

Exploring Strategic Management Practices of Higher Education Institutions in Nepal

Kedar Prasad Acharya

A Dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Submitted to

Office of the Dean

Faculty of Education

Tribhuvan University

Kathmandu, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

In the emerging scenario of higher education, strategic management practices have been developed as a comprehensive approach encompassing activities from the articulation of vision, mission, goals, and objectives to assessment of the environment, formulating, evaluating, and choosing strategies, and implementing them to enhance the performance of higher educational institutions (HEIs). This study examines the strategic management practices of selected HEIs in Nepal. A mixed-method design was employed, adopting a pragmatic approach to concurrently analyze and interpret qualitative and quantitative data. Evidence was gathered through interviews with senior leaders, academic managers, and policymakers; survey responses from academic managers, faculty members, and administrators; focus group discussions, and document analysis.

The literature on strategic management practices in higher education is reviewed. The study included six universities, six constituent campuses, one central department of Tribhuvan University, and 20 community-based affiliated campuses with established strategic plans, excluding provincial universities, medical academies, and for-profit HEIs in Nepal.

The findings indicate that most HEIs in Nepal demonstrate a modest level of strategic initiation, strategic planning, execution, and monitoring as well as evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation were weaker compared to initiation, planning, and execution. There were statistically significant differences in strategic management practices among HEIs. Variations in these practices among HEIs may be attributed to institutional type, leadership, and experiences of the research participants.

The purpose of preparing a strategic plan was found to be both practical and political, with a tendency to document plans primarily to secure funding, contributing to a gap between planning and implementation. Typically, a strategic plan is developed through a strategic plan preparation team with elements like environmental analysis, identification, evaluation, and selection strategies,



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including the development of vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Implementation of the plan followed, accompanied by a monitoring and evaluation process. HEIs implementing strategic management are found to have improved teaching and learning performance, adoption of research and innovative practices, market positioning and growth, stakeholders' satisfaction, and institutional sustainability.

Key challenges in strategic management practices are political interference, limited resources, inadequate strategic management expertise, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. Critical factors influencing successful adaptation include autonomy, institutional leadership, organizational culture, internal governance, robust information and communication systems, and political maneuvering. The mean value of these factors varied significantly across HEIs, likely due to differences in institutional characteristics. Similarly, a strong positive correlation was observed between strategic management practices and these critical factors.

The study proposes a strategic management framework for HEIs in Nepal drawing on insights from the literature review, the framework applied by HEIs in Nepal, findings from the research process, and the researcher's professional experience.



शोध सार

उच्च शिक्षाको उदीयमान परिदृश्यमा रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापनका अभ्यासहरू दूर दृष्टि (Vision), अभियान (Mission), लक्ष्य र उद्देश्यहरूको व्याख्या गर्नेदेखि लिएर वातावरणको मूल्याङ्कन, रणनीतिहरू बनाउने, मूल्याङ्कन गर्ने र चयन गर्ने, र तिनीहरूलाई कार्यान्वयन गर्ने गतिविधिहरू समेट्ने समग्र दृष्टिकोणको रूपमा उभिएको छ र यसले उच्च शैक्षिक संस्थाहरूको कार्यसम्पादनलाई सुधार गर्ने लक्ष्य राख्दछ। यो अध्ययनले नेपालका चयन गरिएका उच्च शैक्षिक संस्थाहरूको रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापनका अभ्यासहरूको खोजी गर्दछ। यो अध्ययनमा मिश्रित तरीकाको ढाँचा अपनाइएको थियो जहाँ गुणात्मक र परिमाणात्मक तथ्याङ्क एकैसाथ विश्लेषण र व्याख्या गर्न व्यावहारिक दृष्टिकोण अपनाइएको थियो। शैक्षिक क्षेत्रका वरिष्ठ नेताहरू, शैक्षिक व्यवस्थापकहरू र नीति निर्मातासँग अन्तर्वार्ता, शैक्षिक व्यवस्थापकहरू, शिक्षकहरू, र प्रशासकहरूबाट सर्वेक्षणका माध्यमबाट प्राप्त जवाफ, लक्षित समूह छलफलहरू र अभिलेखहरू विश्लेषणका माध्यमबाट प्रमाण सङ्कलन गरियो।

