capability and optimize the use of their potentials for survival. They should therefore be provided with basic survival skills necessary for job and further education.

Box 7: If Education Had Been Skill-Oriented

Born in 1981 in Pali village of Arghakhanhi district, Laxman is a Dalit. He took SLC in 2000 from Kamala Madhyamik Vidhyalaya and passed. He dreamed of becoming a medical doctor. His struggle began with his success in SLC. He got into economic hardship and started looking for a job, started working in a butchers' shop, and joined Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus. But since the situation did not favor, he gave up his job and studies and left home in search of jobs in India.

His plan of earning money for himself and the family did not materialize. Exploitation of the employers in India compelled him to return home. Fortunately, he got a job in an NGO named Oppressed and Ethnic Development Academy working for the upliftment of the oppressed people. He then joined the Certificate level at Panini Multiple Campus and is now in the second year.

Laxman looks back at his school education and thinks that had his school given him skill-based education, he would have started business for economic sustenance of his family for the education of his younger sisters and brothers, and for his own further study. His life would have been different. In his view, school education neither gave him the ability to enter the job market nor helped him to become self-dependent. He asks: Thula manchele kina sochdainan (Why don't the big men think?)

Contribution of School Education to Social Life**Table 14. Contribution of School Education to Aspects of Social Life**

Categories	Rating							
	Much		A Lot		Little Bit		Very Little	
Social contact	210	(11.9)	963	(54.5)	501	(28.4)	93	(5.3)
Civic awareness	193	(10.9)	881	(49.9)	567	(32.1)	126	(7.1)
Political awareness	53	(3.0)	242	(13.7)	637	(36.1)	835	(47.3)
Awareness of social concerns and issues	124	(7.0)	777	(44.0)	709	(40.1)	157	(8.9)
Participation in social activities	146	(8.3)	752	(42.6)	678	(38.4)	191	(10.8)
Ability to live a socially active life	151	(8.6)	755	(42.7)	669	(37.9)	192	(10.9)
Understanding cultures of different social groups	112	(6.3)	635	(35.9)	721	(40.8)	299	(16.9)
Access to social authority	107	(6.1)	593	(33.6)	780	(44.1)	287	(16.2)
Others	7	(0.4)	18	(1.0)	23	(1.3)	17	(1.0)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage

As perceived by the school leavers, their school education provided them many skills which brought them increased social contact, civic awareness, and participation in social activities (Table 14). A great majority of the school leavers from the mountains and hills said that they found school education a source of inspiration to serve people of different social groups, and live an active life enjoying access opportunities to social authority.

The opinions were expressed by a majority of the school leavers were neither so high nor so low. This means school education was of in providing skills. Female school leavers moderate were not very happy with the contribution of school education in terms of imparting the skills.

Contribution of School Education to Family Life

About the contribution of school education to family life, a majority (58.3%) of the school leavers said that they obtained knowledge about their roles in the family. Half felt school education enabled them to participate in family decision-making and enhanced their sense of

resource sharing among family members. About 14 (0.8%) believed it increased the feeling of mutual understanding within the family (Table 15).

Table 15. Contribution of School Education to Family Life

Categories	Much		A Lot		Little Bit		Very Little	
Understanding of one's role in family	412	(23.3)	1030	(58.3)	279	(15.8)	46	(2.6)
Ability to cooperate with family members	541	(30.6)	993	(56.2)	206	(11.7)	27	(1.5)
Participation in family decision-making	315	(17.8)	872	(49.4)	469	(26.5)	111	(6.3)
Sense of resource sharing within family members	312	(17.7)	794	(44.9)	508	(28.8)	153	(8.7)
Others	6	(0.3)	14	(0.8)	8	(0.5)	13	(0.7)

Figures in parentheses indicates percentages.

School Education and Key Competencies

Competencies are to be transferred from teaching to practice so that school leavers could develop them for their personal and social life eventually for the chosen career paths. A large number of respondents said that school education contributed little in each of these factors. This implies that the school education leaves for improvement to make students competent in life skills. School leavers were very positive in rating the extent of competencies they obtained from school. Fifty percent said they had obtained considerable amount of competencies from their school, particularly in the ability to think creatively, to solve problems, to communicate, make decisions, and live a healthy life.

5.2 Perception on Skills and Competencies Acquired from School

School leavers pursuing higher studies rated high the skills and competencies acquired from school in expressing and comprehending in Nepali 29.7%. The skills acquired were those of expression and comprehension in English, analysis of facts and issues, and management and organization. But a majority of them also pointed out the inadequacies of skills they acquired from school to improve their personal, social, and family life. About 50% of the respondents said they had acquired only some skills from their schools. Some said they got no skills. Among those who were positive breakdown on the various areas were: competencies pertaining to the use of library 39.3%; working on projects 41.8%, map reading 34%; and management 27%.

Of the twenty-four skills and competencies listed for assessment, 35.3% of the employed school leavers referred to the ability to express their ideas and thoughts in Nepali, 32.8% to writing ability in Nepali, and 25.6% to performance of simple mathematical operations. Some of the school leavers also said that the skills and competencies they acquired from the school range only from 3.1 to 13.6%. Further, less than 50% of the school leavers rated the skills and competencies they acquired from the school. About one-fourth of the students said they acquired nothing on ability to use the library (26.3%), ability to perform advance mathematical operations (31.8%), ability to read globes and maps (42%), ability to do project work (40.4%), management skills (24.8%) and organizational skills (25.8%).

