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Collaboration for Educational Public Policy Making in Nepal in COVID 19 Post-Pandemic Era: A Marketing Perspective

Abstract

The COVID 19 pandemic creates a situation where innovation/expertise should be incorporate in public decisions promptly. Civil servants should bring such decisions into effect immediately. Thus, COVID 19 pandemic stresses revisiting the roles of politicians, bureaucrats and experts. However, to what extent politicians, bureaucrats and experts are collaborating for the sake of innovative ideas for policy making in COVID 19 post pandemic era in Nepal is limited exploration in Nepal eventhough government of Nepal (GoN) has been carrying out reformation efforts since 1950s and continuing till date. In this purview, this paper aims to explore higher education's contributions to make public policy from socio-administrative perspective. The research methodology is guided by case study based. Documents of public service Commission, Nepal (PSC) and University Grants Commission, Nepal were reviewed to identify aspirants to join in civil servants at one hand. On the other hand, the teaching methods, syllabuses of Master's level, research activities, and eventually developed policy briefs were collected from Dean offices of the University and research centres of university to find out the areas where Universities of Nepal provided innovative policy suggestions to government Nepal in administrative reform areas. Finally, interview with deans of Arts and Humanity Faculty and Management Faculty and Research Directorate, department head, secretary of Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration (MOFAGA)- central personnel agency were carried out. Besides, questionnaire survery was carried out to 330 respondents identified from UGC report. The research paper concluded that University contributed theoretical understanding of administrative management effectively whereas limited contributions in strategic areas of public administration.

Keywords:

post COVID 19 pandemic; collaboration; University of Nepal; reforms; Nepal

Introduction

Higher education across the globe has an enormous capacity to change society and contribute to producing public goods. The knowledge transfer, economic development and community engagement are the basic elements to translate state/public missions into reality. In the word of Papadimitriou (2020), the former two aspects of higher education are easily measurable whereas community engagements are critical. Community engagement is influenced by various factors such as structure, agents, and procedures determined by communities at local, national, regional and international levels (Jacob et al. 2015). Beneworth et al. (2018, 17) define community engagement as a “process whereby universities engage with community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial even if each side benefits in a different way”. As the public mission of the universities derives from the definition of their work in the public domain, the various types of related activities encompass economic development, technology transfer, community engagement and community partnership (Calhoun 2011). Under the umbrella framework of the public mission, higher education institutions focuses on the transmission of knowledge through teaching, the creation of knowledge through research and engagement with society through commodification and financialization (Cooper, 2017, Pinheiro et al 2015, Addie, 2017). Academic entrepreneurialism emphasizes the structural changes in curricula in order to achieve a higher degree of employability and marketability. Thus, academic preparation aligns with the labour market requirements.

In this purview, the employability and marketability issue of higher education is not so easy to find out their relationship eventhough both issues are intertwined particularly in a developing country like Nepal. Therefore, the factors and conceptual clarity determine the

public mission of employability and marketability ultimately. Theoretically, the following factors are discussed to elucidate that higher education is the public good through its marketing.

Public Services and its Marketing Orientation

The public sector organizations are concerned with providing various services to the community. It is, however, relevant here to see that delivering public services constitutes an important concern to deliver ‘citizen value’ and also to provide the citizens ‘satisfaction’ with the service provision. Delivering desired satisfaction to the customers’ demands. For example, not only effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery but also transparency and accountability in the overall delivery processes to ensure organization providers’ response and accountable behavior towards the needs and expectations of the citizens. One should, therefore be concerned with the idea that marketing can also be used in the public sector organizational providers to better their performance to serve that citizens. This demands, on the other hand, to understand the extent of diversity in the case of public services. It is relevant, here, to focus on the characteristics of public services.

At the most basic level, “the majority of public goods are in fact services rather than physical product and as such are characterized by intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability” (Kotter and Andressen in Laing 2003, 431p). Beyond this basic level, “the core defining characteristics of public services have been as including dominance of political objectives the primacy of citizen and multi-dimensional customers” (Lovelock and Weinberg in Laing 2003, 432p).