उच्च शिक्षामा रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन अभ्यासहरूसँग सम्बन्धित साहित्यको समीक्षा गरिएको छ। अध्ययनमा नेपालका ५ विश्वविद्यालय, त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयका ६ आङ्गिक क्याम्पस र एक केन्द्रीय विभाग, र २० वटा समुदायमा आधारित त्रिभुवन विश्वविद्यालयका सम्बन्धनप्राप्त क्याम्पसहरूलाई नमुनाका रूपमा समावेश गरिएको थियो भने प्रदेश विश्वविद्यालयहरू, चिकित्सा विज्ञान प्रतिष्ठानहरू र नाफा कमाउने उच्च शिक्षण संस्थालाई अध्ययनबाट बाहिर राखिएको थियो।

निष्कर्षहरूले नेपालका अधिकांश उच्च शिक्षा संस्थाहरूले रणनीतिक पहल, रणनीतिक योजना, कार्यान्वयन, र अनुगमन र मूल्याङ्कनको सामान्य स्तर प्रदर्शन गरेको देखाउँछ। अनुगमन र मूल्याङ्कन, पहल, योजना र कार्यान्वयनको तुलनामा कमजोर देखिए। उच्च शिक्षा संस्थाहरू बिच रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन अभ्यासहरूमा तथ्याङ्कीय रूपमा महत्वपूर्ण भिन्नता रहेको पाइएको छ र यी अभ्यासहरूको भिन्नताहरू उच्च शिक्षाका संस्थाहरूमा संस्थागत प्रकार, नेतृत्व, र अनुसन्धानमा संलग्न सहभागीहरूको अनुभवहरूमा निर्भर हुने कारणबाट भएको हुन सक्दछ।

रणनीतिक योजना तयार पार्ने उद्देश्य व्यावहारिक र राजनीतिक दुवै भएको पाइयो, जसले मुख्य रूपमा आम्दानी बढाउनका लागि योजना तयारमा झुकाव भएको देखाउँछ र योजना र कार्यान्वयन बिचको खाडल सिर्जना गर्नमा योगदान पुऱ्याउँछ। सामान्यतया, रणनीतिक योजना एक समर्पित रणनीतिक योजना तयारी टोलीको गठन, वातावरणीय विश्लेषण, र पहिचान, मूल्याङ्कन, र चयन, दृष्टि, अभियान, लक्ष्य र उद्देश्यहरूको विकास सहित बनाइन्छ। कार्यान्वयन पछि, अनुगमन र मूल्याङ्कन प्रक्रिया सगसगै गरिन्छ। रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन कार्यान्वयन गर्ने उच्च शिक्षा संस्थाहरूले पढाइ र सिकाइ, अनुसन्धान र नवप्रवर्तन, बजारको स्थिति र वृद्धि, सरोकारवालाहरूको सन्तुष्टि र संस्थागत दिगोपनमा सुधार गरेको पाइएको छ।



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रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन अभ्यासमा पहिचान गरिएका प्रमुख चुनौतीहरूमा राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप, स्रोतहरूको सीमितता, अपर्याप्त रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन विशेषज्ञता, र अपर्याप्त सरोकारवालाहरूको संलग्नता हुनु रहेको छ । रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापनमा सफल अनुकूलनमा प्रभाव पार्ने महत्वपूर्ण तत्वहरूमा स्वायत्तता, संस्थागत नेतृत्व, सङ्गठनात्मक संस्कृति, आन्तरिक शासन, प्रभावकारी सूचना र सञ्चार प्रणालीहरू, र राजनीतिक कौशल (Strategic maneuvering) समावेश छन् । यी तत्वहरूको औसत मानमा उच्च शिक्षा संस्थाहरू बिचमा उल्लेखनीय रूपमा भिन्नता देखिएको छ, जुन संस्थागत विशेषताहरूको कारणले हुन सक्छ । त्यसरी नै रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन अभ्यास र यी महत्वपूर्ण तत्वहरू बिचमा मजबुत सकारात्मक सम्बन्ध देखा पर्‍यो ।

साहित्य समीक्षा, नेपालका उच्च शैक्षिक संस्थाहरूले अवलम्बन गरेको ढाँचा तथा अनुसन्धानका क्रममा हासिल भएको संज्ञान र व्यक्तिगत अनुभव समेतमा आधारित यो अध्ययनले नेपालका उच्च शिक्षा संस्थाहरूको लागि एक रणनीतिक व्यवस्थापन ढाँचा प्रस्ताव गरेको छ ।

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this study, entitled “Exploring Strategic Management Practices of Higher Education Institutions in Nepal” is based on my own original research work. In-text citations and references have been provided for all supporting literature and resources. The results presented in this study have not been submitted elsewhere for the award of any degree.