Except for Nepali language, simple mathematical operations, and accounts, far less than 10% of the school leavers from private school rated high level of skills and competencies. Nearly one-third appreciated the high level of skills in writing and speaking in Nepali given by the school. Some 50% admitted that they acquired skills of questioning, group work, problem solving, translation of knowledge into practice, performance of simple mathematical operations, etc. In

English they acquired very little; in analysis of facts and issues, management, and organization skills they said they had achieved something. Self-employed students rated high, level of knowledge obtained with regard to problem solving, translation of knowledge into practice, and decision making, but their worries lay in the lack of skills in English, organizational management, and project analysis.

The unemployed school leavers pointed the need for various skills and competencies to avail of the opportunities of employment. To what extent they acquired such skills from their schools is a matter of concern. Apart from Nepali, the number of responses did not exceed 50%, as mentioned by unemployed school leavers. A majority of responses assessed the extent of knowledge that the school provided. In management, organization, leadership, and problem solving 50% of the respondents, said the schools had not been able to provide the skills need by them.

5.3 Secondary Education for Higher Education, Job Efficiency, and Employability

As to the question how secondary education helped in higher education, about 23.4% (1504) of the school leavers reported that they would have prepared better if the school had got good physical facilities. In addition, some 19.2% each stated that if the school had made the provision for choosing the subjects as per their wish and interest based on local needs, they would have done better, particularly in English. They also pointed out the need of regular classes, skill-oriented vocational courses, and relevant secondary courses related to higher studies.

Of the 338 employed school leavers 76.6% expressed their opinions and, of all that respondents, nearly half from all the eco-zones irrespective of ethnicity and school types said they would have become more efficient and competent had they been given practical and skill-based education. About 20.5% school said they should have been given quality education in English and Mathematics as emphasized by the female students. Some 28% underlined subjects like Accounts, Health, and Computer taught by trained and experienced teachers on a regular basis.

About 67.9% self-employed school leavers preferred technical or vocational skills combined with a working knowledge of general education subjects. While 10.6% wanted secondary education to provide the knowledge in marketing management, 6.9% opted for help in establishing small enterprises with low investment. The views expressed were, directly or indirectly related to skills necessary for entrepreneurship.

A great majority of the unemployed school leavers observed that secondary education system should provide subjects as per the choice and interest of the students in need of employment. They believed, it would be helpful to proceed in their career in higher education or in the world of work. Some 28.5% of the unemployed respondents believed that English language skills and computer knowledge would help them to obtain employment while 9.2% believed that some managerial skills training would help them for self-employment. Important for employability but not included in the school curriculum are the courses in the examinations of Public Service Commission.

5.4 Secondary Education and Personal Life

About 60.9% responses of the school leavers pursuing higher studies showed the need for practical and skill-based education followed by programs that develop leadership, personality, and intelligence (28.3%) and programs that facilitate the poor, Dalit, women, and intelligent

students (9.1%). A majority of opinions expressed put up demand for location-based technical or vocational education through which the students of secondary level could justify their choice of the career path for personal development. The Government should make a feasibility study in that regard to ensure functional courses by location to benefit the communities and cultures.

With regard to the contribution of secondary education to the improvement of students' personal life, about 45.6% of the employed school leavers mentioned subjects falling within the choices and interests of the students which meant they could set their aims of life adjusting to changes in the family and society. Some 15.4% school leavers also mentioned the need for extracurricular activities to improve their personal life through an overall understanding of lifestyle, society, and sportsmanship. Some 15.5% said discipline and good ethics would have changed their personal life if the school had provided them the necessary training.

About 39.8% said that secondary education could have provided them with technical or skill-based education in their struggle against poverty. The higher the income through employment, the better personal life. Secondary education needs to take care of students' English, personality, discipline, moral education, self-reliance, ability to translate knowledge into practice, creative thinking, etc.

They believed that good teaching by experienced teachers (proficient in subjects like Mathematics and Science), courses on personal skill development are the inputs that secondary education should provide them. In this regard, 41.8% stressed skill development, 22.1% teaching by competent teachers (especially English teachers), 9.1% extracurricular activities, and 6.7% for computer knowledge. Other factors improving personal life, as reported, were self-reliance, hard work, leadership development, speaking ability, and role-playing skills.

5.5 Secondary Education and Social Life

About 53.3% of the school leavers those pursuing higher studies viewed the role of secondary education in social life differently. They believed that education system should be equipped with programs and activities of social exposure to interaction and understanding of social values. How far it would be possible to involve the groups in society at the community level remains an open question, but exposure to the social values and norms is indispensable to students, said by 29.4% school leavers. Such interaction, would give opportunities through the demonstration effects in their personal, family, and social life.