A common understanding of marketing usually involves determining the needs of the customers, what customers want or need, informing them about the nature and availability of services- targeting the customers, developing

mechanisms to persuade or convince them to use the services, establishing mechanisms for recording the customers' response to services enhancing customers satisfaction or delivering desired satisfaction with the use of services-satisfying customers' needs plus achieving organization goals. Marketing is the " activities, set of institutions, and processes- always inter conned and interdependent- to identify, anticipate, create, communicate, deliver and exchange valuable offerings that satisfy clients, audiences, partners and society at large. In the era when public sector organizations must perform better to respond better to the public interest, irrespective of whether they govern the character of public provision as opposed to producing goods and services themselves, marketing can help(Serrate 2020, 5).

In marketing public services, one must be aware of:

- The diversity that exists in the case of public services
- The way organization providers operate to deliver services
- The need to serve the collective interest/ public interest and the state of the reflection of the same in political decisions
- The state of public sector monopolies- the state providing the services that happen to be of monopolistic nature

It is important here to focus on 'marketing orientation'. There are three important components of marketing orientation as identified by Narver and Slater (Narver and Slater-1990 in Palmer 2000, 6P).

a. Customer orientation: The organizational provider should know or understand its 'current' and 'potential' customers. The ideas of this type of orientation is to create 'superior value' for them, thereby increasing the flow of benefits to the customers in relation to the cost paid by them or vice versa. This appears

crucial to the acceptance and use of services by the customers.

- b. Competitor orientation: The organizational providers are required to know or understand their 'present' and 'potential' competitors. They should have a proper understanding of competitor's short sun 'strength and weakness' as well as long term 'strategies and capabilities'.
- c. Interfunctional coordination: This dimension is concerned with the functional aspect of organizational providers in term of use of input of resources- the 'manner in which they use the resource in facts to create superior value' for target customers. The organizational providers are supposed to 'mobilize and integrate all the resources effectively to meet the needs of the customers. The basic idea is that effectiveness and efficiency in the use of resources should be in line with meeting the needs of the customers. All the staff should have an orientation that creating 'superior value' for customers depends upon the actual performance shown by them. It is to see that organizational provider integrates all types of resources efficiently without wastage to meet customers' needs.

Palmer (2000, 6-7p) mentions that 'marketing orientation is used to desire both – the philosophy of an organization (a business vs service philosophy) and the techniques which its uses... Marketing orientation is associated with 'a range of techniques (e.g. market research). The techniques of services marketing also includes pricing, the design of channels of distribution, motivation and control of service personnel and new product development.

Marketing, with its roots in business, has increasingly been recognized as an important concern of government organizations particularly to ensure the benefits that marketing approaches offer to meet the needs of citizens in a more responsive manner. The importance of marketing

in public service is likely to increase with the acceptance of a new management orientation that puts 'value' on the use of business-like approaches or private sector principles/tools in the functioning of the public sector. One can also notice that marketing represents relatively a new concern in government and it is seen that public sector operations do differ from that of the business/private sector. It is in this regard that one cannot expect an easy application of marketing approaches in the government. It is relevant here to see the differences between public and private sector models.

Marketing appears as an important concern particularly when a situation of competition prevails among providers of goods/services. If the services provided in a particular situation happen to be of monopolistic nature, then the adoption of marketing approaches usually by organizational providers comes in question.

One cannot expect that the marketing needs of public and private services appear the same. The "marketing needs of 'pure public service' can differ from those of the private sector" (Palmer 2000, 26 p). To him, the following differences appear worth taking (Palmer 2000, 26-27p).

A market exists in which buyers and sellers are free to choose with whom they wish to do business. This is the assumption based on the traditional definition of marketing. In the public sector, "choice is often neither available nor possible in practical terms. In effect, customers of social services cannot normally choose to receive their services from a provider other than which has been designated". On the other hand, many public sector service providers are "constrained in the choice of clients which they are able to target."

The aim of "most private sector organizations is to earn profits" (for owners). In contrast to these quantifiable objectives. "Many public sector services operate with relatively diverse and unquantified objectives, for example, a museum may have a scholarly objective in addition to

a more quantifiable objective of maximizing revenue.

The private sector is "usually able to monitor the results of its marketing activities as the benefits are usually internal to the organization." But, "many of the aims which public sector organizations seek to achieve are external and less statement or balance sheet cannot be produced in a way which is possible in a private..."

The "degree of discretion given to a public sector marketing manager is usually less than that given to a counterpart in the private sector". It is to see that "statutorily determined standards affect public sector organization to a greater extent than the private sector, for example, the marketing of educational facilities is constrained by the need to adhere to the national curriculum".