I understand that my dissertation will become part of a permanent collection of Tribhuvan University Library. My signature below authorizes the release of my dissertation to any reader upon request for scholarly purposes.

Kedar Prasad Acharya

PhD Research Scholar

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother who has nurtured me to come to this stage. I also dedicate this dissertation to my father in honor of his contribution to my career even at difficult times.



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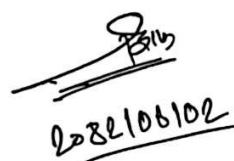


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The undersigned certifies that Mr. Kedar Prasad Acharya has prepared a Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Exploring Strategic Management Practices of Higher Education Institutions in Nepal" under my supervision. He has completed his dissertation within the prescribed timeframe and has fulfilled the standard requirements for a Ph.D. Therefore, I recommend the dissertation to the Research Committee of the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University for approval for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Education

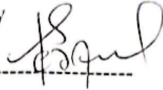
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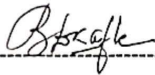
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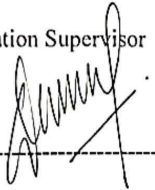
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Prof. Bed Raj Acharya, PhD
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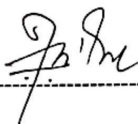



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Kedar Prasad Acharya

PhD Research Scholar

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFU	Agriculture and Forestry University
B.S.	Bikram Sambat
CBAC	Community Based Affiliated Campus
CMC	Campus Management Committee
FY	Fiscal Year
GoN	Government of Nepal
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HERP	Higher Education Reforms Project
HMG	His Majesty the Government
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IQAC	Internal Quality Assurance Committee
KU	Kathmandu University
MOEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MWU	Mid-West University
NESP	National Education System Plan
NPC	National Planning Commission
PCL	Proficiency Certificate Level
PokU	Pokhara University
PU	Purvanchal University
QAA	Quality Assurance and Accreditation
SHEP	Second Higher Education project
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
SMP	Strategic Management Practices
TU	Tribhuvan University
UGC	University Grants Commission
VC	Vice-Chancellor
VMGO	Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives
WB	World Bank
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

Introduction

This chapter presents the context of the study. It proceeds with problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. A discussion of the issues stemming from the research questions to be addressed by the study forms the body of the chapter. It further presents the significance and delimitations of the study. The concluding part of the dissertation report has been organized into seven chapter.

Setting the Scene

HEIs are complicated and stable institutions deeply embedded in the knowledge industry, having undergone significant evolution and adoption over time. Their primary mandate is to equip individuals, particularly students, with competitive qualifications essential for marketability, ongoing skill enhancement, and active participation in societal affairs. As repositories and generators of knowledge, HEIs play a pivotal role in the creation, testing, and dissemination of innovative ideas, thereby fostering economic development. They are also instrumental in producing skilled human resources, contributing to economic growth and indigenous technological advancement (Thys-Clément & Wilkin, 1997).

Universities hold a critical position within society, as underscored by the findings of the inaugural Global Colloquium of University Presidents (2005). Modern societies increasingly rely on universities to uphold and transmit historical knowledge to future generations, educate upcoming citizens and professionals, and drive the discovery of new knowledge that challenges existing paradigms. Additionally, universities function as catalysts for economic progress, fostering technological innovation, artistic creativity, and addressing pressing global issues like poverty, disease, and environmental degradation (Doyle, 2005, p. 44).

Romer (1986) emphasizes that the primary driver of economic development lies in the expansion and dissemination of knowledge, a responsibility that HEIs should shoulder. They significantly contribute to national and community development efforts by pursuing excellence in teaching, research, and service (Cummings, Locke, & Fisher, 2011). This role is globally recognized, with HEIs playing a vital role in social and economic development across the globe (OECD, 2007; Pillay, 2011).

The evolving global landscape across ecological, political, socio-cultural, and technological dimensions requires that HEIs continuously adapt their goals, business models, and systems to remain relevant. As environmental dynamics evolve, the roles of HEIs and their stakeholders also evolve (Keller, 2004). Governance, management, and leadership in HEIs are intricately linked, with governance setting the direction and implementing and necessitating leadership to serve as the core of this dynamic relationship.

Management within HEIs is a holistic process involving planning, organizing, directing, and controlling activities, drawing upon various management theories such as classical, human relations, decision science, system, management science, and contingency theories. It encompasses functions, processes, and systems across multiple domains, including academic, educational, economic and financial services, and external management.