Employed school leavers were found to be aware of their life in general and social life in particular. A good proportion of them are in favor of organizing interaction activities and programs that lead to involvement in societal development. This means that teaching activities provided no knowledge and understanding of the culture and living styles of the different sections of the society. Female students and good SLC performers from private schools of urban areas were more conscious about this than their male counterparts. School leavers also suggested the inclusion in the curriculum of social rights (7.2%), importance of group work (8.0%), ethics (9.0%), and gender equality and womens' rights (6.8%).

Secondary education, as perceived by 70.8% of the school leavers, should include a course in participatory activities between school and the community that exposes students to the contents of social studies. With such an exposure, students would understand the social issues and the ways to resolve them. Knowledge of leadership qualities, personality development, and civic attributes were other things that could be provided by the school (18%). Well-exposed and experienced teachers would promote feelings of social responsibility and commitment in the

students which could accurate the process of social development mitigating a number of social evils and anomie.

Some 237 responses on the role of secondary education to the improvement of social life have been recorded. About 40.1% suggested the inclusion of social and civic education in the curriculum, while 19.4% suggested organizing field visits and exposing students to interaction with the community to gain practical experiences of social issues and potentials. There were some diffused views, too. The respondents said that secondary education should help students to increase their capacity to work in groups and with the community, provide additional courses on social concerns (family, society, and culture), ideas of social reforms and welfare, and provide contents and contexts that encourage students to be a part of the society.

5.6 Outcome of Focus Group Discussion

School Teachers

The schoolteachers have viewed the SLC examination held in their time to be much better than it is today. Out of the 221 responses, 13.6% said SLC was then more respected and disciplined. In contrast to the quality of SLC of the past, 50.0% teachers mentioned dishonest marking followed by increased tension for students (16.7%). Higher education in the past had limited faculties (18.4%), lacked reading and reference materials (10.2%), and students were more disciplined (9.2%), but today they feel there is a wider scope for market and access to information. Schoolteachers also somewhat wryly commented on the *ghumante shichhak ra firante bidyarthi* (**vacillating and running about teachers and students**).

About 17.2% of the teachers (116) pointed out the need for coordination between the secondary and higher education curriculum saying the secondary education should lay stress on subjects like English, Mathematics, and Science (8.6%), and on subject choice meeting local and regional demands (6.0%). With regard to challenging employment opportunities in the market, 89.7% of the respondents (107) stated that secondary schools should provide education for on-farm and off-farm enterprises and the course should be employment-oriented. Some 49.5% of the schoolteachers commented on the current curriculum as one providing only theoretical knowledge which hardly enables the students to overcome the life's challenges.

The performance of private schools has been better in terms of the results and reality of products. The major reason identified by nearly 21% of the teachers was the regular, punctual, and responsible nature of the teachers and management of classes as per the calendar of operation. Parents showed concern for better performance by the schools. Public schools could not achieve much because of weak administration (14.9%), irresponsible and undisciplined teachers and students (13.4%), low parental concern (10.5%), frequent political disturbance and low economic background of students (9.5% each). Teachers also pointed out the poor results of public schools as an index to the total years of schooling. Students from private school spend at least 13 years - from kindergarten/nursery to the year of SLC exam while an overwhelming majority of public school students spend about 10 years from grade one.

With regard to the role of secondary education in making the students skillful and competent for higher education, 22.0% of the schoolteachers (101) held the opinion that provisions should be made, as far as practicable, for specialized subjects that are of interest to the students and relevant to higher education. Some 12.0% laid stress on English, Mathematics, and Science. Weak policy implementation and lack of monitoring of educational activities were identified as reasons for low performance of public secondary education. Secondary education is more

theory-based and lacks technical orientation. This is attested in teachers' own words: *berojgar matra janmaune shikchha*, literally meaning 'education giving birth to the unemployed'. In other words, secondary education has prepared students neither for higher education nor for job. The teachers ask *padnele jhan kina bhautarinu pareko?* (Why should the educated wander for job?)

Parents

Parents want their children educated. When asked what their aspirations were, they said *Euta ashal byekti* (a good individual). About 20.4% parents (167) wanted their children to become doctors and engineers. A majority (28.2%), of the low-income and less educated parents, wanted their children to obtain good jobs and improve family income while 19.8% aspired their children to acquire name and fame with friendly nature, sound moral character, equipped with discipline. Their wish is summarized in their own words as: *afnai khuttama ubhiun* (meaning let them be able to stand on their own legs).

Asked what changes they found in their children before and after SLC, about 15.0% of the 167 parents said their children were now mature and responsible, 12.0% found them highly motivated toward the higher studies, and nearly 11.0% found them with positive thinking. Some 56.4% said their children are disciplined, soft-spoken, respectful, sensitive to work, and enthusiastic about their future. Good environment at home, limited family control, timely completion of the courses, and diligence were the perceived reasons for the success of the first divisioners in SLC, according to half of the 70 parents). Thirty-six % referred to weak home environment, 38.8% blamed the school, and the others found fault with their own children for poor performance in SLC. This seems to be a balance judgment on the part of the parents.