It is important to note that "many of the marketing mix elements which private sector organizations can tailor to meet the needs of specific groups of users are often not open to public sector marketers. For non-traded public services, price – if it is used at all – it is a reflection of centrally determined social values rather than the value of placed on a service by the consumer".

One can also observe "difficulty in marketing non-traded public services particularly to identify who the customer is". It is to note that "unlike most private services, the recipient is very often not the customer. In the case of state education, the customer could be viewed either as a child undertaking the education, the parents of the children or society or as a whole which is investing in a trained workforce of tomorrow."

Therefore marketing of higher education service places higher importance to prepare human resources required for today and tomorrow.

Marketing of higher education

Higher education is a new field for practice but may suffer from a lack of theoretical discourse. Early writers on educational marketing such as Gray (1991) and McMurty (1991) argued for the

domestication of the development of a home-grown philosophy of marketing, rooted in the context of education rather than being some form of imported wisdom (Quoted from Maringe and Gibbs, 2008, xi).

Maringes and Gibbs (2008, xii) put forward three counter-arguments with each other.

The first, they argue

... marketing is one way in which value can be exchanged and delivered. Education needs to embrace the marketing philosophy as an integral part of its development and delivery.

The second, they argue

Education should never be commoditized. It should not be seen as a piece of furniture in a shop with a price tag on it. It is both a process and product of interaction between the learner, the material of learning, the instructors or facilitators of learning, and the variety of resources used to aid the learning process. Yet, because it is so important... its value would be more effectively delivered from a marketing perspective.

The third, they argue

... marketing as a concept goes beyond the ordinarily accepted views of advertising and promotion. Thus, marketing is about the exchange and delivery of value between those who provide the educational service and those who seek to benefit from it.

From these arguments, it is derived that marketing is not a means to an end but as a process of building relationships based on trust and aimed at empowering the clients or customers of higher education.

The analysis revealed that institutions showcased organization development that provided specialized knowledge for students to leverage for economic gain. It highlighted curricula to develop and certify student entrepreneurs and presented co-curricula as pathways to the

higher education industry. It matters of equity, distinctiveness and balance in institutional purpose and values.

The above counter arguments reveal two kinds of views on the marketing of higher education: marketing for commodification and marketing for pro-education.

Marketing for commodification

Based on the philosophy of doing business, the marketing of higher education stresses its commoditization. Commodification refers to the production and delivery of goods and services for monetized exchange by capitalist firms in pursuit of profit. In Marxist political economy, commodification takes place when economic value is assigned to something that traditionally would not be considered in economic terms, for example, an idea, identity or gender (Maringe and Gibbs, 2008, 11p.). This definition of commodification highlights basically three components: goods and services are produced for exchange, exchanges are monetized and monetary transactions take place for the purpose of profit. Based on this concept of marketing, higher education seems as a kind of commodity which is only for profit or monetary gain. It emphasizes the strategies of marketing in which monetary gain is a precondition. Students are considered and taken care of as customers. Eagle and Breman (2007) argue that educators hurry up for the adoption of fees. They further argue that this tendency encourages them to demand more for their money either by virtue of an institution's reputation to secure an advantage in the job market or by the exchange value of their degree.

The remarks of Hassan (2003, 79p) against the commodification of higher education. In the last twenty years, however, [the university] has metamorphosed rapidly into a completely different institution- if such a perpetually mobile business-oriented entity may still be called an 'institution'. So radically has the university

changed that the typical academic, administrator or student from the 1960s and 1970s would barely recognize it today, it might seem to them to be more akin to a marketing company or advertising agency, so concerned is it with profit, product, client, market share and branding image.

Thus, it ignores social values, culture, and national interests. This kind of concept is triggered by the concept of globalization and liberalization policy adopted globally.

Marketing for pro-education

The mutually beneficial development of informed learning systems within which the development of relationships increases the opportunity for well-being and in which a duty of respect is owed and an obligation of fairness assumed (Marringe and Gibbs, 2008, 7p). The CORD Model seems appropriate for this concept of higher education marketing. The CORD model stands for Contextualization, Organization and Coordination, Research and Development, which provides a framework for raising the profile, the strategic focus and for developing a home-grown educational marketing philosophy.