Management in HEIs is influenced by competitive forces, resource constraints, accountability demands, and the need for strategic direction (Keller, 2004). Consequently, strategic management has supplanted traditional approaches, requiring HEIs to define vision, goals, and priorities and formulate appropriate implementation strategies across key areas such as quality assurance, internationalization, research funding, study programs, and infrastructure.

Traditional higher education management has been shaped by collegial and bureaucratic

perspectives, integrating both traditional and administrative management approaches. As emerging challenges of HEI management could not be properly addressed by conventional management practices, strategic management emerged as a tool to respond to these challenges.

Context of Higher Education Planning in Nepal

The formal journey of higher education planning in Nepal traces back the establishment of Tri-Chandra College in 1975 BS. However, the aspiration for a university in Nepal finds roots in 1948, evident from a university planning commission convened by Chandra Shamsher (Gorkhapatra, 2005 BS, cited by Parajuli, 2019). Despite the earnest endeavors, the fruition of a university remained elusive.

The emergence of democracy in Nepal with the downfall of the Rana regime underscored the imperative for a university to facilitate engagement on the global stage. In pursuit of expertise, the government sought counsel under the US Truman three-point agreement, leading to a recommendation for the establishment of a national university in Nepal, heavily influenced by Western university traditions.

The inception of Tribhuvan University (TU) in 1959 marked a milestone in Nepal's higher education landscape, aligning with the vision outlined in the first five-year plan (1951-1956), which advocated for a flagship university. Subsequent plans, notably the three-year plan (1957-1961), prioritized infrastructural development and library enhancement as a stepping stone to the foundation of a university of national height. The Comprehensive Education Commission of 1961 further emphasized the augmentation of higher education across diverse domains.

The radical overhaul was witnessed during the fourth plan (2028-2032) through the National Education System Plan (NESP-2028-32), vesting exclusive authority for higher

education in TU, marginalizing other stakeholders. Confronted with escalating demand and fiscal constraints, the private sector was permitted to establish affiliated campuses in Nepal. The inception of NSU, spurred by the recommendations from the Royal Commission report advocating for a multi-university framework, exemplifies this shift.

The restoration of democracy in Nepal following the People's Movement of 1990 heralded an era of neoliberal economic policies, catalyzing a surge in demand for higher education. This surge precipitated the establishment of new universities in Nepal, alongside the liberalization of foreign investment in higher education, including affiliations with foreign universities.

During the 1990s, several strategic reforms were initiated in Nepal's higher education at the national level. The Assessment of Tertiary Education project, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which was managed by the World Bank in collaboration with the Government of Nepal and TU, aimed at two broader goals: making tertiary education cost-effective and relevant to the national goals of development of human resources and macroeconomic growth; and preparing a policy framework that scrutinized 18 dimensions associated with higher education for the next decade for the tertiary education sector in Nepal (Bajracharya et al., 1995).

Drawing on its recommendations, the Nepal Higher Education Project: 1994–2000 (NHEP) was initiated to overhaul higher education, emphasizing decentralization. This initiative focused on reforms in curriculum, infrastructure development, and academic and financial management, while also supporting the creation of a strategic plan for TU to expedite the reform process. The Second Higher Education Project (2007-2014) was designed to

enhance the quality, efficiency, and relevance of planning and executing a strategic plan at the HEI level, on the one hand, and implementing quality assurance and accreditation, on the other.

Similarly, the Higher Education Reform Project (2015-2020) has been implemented by supporting national programs in higher education, focusing on systematic reforms in quality, relevance, equity, and efficiency, which also encapsulate strategic planning in higher education. Further, the Nurturing Excellence in Higher Education Program (2021-2025) aims to increase equitable access to quality higher education, align higher education with labour market needs, enhance governance capacity, regularity provisions, and financing of higher education, and strengthen digitalization of higher education. All these projects have continued a trajectory of reform through themes of 'decentralization', 'autonomy', 'academic autonomy', 'deemed to be university', and 'reform'.

At the university level, strategic planning practices are of paramount importance, guided by long-range plans, annual budgets and programs as envisioned by the university acts in Nepal. HEIs prioritize strategic planning, aligning reforms with Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) principles, and emphasizing 'decentralization,' 'autonomy,' 'reform,' and 'development.'

Reflecting on insights gleaned from decades of planning initiatives, education commissions' recommendations, and WB-funded projects, strategic planning practices have now been an integral part of Nepal's higher education landscape since 2000. However, scanty research exploring these practices underscores the need for more in-depth investigation into strategic management practices in Nepal.