Interesting conclusions have been drawn from the opinions of parents why they consider education to be important. About 142 responses were recorded. A majority considered education only for employment while 25.3% took it as an outlet for good citizenship with good moral character (Table 6.5). They support this statement by saying *sikchhya andhayrobata ujjalotira dorayunako lagi ho* (education should lead one from darkness onto light). *Hatma ship nabhayeko shikchhya sing nabhayeko goru jasto* (Education without skills at hand is like a bull without horn) was the comment of 53.4% parents (133). This is the view expressed in the context of assessment of the current education system. Some parents suggested classifying subjects as compulsory, optional, or vocational as per the needs, priorities, demands and choice of the students. The current policy of *Padhe padha napadhe napadha* (It's up to you to study) has already hampered the growth of human resources, investment, and development of the nation.

Institutions

It was unanimously accepted that the armed conflicts and party politics have badly impacted the tender minds of the students. Both teachers and students are in mental tension and teaching and learning have turned less motivating increasing unemployment (16.3%) and out-migration (14.0%). Students are compelled to do household works, which leaves them little time for homework. Most of them have no textbooks and reading materials. They just spend time waiting for teachers in the school premises and classrooms in the name of study.

SLC students of the past possessed creativity, analytical ability, and capacity to solve problems. They were disciplined and respectful but lacked information technology and the methods and skills of presentation. The SLC students today lack the qualities revealed in 17 out of the 21 responses. The stated reasons for quality deterioration were inadequate curriculum content, non-availability of textbooks and reading materials, politically polluted school environment, and

theory-based education (25 out of 44 responses). Teaching is examination-oriented. It was suggested that secondary education should impart practical knowledge and skills to students by mobilizing the locally available resources. In the words of the participants' what secondary education should do is *manche bhayera banchna sikaunu parchha* which means 'education should teach how to live life with human dignity'.

Educational institutions should efficiently monitor educational activities and supply sound professional feedback to the implementation authorities (26 %). Twelve respondents said that the DEO should be authorized to provide trained and experienced teachers and subject teachers with skills to the address problems of public schools. Incentive to the people involved in secondary education and moderate costs of education are in demand. Positive thinking and professional ethics in the Government officials and other stakeholders were considered indispensable.

6. KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

6.1 Key Findings

The main finding derived is that pursuing higher education is the main activity chosen by a great majority of the school leavers. Several factors, particularly geographic, school type, gender, income status and expenditure in education, ethnicity, and location of schools have been identified as affecting student performance in the SLC examination. Private schools are ahead of public schools with better performance if SLC results alone are considered as the criteria of quality education.

(a) General Features

- Sample school leavers were grouped into four categories based on their existing status as students pursuing higher studies, and as individuals employed, self-employed, and unemployed. Of the total sample of 2,160 secondary school leavers, 1,767 or 82% were traced out. Some 78% of students were from public schools and another 22% from private.
- The average family size in the hills and mountains exceeds 6 and, in the Tarai and Kathmandu Valley is 5 or below. Overall, family size calculated of the sample population of the school leavers is estimated at 5.8 with a gender ratio of 2.8 males vs 3.1 females.
- Hill Brahmins with 44.3% ratio predominate followed by 19.2% Chhetris/Thakuris, 16.2 Newars, 11.4 of Janjatis, 3.1 Tarai Brahmins, and 2.6 Dalits. Hindus are the predominant religion group constituting 91.6%.
- A little over 28% of the sample students' families pursue agriculture as their primary occupation, a prime one in the mountains and Tarai. In Kathmandu Valley service and business occupy a major share. Other occupations include service Government or private (15.7%) and trade/business (8.6%).
- The average value of assets holding is highest (3,928,000 rupees) in Kathmandu Valley. In expenditure, families in Kathmandu Valley claim the highest share of 16.6% for education, 1.4% of the assets holding value, and 25.7% of the total income.

- Public schools account for 70.5% of the students who have passed. The pass percentage of the Janjati and Dalits were 9.8 and 1.7, respectively. 32.9% of the female students passed.
- The average marks calculated among the pass and fail students shows low scores in English and Mathematics. Science and Nepali have also been difficult for the majority.
- A great majority of students over 75% have selected Optional I subject on their own choice because that was the only subject available in the school. Likewise, Optional II subjects were taken on their own choice by 53.5% and 41.2% said that only that subject was available. Mathematics seems to be the leading Optional I subject for a majority of the school leavers followed by the Economics. Health is the main subject offered by a majority of the school as Optional II subject followed by Accounts.
- Twenty and twenty one % respectively had wished to study other subjects as Optional I and II - Computer, Economics, Accounts, Geography, Education, Agriculture, Forestry, Health, etc. Nineteen percent wanted to study subjects such as Agriculture, Accounts, Education, Hotel Management, Fine Arts, Journalism, and Music. Such a wish was expressed by the school leavers from public schools of the rural areas (12.0%) and by Dalit (16.3%).
- A great majority of the school leavers are found to have aspired for higher studies, for employment or personal career since over 48% perceived their education up to the masters level while about 17.8% had no idea. Perception towards higher education is only vaguely correlated to the economic status of parents.
- It is interesting to note that the perceived occupation of the highest number of school leavers was teachership (22.9%), Government job (18%), and medical doctor (12.2%), engineering (8.3%), and professor (6.7%). While rural, female, and Dalit school leavers preferred to be teachers, school leavers from the private schools preferred to be either doctors or engineers. Parents of Dalit students wished their children either to be Government jobholders or teachers.