Student's choices

Understanding the student's choices is essential for the marketing strategies of the universities. Importantly, from the student's point of view, deciding on a university is a high-risk, complex process (Le, Dobeles, and Robinson, 2019). The understanding of student choice is a key element for higher education marketing, the long-term success of the university and marketing strategy (Adefulu et al, 2019). This understanding can shape engagement and marketing relationships between the students and the university, providing relevant information and engaging to enhance the students' experience. The choices of the student are influenced by a wide range of factors such as the personality of the student, characteristics of the institution or

influential information sources (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Marketing Mix: A5P model of marketing public services

The marketing 'mix' involves a set of elements or ingredients usually used by organizational providers to promote and deliver services to customers. It is "the set of tools available to an organization to shape the nature of its offer to customers" (Palmer 2000, 7p). The set of tools is used by an organization to develop marketing approaches and strategies that ultimately result in meeting the customer needs as well as achieving high-quality organizational performance. The public service marketing model involves a marketing mix of a set of elements that an organization uses to structure and upgrade its service to customers. Doherty and Herne (2000, 128-33) have presented the A5Ps marketing model for public services. The model identifies 5Ps namely package, promotion, place, price and people. The model represents a framework consisting of five important ingredients which serve as 'tools' of an organization normally uses to give vision and direction to service providers.

Methods

The study is based on Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. In this article, all relevant articles and books related to higher education marketization were collected from Western and Non-western countries including Asian Context. Relevant variables of the education marketization such as education as a commodity, education as public goods, student choices and models of marketization reviewed. Based on the other theoretical pinning of higher education marketization, the Nepali cases were discussed. The data on higher education were retrieved from the University Grants Commission (2005-2019), National Statistical Offices and the Economy Survey 2019. The data were systematically

collected, tabulated and presented in graphs and maps by using GIS software.

Results and Discussion

Globally the paradox of higher education is a hot discourse either it is public goods or private goods in general and particularly after COVID 19 pandemic. In general, higher education is linked with employmentability so that it can contribute to national income. The higher education service is the process to mould the citizens' minds in line with the national interest. As the software of the mind of the citizens, it is difficult to segregate higher education either public goods or private goods or mixed. In the case of Nepal, how far employmentability is generated through higher education? What is their competency level after graduation? What is the student's choice level in Nepal? How marketization is going on? What is the profitability level in the public sector and private sectors due to higher education? These are crucial questions.

The constitution of Nepal define the national interest in Article 5, safeguarding freedom, sovereignty, territorial integrity, economic well-being and prosperity and others are the basic element of the national interest. Likewise, in Article 31, the right to education is defined as fundamental rights but missing the right to higher education. On the flip side, the state policies as defined in Article 51 cannot achieve without higher education. Education Policy 2019 defines the legal frameworks claiming "education for all" and "diversity management" as the motto of education policy.

In this legal constitutional framework of Nepal, the reality of higher education as a public good is entirely different from the constitutional explanation. The data of CBS(as of 2020) showed that 7.1 million people out of 20.7 million working age were employed whereas 908 thousand were unemployed. Sexwise, females were higher unemployed than males. Employment sector-wise,

67 percent of people were engaged in agriculture. The trade industry had the second largest share of employment (17.5 percent) followed by construction (13.8 percent). The informal sector's share is 62.2 percent. Occupation-wise 23.8 percent people were employed in service and sales occupations out of the total employed people whereas 43 percent were in elementary occupations.

Eventhough higher education is linked with employment, there are crucial issues associated with employmentability. Industrialist argues that they did not get proper human resource from the higher educational institution (HEI). The certificate given by the HEI does not provide the competency level of their industry. Higher education means a degree of self-employment generation as well. The unemployment trends show that higher education attained graduates aged 15-34 years groups were unemployed. These people are economically more prosperous. It means the investment of the public sector and private sectors is in vain.

The trend of higher education enrollment is relatively low in comparison to developing countries. The higher education enrollment rate in Nepal is about 15 percent whereas 30 percent in other developing countries.

The nature of University establishment in Nepal is unique. After the liberalization policy adoption by the government of Nepal in 1990, the door for the new universities establishment was open-up. Earlier there were only two universities - Tribhuvan University and Nepal Sankrit University established. All 11 Universities including 6 deemed Universities in Nepal are public universities because they are established through their respective act passed by the parliament of Nepal. Tribhuvan University, Nepal Sanskrit University and Rajarsi Janak are government-funded universities while Kathmandu University is non-governmental.