Critical Issues and Challenges in Higher Education of Nepal

Despite reform initiatives through external funding, higher education in Nepal faces significant challenges in meeting the demands of the economy's human resources (WB, 2015, p. 1). These challenges, highlighted by institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2015), the WB (WB, 2015, 2021), and the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MOEST, 2019), occur at both national and institutional levels. ADB (2009) emphasized the government's passive role, the politicization of higher education, and bureaucratic rigidity as major hindrances to Nepal's higher education system.

Critical issues plaguing higher education in Nepal include its misalignment with labor market needs, weak governance structures, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and affiliation and accountability systems. Insufficient resources contribute to weak competitiveness, limited industry connections, and compromised quality. Furthermore, access and equity issues persist, alongside deficiencies in governance and management, collaboration and competition challenges, inadequate funding, and a lack of focus on research (ADB, 2015; WB, 2015; WB, 2021; MOEST, 2019).

The fifteen-year plan from 2019/20 to 2023/24 highlighted major concerns such as the failure to produce human resources suitable for a knowledge-based economy, a lack of emphasis on research, governance system shortcomings, high rates of brain drain, and mismatches between produced human resources and market demand, resulting in unemployment among qualified individuals (NPC, 2024). To address these issues, the plans have outlined vision, goals, objectives, strategies, and operational policies.

The national education policy (2019) has identified key problems in higher education in Nepal: ineffective governance systems, the mismatch between employment and higher

education, rising rates of educated unemployment, low competitiveness and productivity and research orientation, inadequate financing, poor quality, limited access to science and technology education, and brain drain (MOEST, 2019, pp. 4-5). The policy provided a comprehensive framework covering the vision, mission, objectives, strategies, policies, and action plans, along with responsibilities for implementation, institutional provisions, economic aspects, legal provisions, monitoring and evaluation framework, and risk management measures.

The ADB (2016a & 2016b) has recommended several measures to address these challenges, including depoliticizing higher education, establishing a long-term investment strategy, granting HEIs greater autonomy with increased accountability, diversifying revenue sources, emphasizing the relevance of higher education, setting quality standards, investing in information and communication technology (ICT), and formulating comprehensive higher education laws.

Strategic Management as a Response to Emerging Challenges

As stated earlier, external environmental factors also contribute to the challenges faced by higher education. Both the government and institutions have initiated efforts to address these challenges, with the government formulating education policies, long-term plans, and annual plans, and institutions developing strategic plans under the guidance of the University Grants Commission (UGC) or based on immediate needs. This dual approach prioritized strategic planning at the institutional level, leading to the formulation of strategic plans by universities and other HEIs in Nepal.

Globally, HEIs encounter a myriad of challenges stemming from economic, regulatory, and social pressures, spread out environmental, structural, interpersonal, and cultural

dimensions (Bess & Dee, 2008a). Firstly, there has been a global surge in demand for higher education, driven by factors outlined by Johnstone (2015), including demographic shifts resulting from high birth rates and increased college enrollment, as well as increasing public recognition of education's role in driving economic progress, international competitiveness, and societal well-being. Additionally, private demand for higher education has surged due to greater awareness of enhanced employment opportunities, social status, and personal empowerment (Johnstone, 2015).

At the dawn of the 21st century, higher education underwent a transformation and is now viewed as a semi-public good straddling both public and private spheres (Tavernier, 2005; Keller, 2008). In today's knowledge-driven society, graduates benefit significantly from higher education, yet governments worldwide struggle to fully fund it, shifting the burden to users (Jenkner & Hillman, 2004). Consequently, the cost of higher education has outpaced inflation, primarily due to rising faculty expenses and reduced state funding, leading to financial constraints for HEIs (Barber, Donnelly, Rizvi & Summers, 2013).

Universities contend with navigating through a growing body of scientific knowledge, necessitating a shift from knowledge accumulation to skill acquisition in handling information (Tavernier, 2005). Environmental shifts, including internationalization, privatization, and the ICT revolution, have ushered in a competitive market for higher education provision, requiring HEIs to be adaptive to remain competitive.

Government policies have evolved from traditional state-centric regulations to a multi-actor model encompassing privatization and decentralization (Nickel, 2011a; 2011b). The ICT era has revolutionized teaching, learning, and institutional management in higher education (Keller, 2007). Yet, HEIs face the imperative to embrace transformative rather than

incremental change to leverage technological advancements (Donnelly, Rizvi & Barbar, 2013).