(b) Major Findings

- Of the 1,767 school leavers traced out, 44.9% opted for higher studies and 19.1% for employment: some 18.8% remain unemployed and 17.1% are working on a self-employed basis.
- The low income and disadvantaged groups including Dalits and Janjati have less access to higher education (10.8%). Leavers from public schools of the rural areas with a medium level of income and SLC second divisioners are found to have joined the faculties of Management, Humanities, and Education. Dalits are mostly admitted to Humanities and Janjatis to Management and Education.
- About 55.5% of the school leavers pursuing higher studies have joined higher secondary (+2) schools/colleges and 44.5% university constituent/affiliated colleges. Of the employed, self-employed and unemployed, over 80% have joined university constituent or affiliated colleges 98.6%, under Tribhuvan University.
- The Faculty of Management has been the center of attraction to a large majority (over 41.1%) of the school leavers pursuing higher studies followed by Humanities (23.6%),

Education (22.3%), Science (9.2%), Engineering (2.4%) and others (1.5%) including Medical Science, Agriculture, etc. Those employed, self-employed, and unemployed but wishing to pursue higher studies have also plans to join Management (29.6%), Education (28.7%), Humanities (20.9%).

- At the Certificate level, the general subject studied by 23.89% is English followed by Nepali (19.75%) and Economics (13.43%). Accounts come after Economics. Mathematics is compulsory for Science and Business Mathematics for Management. Nepali and English are compulsory in all faculties.
- The relevance of SLC courses to the subsequent studies is not uniform across the subjects. Compulsory subjects, in general, and Nepali and English, in particular, are assessed as highly relevant by about 32% school leavers. Subjects like Mathematics, Optional, and Vocational have been assessed as quite relevant. Half of the students rated Science as not relevant to their studies probably because a majority of them have joined social science. On the whole, students' ratings of the relevance of the SLC courses have not been very positive.
- College teachers in general have rated the school leavers as weak in English. The level of basic understanding of the subject matter is low or very low as perceived by half of the teachers and so is the case with the ability to understand the subject matter, problem solving capability, analytical mind, and ability to work independently. Ways to acquire competencies, as they perceived, are through good educational environment and hard working habit, etc.
- The private sector is the prime source of employment for 67.8% of the school leavers - 18.6% in Government services, 11.5% in I/NGOs, and 2.1% in other organizations. Exactly 49.4% are employed in education, 33.3% in business, and 5% in media. Seventy one % of the self-employed have started businesses like grocery shops, restaurants, medical halls, etc. After business come agricultural activities (7.6%), hotel and tourism (6%), and manufacturing and education (3%).
- A majority of the school leavers started their job with SLC qualification or below. Those who failed in SLC (46.8%) hold the positions of schoolteachers. Other positions that the school leavers hold are accountant (9.5%), office assistant (8.9%), health educator (5.9%), salesman (5.0%), etc. The average annual gross salary drawn by the employed school leavers is computed at Rs. 41,077 while the increased average is calculated at NRs. 55,724.
- The average investment made to start the venture, as reported, is about one hundred fifty thousand rupees. Over half of the school leavers started business with NRs. 0.1 million. With this level of investment, the initial monthly income was less than NRs. 5,000 (half of the school leavers) and above NRs. 25,000 (5%). The initial income range of NRs 5,000 per month has decreased by 20%, and the monthly earning of over NRs. 25,000 has doubled (5 to 10%).
- The relevance of SLC courses for two categories – employed and self-employed – has been perceived as not very positive, which means that the currently prescribed curriculum has not been fully successful in meeting the needs and aspirations of the different sections of the society.

- School leavers pursuing higher studies have found the skills they acquired from school inadequate, although some stated that some of the skills acquired were helpful (namely, writing, expression and comprehension in Nepali, organizational skills, etc).
- Employed students said they had acquired speaking ability in Nepali (33.3%), in writing ability in Nepali (32.8%) and ability to perform simple mathematical operations (25.6%). It indicates that secondary education has not been able to make the student skillful and competent. Policies therefore, need to be re-designed considering the poverty situation, education, and life skills of the school leavers.
- Nearly one-third of the self-employed students admitted that they acquire a high level of skills in writing and speaking in the schools. They are also positive about school education for providing skills to work in groups, to solve problems, and to perform simple mathematical problems. They have also appreciated the level of knowledge they obtained.
- Unemployed students put blame on their weak secondary education. They referred to the vastness of the course, which gives little knowledge that could be practically applied. Courses should be revised and redesigned as per the needs of the employers.
- Another group of students among the school leavers are the ones still preparing for the SLC examination. They have wasted their times just appearing at the exam every year. English, Mathematics, and Science are the most difficult subjects for them. The motivation to pursue further education is found to be a factor goading them to persistent efforts.
- A majority of employers have evaluated school leavers as below average in terms of performance. The reasons noted are low analytical capability, low writing and speaking ability in English, lack of innovativeness and risk taking capability, and inability to translate knowledge into practice.
- A large majority of the school leavers see their secondary school as being crucial to improving their personal and social roles. Improvement in communication skills, personality development, social development, family roles, access to resources, and information are changes for the better.