Likewise, Purbanchal University is managed by the stakeholders whilst Pokhara University is by the

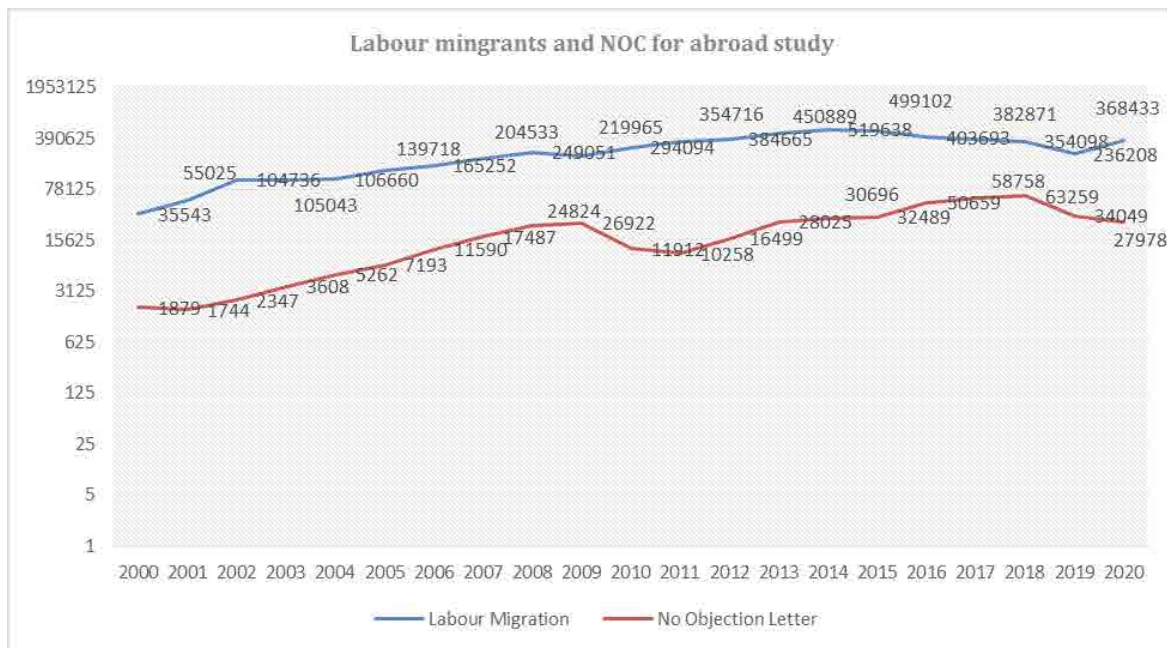


Figure 1. University-wise enrollment trends in Nepal

Source: University Grants Commission Reports 2006 to 2019

private sector. Agriculture and Forestry University and Mid-Western University are established in land granted model whereas Far-Western University is in a community participation model (See the respective university's Act for details). Whatever the nature of the establishment, all 1436 campuses of these universities are grouped as a constituent (10%), community (38%) and private (52%). Tribhuvan University alone shared 62 constituents, community 529 and private 551 out of 1436 campuses (UGC, 2020). It created confusion in their model of establishment and their operation through Constituent, Community and Private Campuses. Their philosophy is yet to marketize in society to increase their acceptability by the students. Despite their variation in nature, these universities were hardly contributing to the national interest due to the lack of the university's governance competency and students' choice. Thus, there is a trade-off between the liberalization policy in the education sector and the marketization philosophy in Nepal.

Regarding attraction of the students to the University, 78 percent of students were admitted

to Tribhuvan University while 22 percent share in the rest of the 11 universities including 6 deemed universities. Likewise, out of altogether 1436 campuses of these universities, 36 percent of students were enrolled in Constituent Campuses 27 percent in the Community and 37 percent in the Private Campuses (UGC, 2020). While analyzing the graduation rate of the enrolled students in HEI, it was just 19 percent as of the report of UGC 2018. This data showed that 80 percent of students either failed or dropped. This was the loss of time and investments by the government and private sector.

