

***Editorial*****Nepal Open University - Dismantling Myths and Democrtizing Higher Education**

For nearly four decades, the concept of an open university in Nepal existed as a persistent but unrealized aspiration. As noted by Chouhan (2014), plans for a national open university failed to materialize for years. The establishment of Nepal Open University (NOU) in 2016, therefore, was not merely the launch of another institution; it was the culmination of a 37-year struggle to redefine the very frontiers of educational access in the country (Dahal, 2016; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022).

Historically, Nepal lacked any state-provided distance education infrastructure. A study on Tribhuvan University's blended e-learning found both teachers and students generally positive, though students were more accepting than teachers. Challenges like unreliable electricity, slow internet, and limited technical support hinder adoption. Successful implementation depends on addressing these infrastructure and resource barriers (Baral et al., 2024). While conventional universities expanded, a significant demographic remained on the margins. The persistent advocacy, notably from bodies like the Non-Resident Nepali Association in 2009, underscored a clear national imperative: quality education must transcend physical campuses.

NOU's founding law granted it a critical parity, bestowing the same legal status as any other national university (Khanal et al., 2023). Its mandate, however, was uniquely transformative: to leverage online platforms to promote education and research and to enhance access for those previously excluded (Khanal et al., 2023; Nepal Open University, 2018). The university's mission to foster a "knowledge society" and prepare youth for global and domestic markets is a direct response to contemporary demands.

Yet, from its initial offering of a limited range of courses in May 2018, NOU has

faced a familiar skepticism: the questioning of quality in online education (Khanal et al., 2023). This editorial confronts that misconception head-on with the most compelling evidence available: student outcomes.

Reports from NOU students themselves across diverse domains indicate that the quality they have gained is fully satisfactory. More critically, they are proving their competency in society, demonstrating that the education provided is not merely adequate but excellent. Their professional success is the most potent rebuttal to prejudice, proving that rigor is a function of curriculum, engagement, and support, not just physical presence.

The journey of NOU, from a 37-year-old idea to a functioning institution, is a narrative of catching up and leaping forward (Chouhan, 2014; Dahal, 2016). It addresses historical exclusion by embracing technological possibility. To doubters, we present the achievements of its graduates. To policymakers and the public, we argue that supporting NOU is an investment in Nepal's human capital at scale.

As NOU expands, the challenge ahead is twofold: to continually enhance its systems and to confidently amplify the stories of its students' successes. The university must shift the public narrative from questioning *if* quality can be delivered at a distance to showcasing *how* it is being done.

The long wait for an open university is over. The task now is to ensure that its promise reaches every Nepali who seeks to learn, grow, and contribute, anytime, anywhere. The future of an inclusive knowledge society in Nepal depends on it.

## References

- Baral, B., Hansson, H., & Larsson, U. (2024). Evaluating e-learning acceptance in Nepal: A case study of a Tribhuvan University affiliated college. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences Research*, 9(2), 139–156. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jbssr.v9i2.72422>
- Chouhan, T. (2014). Distance educations for computers undeveloped country like in Nepal: Prospects and challenges. *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 4(6), 463–467. <https://doi.org/10.7763/IJiet.2014.V4.451>

- Khanal, J., Gaulee, U., & Simpson, O. (2023). Higher education initiative challenges based on multiple frames of leadership: The case of Nepal Open University. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, 38(4), 366–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2021.1882296>
- Dahal, A. (2016, July 2). Way paved for establishing open university in Nepal. My Republica. <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/way-paved-for-establishing-open-university-in-nepal-1/>
- Khanal, J., & Ghimire, S. (2022). Practices enacted by Nepal Open University for equity and access: A qualitative study. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 26(3), 78–84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2022.2043480>
- Nepal Open University. (2018). *Vision mission & objectives*. <https://nou.edu.np/vission-mission-objectives>