6.2 Policy Issues

Information compiled in the study indicates several policy issues to be discussed for the improvement of secondary education. The following are some of the issues identified:

Secondary Education for Higher Studies

Information derived from the ground realities shows a large majority of the school leavers go in for higher education after leaving the school. Therefore, the present secondary school education is found to be mainly a preparation for liberal higher education. The Nepalese secondary education system is characterized by a straight highway system in which all try to get to the end of the road (IIES 1988) because the nature of the secondary curriculum is fundamentally general and academic. It mainly lays emphasizes on the preparatory courses for college admission, thereby inducing the school leavers to seek admission in campuses. However, the school leavers admitted to higher studies have expressed their grievances about facing difficulties in the campus

courses because of the weak base and irrelevancy of the content and context of the subjects offered in secondary education. A majority of the school leavers who are known to have gone for studies in Management, Humanities, and Education have complained of the lack of relevancy of the secondary courses (except the compulsory subjects). Optional and vocational courses virtually have less relevance as the school leavers' experiences in higher education show. Lack of a clear orientation of courses on the content relationship and contextual exposures might create a gap between the teachers as the givers and the students as the receivers. The free education policy adopted by the Government has also led to create further demand for higher education. With the mushrooming of private schools, the current secondary education has been a platform to enhance the demand for higher liberal education rather than to attract the school leavers to the world of work immediately after completion of their secondary school.

Relevance of Secondary Education

Information derived from the study indicates that many SLC courses only have a questionable amount of relevance to the students' subsequent studies and activities. Although most of the students have rated the relevance of a number of subjects like English, Nepali, Mathematics, Economics, and Accounts, etc as so-so, there are many who find these subjects having little or no relevance. The perceived extent of relevance of optional, vocational, and other courses such as Science, Health Education, Physical Education, and History is particularly low. Employed, self-employed, and unemployed students have also commented on the relevance of SLC courses from their own view of employment and employability. The SLC courses, however, should be directly related to the courses taught at the college level and to work. The curriculum policy should seriously address the relevance issue so that knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired by students in their secondary education become relevant to further education, job market, life and societal needs. The question also arises: Have the demands of different sections of the society in terms of location, gender, and people from different caste groups met as yet?

Secondary Education Versus World of Work

While very few job opportunities exist for the SLC graduate in the market due mainly to the fact that there are no jobs and, if there are jobs, they possess no relevant skills and competencies. Holding of multiple degrees by a person, often known as education inflation, and high production of university degree holders, often called surplus schooling, has created competition between SLC graduates and high degree holders, even for small positions. In a situation where the Nepalese economy influenced by modernization and globalization has taken a shift to reforms with technological changes, especially in IT and migration caused by various reasons, the job market is becoming more complicated and competitive. In this context, there is very little or no place in the job market for school leavers unless they possess up-to-date knowledge and competencies in the form of vocational and technical skills, in the context of technological change. Such a development may have two implications for the secondary education system. First, education must be designed to meet the increasing demands of economy for workers who have freshly acquired new skills rather than a fixed set of technical skills acquired. It therefore, needs the basic competencies learned in secondary schools. Second, education gained at the higher levels must support the continued expansion of the stock of knowledge. Horizontal expansion of the current secondary education does not seem to be supportive to either of the statements made above.

Secondary Education versus Life Skills and Poverty Reduction Goal

The goal set in the Tenth Plan envisaged is the establishment of a link between secondary education and employment for poverty reduction. It is believed that education can help to enrich human capital endowments, which will subsequently deal with the labor market discrimination. Education can, therefore, make a significant contribution to the reduction of poverty since it confers skills, knowledge, and attitudes that increase the productivity of the poor by increasing their output (when discrimination is absent). Each one of us is aware that poverty in Nepal is endemic and widespread and that survival has become the primary need for many. The perception of a majority of the guardians on school education relates to generating human potentials saleable in the employment market and thereby to economic benefit for a comfortable family life. However, the employment and earning potentials rest on the skills and competencies often called life skills that the secondary school leavers possess. School leavers need to enhance their individual capability, optimize the use of the potential for survival, and sustain life. For this, they should be provided with basic *survival skills* to prepare them for society, for job, and for further education. In order to survive, the *generic skills* need to be developed. There is a need for educational programs that provide *transferable skills* to help earn, socialize, and improve the quality of life.

Given this reality, while these issues remain the key issues to be addressed through appropriate and relevant education and training at the secondary school level, several examples cited the studies show that the school leavers have acquired very little or no life skills from their secondary school education. Although the knowledge acquired by the school leavers in the school enable them to obtain other skills and competencies, no system has been developed so far to equip the students with life skills. Inability to link education with life skills is one of the major issues of the present education system, which demands life skills-based approach to education.

Quality Concern of Secondary Education

The quality of school education could be seen in two ways. First is the quality related to the physical, social, emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual development of the students: inculcate qualities like good conduct, tolerance, truthfulness and justice, and a sense of national identity and integrity, command of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to compete in the national and international labor market, develop life skills, professional and vocational skills that help contribute for individual and national development through economic activities and meet the millennium development and 'education for all' goals. *Second is* low performances profiles of school: Failure rates in the SLC examination, and in the sent-up examination, low proportion of students passing in first division, longer time taken by students to pass SLC, and poor performance of SLC graduates in higher education, etc.