The evolving landscape of work necessitates continual updates of skills and knowledge, blurring the lines between education and employment (African Development Bank, ADB, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank ADB, 2018; Altbach & Peterson, 1999), posing challenges to integrating education and work activities effectively.

Similarly, accountability demands in higher education are rising, with stakeholders emphasizing productivity, efficiency, and quality assurance (Altbach & Patterson, 1999; Tavernier, 2005), requiring HEIs to demonstrate accountability in resource utilization and the quality and relevance of educational outcomes.

Visible changes in higher education, such as shifting student demographics and curriculum disintegration, underscore the need for strategic planning and directed change (Keller, 1983). However, HEIs, with their complex and enduring nature, face tensions between competing interests and organizational imperatives (Speziale, 2011a & 2011b; Middlewood and Lumby, 1998).

Given the above context, strategic management emerges as a response to the evolving higher education landscape, offering a structured approach to navigating demographic, technological, and economic shifts (Martin, 1992; Keller, 2008). Traditional administrative models are insufficient for addressing contemporary challenges, prompting HEIs to embrace strategic planning and management as a means of fostering innovation and adaptability.

Motivation for the Study

Around 26 years ago, I joined the UGC in Nepal, tasked with overseeing the funding of HEIs. At that time, a WB-funded project aiming to reform TU was initiated, with government funding channeled through UGC to TU. However, UGC's role in this project was minimal, as there was little value added to this initiation.

In early 2000, during a meeting at the MOEST, concerns were raised about the low level of funding in higher education. It was recognized that developmental projects through donors were necessary, leading to a decision for UGC to prepare a project concept note. Subsequently, a project concept note was prepared, with my involvement in providing input to its development.

This concept note was forwarded to MOEST, which initiated the task by approaching the WB, which commissioned groundwork on the project, covering research funding, reform funding, and QAA systems. The resulting project, known as the SHEP, largely reflected WB perspectives emphasizing the initiation of strategic planning in HEIs for WB support and mandating the statement of clear Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives (VMGO) within the QAA criteria.

As a part of support mechanism, I noted that most HEIs selected for the project support and QAA processes submitted their strategic plans. However, only a few plans were prepared and implemented. Subsequent rounds of projects followed a similar trajectory, with the current project also operating in a similar manner.

My interest in strategic management grew as I witnessed these developments in my professional place of work. Strategic management, defined as "the art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an

organization to fulfill its objectives," has become increasingly relevant in the higher education sector. Many HEIs have embraced strategic management to adapt to rapidly changing environments.

Globalization has further influenced HEIs, as noted by Friedman (2005), who highlighted the increased mobility of jobs, knowledge, and capital across borders. It is with my 25 years of involvement with HEIs that I have closely observed their strategic management practices. I have become skeptical about whether HEIs are preparing plans to address their core issues or simply chasing after funding opportunities and QAA certification at the cost of broader strategic alignment with global trends.

This concern has motivated my curiosity to explore the potential relationship between HEIs' strategic management practices and their academic impact. The prevailing belief in externally funded projects as a panacea for addressing higher education challenges, coupled with the assumption that QAA certification alone can address them needs to be challenged through a study like this related to the performance of HEIs.

I further argue that addressing current and future challenges in higher education requires a nuanced approach that goes beyond funding-driven strategic management. It is crucial to assess current practices, processes, critical factors, performance, and obstacles to explore ways for a more agile and effective future strategy, though hunting for funding may be considered a just initiative.

Statement of the Problem

The landscape of higher education in Nepal is undergoing significant transformation as institutions grapple with emerging challenges and strive for sustainable growth and prosperity. In response to shifting environmental dynamics, HEIs are required to develop and implement

strategic management strategies like those practiced in for-profit organizations. However, despite the critical role of strategic management in fostering organizational resilience and success, its application and consequently, its effectiveness in Nepali HEIs context has remained largely unexplored.

HEIs in Nepal have to navigate the complexities of their operational environments and therefore they have to face a myriad of challenges spanning from financial constraints, skills mismatch, and governance inefficiencies, to infrastructural inadequacies (WB, 2015; Martin Chautari, 2015). These challenges raise fundamental questions about the overarching aims of higher education and its role in producing responsible, skilled human resources for societal development. To address these challenges effectively, HEIs must adopt strategic management practices that can be tailored to their unique contexts and operational challenges (Kalebar & Mahadev, 2024; Fumasoli & Hladchenko, 2023).