The traditional teaching methods in HEI and traditional syllabuses were found critical factors (Pokhrel, 2018). The newly formed universities as per the liberalization policy adopted by the government of Nepal also copied and pasted the syllabus of the Tribhuvan University even though government claimed these universities should focus on new areas of study (Pokhrel, 2018). Thus the innovations of HEI were lacking or missing which led weaker competency level of graduated

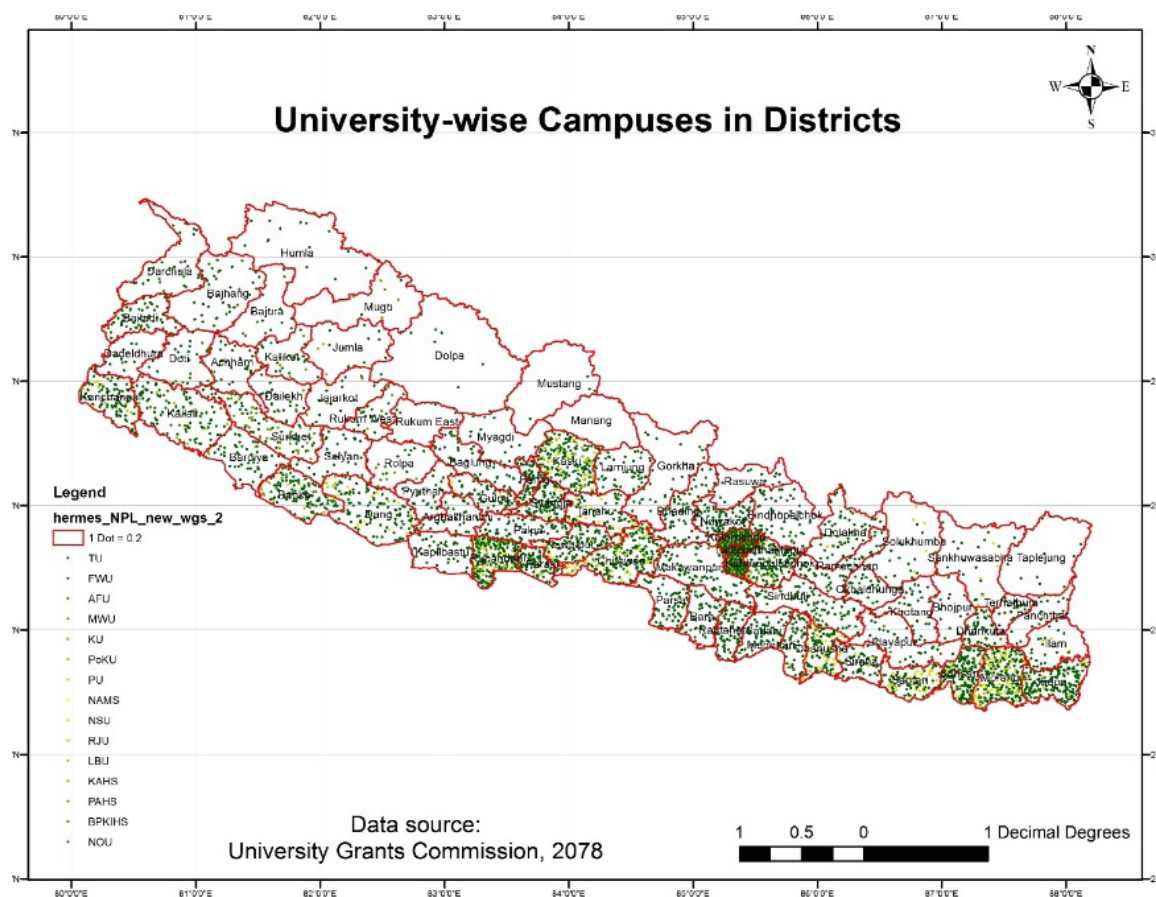


Figure 2. University-wise Campuses in District
 Source: University Grants Commission Reports 2006 to 2019

students. Thus, there was trade-off marketization due to liberalization policy and the competency level of the graduates.

Foreign labour migration and brain drain was also another critical issue when it concerns higher education marketing in Nepal. 'No objection letter' seeking a high rate immediately after +2 level shows that Nepali students don't prefer to study at Nepali University (MOF, 2020). For those graduates who flew out of the country, their starting job was as labour. It means their HEI certificate did not compete in the foreign labour market. Naturally, the income rate was low even though they had a higher degree. Likewise, the retention of those qualified graduates in Nepal was a critical issue. If the working environment was created politically, socially and economically, they would serve the country. Eventually, the environment for employmentability will be

promoted. They contributed to the national economy. The following graph depicts that the youth of Nepal leave the country either to labour or further abroad studies. Both types of human resources were prepared in Nepal but not contributed to the national economy except for remittance. The investment in higher education in Nepal did not create social assets which is the main motto of higher education as a public good. Thus, youth are found as a commodity in Nepal due to privatization and liberalization policy in Nepal.