This study and several others undertaken in the past have identified a number of factors responsible for the poor quality of secondary education. The major factors identified are poor physical environment; lack of educational facilities and of qualified and trained teachers; unbearable classloads of teachers; lack of professional commitment on the part of teachers and devotion; limited opportunity for professional development and training for teachers; inappropriate teaching-learning environment; high teacher turnover and frequent absenteeism; inadequate instructional time; poor quality of teaching methods; ineffective language policy; poor management and supervisory practices; low student motivation for learning; under-financing of the secondary sub-sector; defective curriculum; lack of textbooks and reading materials and a

majority of the schools in general and public schools in particular in the rural areas face such problems. Policy makers should think what interventions with possible options could be traced out for the improvement of the quality of public secondary education in the rural areas.

Perception on Public Private Differences

The output in terms of higher pass percentage in the SLC results has shown private schools as imparting quality education. Various opinions offered by the school leavers, parents, teachers, employers, and institutions have been documented in this study for support. There are several other evidences testifying why private schools are ranked far better than public schools. Put differently, the high proportion of first divisioners passing in SLC examinations from the private schools confirm the wide variation between the achievements of public and private schools in bringing a consensus among the people insisting on the quality of schooling.

It is true that the opportunities in life available strongly determine an individual's performance in school education. It has also been witnessed that the products of private schools have been able to achieve better prospects and have got better opportunities compared to the products of general public schools. Although private schools, too lack mechanisms often disseminating knowledge and skills to their students, they seem to have been progressive while public schools in general seem to be regressive. The reason phenomenon is that public schools have failed either to provide even a minimum level of knowledge, skills, and competencies or to give professional counseling to their students. That is why people at large today have little faith in public education.

The existing reality is such that the people at large have no capacity to afford education in the private schools and the access of a larges number of students to those schools remains limited. The socio-political and economic implications of all this could be painful to the country. Who should then be allowed for education in the private schools? Are the privately run expensive institutes on the desired level for the society and should they continue to expand? How long should the nation go with such educational disparities? Are the public schools really unable to upgrade their performance? Is this poor performance due to funding or policy commitment? Should we organize a dialogue between the public and private schools? In what way could the public-private partnership evolve? In what way, the private schools be supportive to the Government – for educating women, Dalits, Janjatis, and the poor, disadvantaged, and disabled?

Comparative Achievements of Advantaged, Disadvantaged Groups, and Women

Access to education leads to a meaningful life. Thus, resources invested in education generate human capital. The creation of human capital is the creation and distribution of new wealth; it contributes to the reduction of both absolute and relative poverty. In this context, differences in access to education and achievements in terms of life chances between two different groups like the privileged and the disadvantaged and men and women bring economic disparities leading to conflicts and wide social and economic losses. While equal opportunity and human rights through appropriate and adequate school education to all is of deep concern today, the challenge being encountered is not only how to increase the access of educationally disadvantaged groups but also how to guarantee their right to quality education. In this regard, the study has noted wide disparities in educational performance between the so-called upper castes and the disadvantaged groups including women. Dalits and Janjatis account only for 14% while their achievement is low and, the performance of women is still lower. The issue is not only of the limited access of disadvantaged groups and women to secondary education but also their poor

SLC pass rates and campus/college admission rates in comparison to others because they either take a longer time to pass SLC or remain on the non-student status due to their failure. Because educational achievement leads to economic success and social standing, the policy issues that arise are: What specific roles should different stakeholders play for equal access and curriculum re-design to reduce the failure rates of the disadvantaged and women? Should the Government recognize SLC failures as people of educational status? Should the tag 'failed' be discarded? Should certification emphasize the educational strengths and weaknesses of the students?

Regional Variations in Educational Performance

Inferences from the study reveal regional variations in the educational performances of school leavers. There are several factors that support regional variations: language barrier; lack of qualified teachers, particularly the teachers of English, Mathematics, and Science; poor physical facilities; unavailability of textbooks and other educational materials; parents' low attention to education; lack of supervision; professional growth of teachers; poor teaching-learning methods. Common cases also exist. With limited family resource, local communities cannot bear the burden, in cash or kind, in the development of physical facilities of the schools. Thus, several schools lack even the most basic facilities. Studies have shown the imbalance and inequity as regional disparities and disparities in the educational performances of students. Disparities persist both in access to secondary education and in the quality of schooling. Educational policies addressed to check regional disparities in terms of access, quality, and equity are, therefore, to be supported by different educational societies.

School Failures Joining Technical Schools

The wastage in secondary education is accumulating due mainly to the high failure rates in SLC and pre-SLC examinations called send-ups. The present study shows only 6.4% of the SLC pass students joining technical diploma (females 1.6%). Yet the figure for school failures joining technical schools for various training programs is not encouraging for various reasons: (a) opportunities are limited; (b) chance of admission to campuses are low due to competition with the SLC degree holders; and (c) the failures' intention is to pass SLC rather than join technical schools for better prospects (Bista, 1996). Even a large number of technical school graduates are found to have planned to appear at the SLC examination. Attractive packages and motivational factors are important to increase the enrollment rate.

In this context, in an article, CK Lal (2005) states that the training school dropouts with employable skills are an option that have failed to grab national attention. Nepal has dozens of medical and engineering colleges for those who can pay their way, but training schools producing carpenters, plumbers, glaziers, electricians, auto mechanics, nurses, housekeepers, bakers, tailors, dyers, and painters are rare. Occupational training requires working facility with language and arithmetic, but not the ability to memorize answers to literature and social studies questions. 'SLC-failed' students are the best for trade courses and, since they are in a majority, policy makers must think of, and the authority must invest in, them because the SLC graduates have other options. The current donor-funded efforts to provide a vocational safety net to the backlog of SLC the cast-offs from past years must be taken up as a national campaign.

English and Mathematics as a Compulsory Subject

Since the importance of English and Mathematics both in higher education and employment in the present day context is ever increasing, the need to teach these subjects at the secondary level

has no alternative. The present Tracer study and studies in the past have shown that the highest failure rates in SLC examinations occur in English and Mathematics. Teaching learning was improved in the past and the teachers were trained, but there has been no improvement in English teaching. Repeated failure in these subjects puts the students in a critical position. Failure implies loss of opportunities and rewards in the society. This calls for serious efforts to improve the achievement of SLC students in English and Mathematics. Whether English and Mathematics should remain as compulsory subjects could be a matter of policy debate, but seeking options with simplifications for reducing the problems pain of thousands of students and economic and social loss of the nation should draw the attention of the policy markers as soon as possible.

6.3 Implications of the Findings for Further Improvement

Provision of a broad-based secondary curriculum

While the findings derived in the Tracer study and the tendencies observed in general attest to the ever-growing demand for higher education, evidences also suggest that SLC graduates are not adequately prepared for the purpose. Therefore, in order to bridge the gap between secondary education and higher education, the extension of schooling with the provision of higher secondary education may be regarded as a major step. Such a decision is already in effect with the provision of +2 in the present structure of secondary schooling system. In this connection, a 'broad-based secondary school curriculum' is desirable, at least, for up to Grade 10 with provision of streaming of subjects only at the higher secondary or +2 level. Such a broad-based secondary education could help in building the fundamental understanding of the SLC graduates and to prepare them for both higher education and the world of work. A complete 'general education' to enhance general knowledge, skills, and attitudes consisting of the common-care of the compulsory disciplines is appropriate, without specialization that currently exists in the curriculum. A core curriculum, however, should be designed with emphasis on general and broadly applicable knowledge, higher order skills, competencies, and attitudes. Issues thus could be raised: What implication could be observed with this kind of provision? If the provision currently that exists in the curriculum is left as it is, what can one expect from current secondary education while many weaknesses are already at hand? What other options can be considered to overcome the current threats?

Emphasis on Skills and Changing Attitudes

In a broad sense, it seems to be relevant to offer the students 'instant skill-oriented vocational courses' to respond to the wide demand of students, parents, teachers and to meet the needs of the different sections of caste groups, gender, and the society as a whole. However, given the wide vision of the secondary education, its large-scale production of the SLC graduates and the experiences gained from local level development processes, very little social and economic implications have been noticed despite the heavy investments. Further, both parents and students had no taste of vocational secondary education in the past. It is because those general schools had no such exposures and were not providing the experiences required for the world of work. Therefore, the purpose in preparing students for employment should not be limited or narrowly defined only in view of the vocational courses.

Rather, the secondary schools with a wide horizon of the curriculum (content and context) should aggressively prepare the students for the large labor market that exists and is likely to

grow substantially in the days come. They should be provided with generic, survival, and transferable skills infused with enthusiasm, commitment, and capabilities to learn what they need to learn when they join the world of employment. Since there are more and more societal pressures from increased connectedness, greater complexity, uncertainty and diversity, and rapid changes, the general skills required in secondary education and can be grouped as: (a) Skills for personal fulfillment; (b) Skills for living in society; (c) Skills for dealing with the changing economies; and (d) Skills for dealing with the changing work patterns. The traditional notion that secondary schools should prepare workers with specific instant work skills should, therefore, be set aside and schools should prepare individuals who are capable of learning those skills. This calls for a 'broad-based secondary education', which does not directly emphasize vocational skills but provides the students with general skills and knowledge, fitting with the labour market for employment.

Provision for the Choice of the Subjects on a Location Basis – Demand Based Subjects

The courses offered in the optional and vocational areas often do not address the problems, needs, and priorities of parents, students, and the society, nor are they based on the needs of regions and particular locations. This raises the issues that students, parents, teachers, and people of different sections of the society and from different locations have observed to be the irrelevancy of the subjects taught in secondary level. The courses have not met the needs and aspirations of the different sections of the society. What happens if the students are given liberty to choose the subjects on their own to fulfill the demands of the different sections of the society?

Educational and Occupational Counseling

The school curriculum does not have the contextual phenomenon of how students can be made self-decision makers or self-independents to identify and define their own path to success. They are not able even to discover their own potentials. Some extent of counseling thus seems to be necessary. With counseling they would be motivated and encouraged to do better than what their learning offers. Issues for policy could be raised as: What would happen if counseling were made compulsory as a part of education?