Conclusion

Marketing of education services for the employmentability is found critical even though it has public and private goods-oriented philosophy after COVID 19 pandemic. Marketing of education services was crucial in Nepal due to confusion

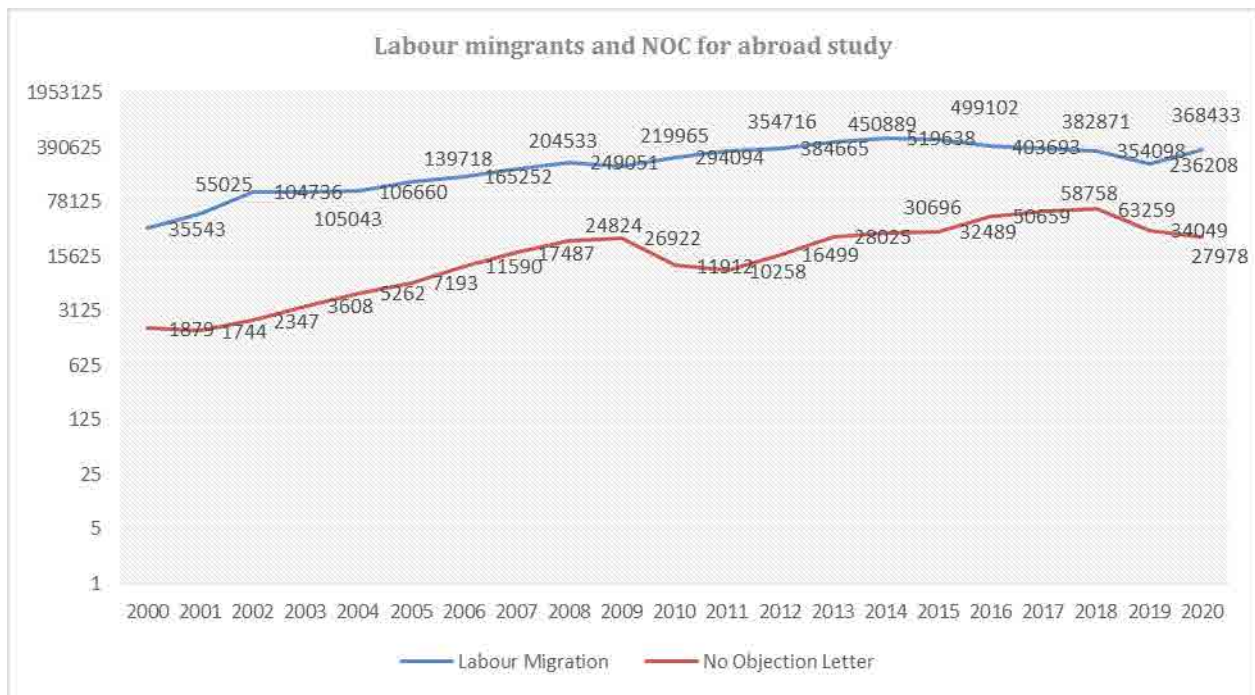


Figure 3. Labour migrants and NOC for abroad study

Source: Economic survey, 2010 and 2020.

about HEIs establishment model and their operations. Eventhough higher education service was not as like a commodity product, it was treated as a commodity in the private campuses of Nepal. Financial profitability was their basic philosophy of privately run campuses whereas it was not the objectives of constituent and community campuses. The interesting point of Nepali University is that these three categories of campuses are found within a single university. Overwhelming students' choices were Tribhuvan University either operated by constituent campuses or community campuses or private campuses. Tribhuvan University was the oldest and biggest University in Nepal. The syllabus of Tribhuvan University dominated to the rest of the Universities because these Universities' syllabuses were not found innovative as stated in their preamble due to copied and pasted culture. In Nepali Universities, all flavours of educational marketing were found in the single University of Nepal. The commodification of higher education through liberalization policy was started but not materialized successfully in

Nepal. The competency level of the graduated student was also not satisfactory due to a lack of employmentability. Thus marketing of higher education services is a very infant stage in Nepal due to the confusing modality of higher education philosophy in Nepal.

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