While strategic management has been extensively researched and applied in business sectors globally, its translation into the realm of higher education remains understudied, particularly in the Nepali context. Despite the documented benefits of strategic management in fostering organizational innovation, enhancing performance, and addressing environmental changes, its potential within Nepali HEIs has not very much known when we delve into the problem and practices of higher education in Nepal.

Near absence of empirical research on strategic management practices in Nepali HEIs exacerbates the challenge of assessing their state of adoption and their impact on institutional performance. The existing gaps in literature concerns about our ability to ascertain the efficacy of strategic management in addressing the multifaceted challenges of Nepali HEIs.

HEIs have been engaging themselves in strategic planning since 2000 with very little research on peripheral aspects of strategic management in Nepali HEIs. This reflects a broader gap in our understanding of organizational management, indicating that there is a lack of research-based evidence regarding the practices of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal.

Literature in strategic management abounds in Western contexts (e.g. Angiola, Bianchi & Damato, 2019; Martin, 1992, Keller, 1983;), but its applicability and effectiveness in non-Western, particularly Nepali HEIs, has largely remained unexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to address these knowledge gaps by undertaking a comprehensive exploration of strategic management practices in Nepali HEIs. Critical evaluation of the adoption, implementation, and use of strategic management frameworks is expected to provide valuable insights into the efficacy of strategic management in enhancing institutional performance and addressing the challenges related to it. Misalignment or nonalignment between strategic planning and its implementation practice can be brought into focus through such study, which is expected to help reduce the misalignment.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore strategic management practices of HEIs in Nepal through an assessment lens. The specific objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

1. To explore the extent of adoption and application of strategic management in the HEIs
2. To explore critical factors that influence the adoption of strategic management by HEIs
3. To assess strategic management performance of HEIs in Nepal and its relation with institutional performance.

Research Questions

The study addressed following research questions:

1. To what extent strategic management practice has been applied in HEIs in Nepal?
2. What processes and tools are used in formulating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating strategies in HEI?
3. How do critical factors influence the degree of adoption and application of strategic management?
4. What are the challenges of strategic management in Nepal?
5. What is the relation of strategic management with institutional performance of HEIs in Nepal?
6. What can be the framework for improving planning and implementation of strategic management practice in HEIs?

Rationale of the Study

As this research delves into the intricacies of formulating, implementing, evaluating, and monitoring strategies within the realm of higher education in Nepal, it is expected to contribute valuable insights to the existing knowledge base on strategic management within the unique context of Nepali HEIs.

This study endeavors to explore the state of strategic management in Nepali HEIs, identify key challenges and opportunities, and offer actionable insights to inform policy, practice, and future research directions in the field of higher education management. Through rigorous empirical investigation, it seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and practice in strategic management within the Nepali higher education context. The suggested

framework is also an input to the expected initiation of making strategic management a meaningful practice.

The research is of paramount significance as it has the potential to augment the understanding of strategic management practices and their application by HEIs in Nepal. As an iterative learning process, the research purports to acquire novel knowledge and perspectives in the field of strategic management. Through data analysis and a thorough review of relevant literature, the research builds upon prior findings, fostering continuous advancement in comprehending timely development in the area of strategic management.

Additionally, this research underscores the importance of developing critical thinking skills among researchers, ultimately enhancing their problem-solving capabilities and facilitating informed decision-making processes based on evidence derived from strategic management practices of the Nepali higher education system. Embracing the philosophy of organizations as learning systems, the study findings can be aligned with the perspective championed by Tabatoni, Davis, and Barblan (2000), which emphasizes the role of strategic management in educating institutional actors and change agents so far as their role in developing and implementing strategic management practices is concerned.

The Government of Nepal (GoN) has articulated a vision for the country “Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali” with defined goals at both the national and sectoral levels. It is my observation that, this research recognizes and contributes to the development of the pivotal role of HEIs in translating these aspirations into reality. The study acknowledges the necessity of intervention and alignment of strategic management at the institutional level to realize the national priority objectives. By documenting and framing the concept of strategic management within the specific context of HEIs, the research contributes to enriching existing theories and

models. Furthermore, it aims to raise awareness among HEI leaders regarding the importance of establishing a practical framework for organizational effectiveness, aligning their services with national goals. The study intends to feed the policy makers and programmers to bring into action what they think is appropriate about strategic management.

Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on strategic management in higher education by bridging the gap between theory and practice and offering practical recommendations for policymakers, institutional leaders, and practitioners. By uncovering the strategic management practices prevalent in Nepali HEIs, this research endeavors to inform evidence-based decision-making processes and facilitate the development of contextually relevant strategies to promote the long-term sustainability and prosperity of Nepali HEIs. In the same way, a practical framework for making strategic management of HEIs effective is presented as a reference that can go a long way to translate the spirit of management into action.

Delimitations of the Study

Every undertaking has boundaries defined by time, cost, and quality, among other aspects. To control the quality of the study, the researcher has to have some delimitations before the start of the study to marshal time and resources into the focus area. The boundaries of this study are HEIs, i.e., universities, affiliated campuses, and constituent campuses of Nepali universities, which have developed strategic plans to marshal time and resources into the focus area. Thus, the HEIs that have not developed strategic plans, provincial universities and medical academics, and for-profit-making private campuses along with foreign university affiliated HEIs have not become part of the study.

Organization of the Dissertation Report

This dissertation contains three generic parts, which a dissertation usually contains: a prefatory part, the main body, and a supplementary part. The main body of this dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The organization of the study has been portrayed in Figure 1 along with a brief overview of each chapter.

Firstly, the first introductory chapter of the study contains the introductory part of strategic management in higher education, a problem statement including research objectives and questions, the significance and delimitations of the study, and the organization of the dissertation.

The second chapter, review of related literature, contains a brief on the higher education system in Nepal with a detailed discussion on the formal history of higher education in Nepal to the present, its context, and emerging challenges. The other part of this chapter is associated with the theoretical and historical roots of strategic management. It covers aspects of critical factors of strategic management in higher education and its problems in higher education.

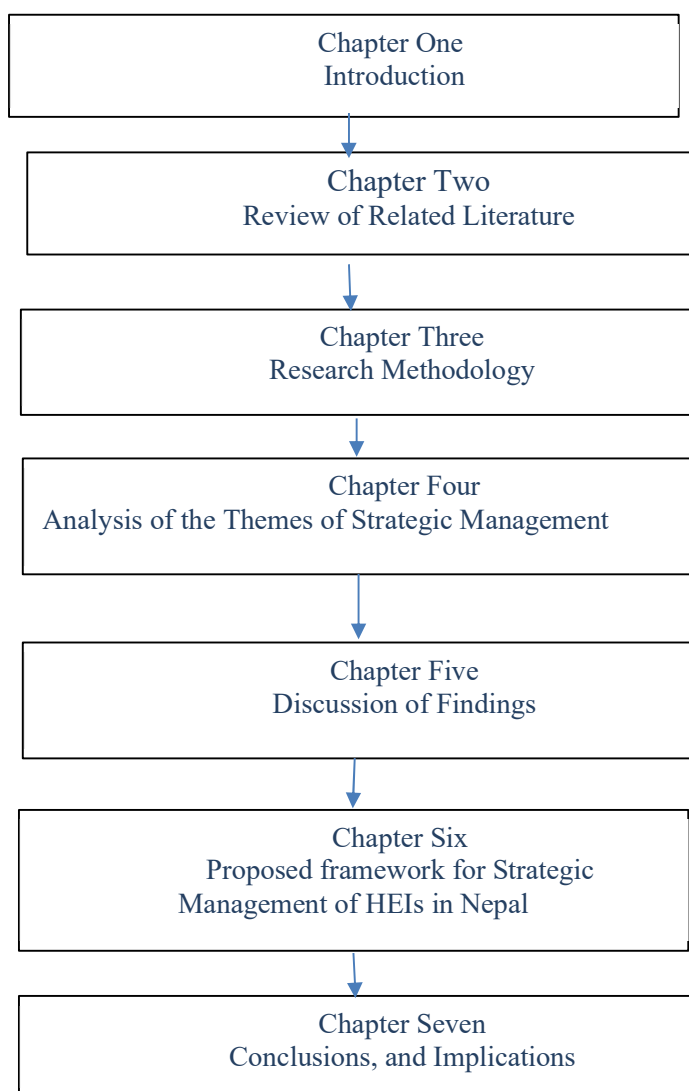
Chapter three elaborates on the research methodology as applied in the study. More specifically, this chapter deals with the philosophical underpinnings of the study, theories guiding the study, overall research design, population and sampling framework, nature and sources of data, data collection methods and procedures, reliability, validity, and trustworthiness of data, data analysis tools and techniques, framework for data analysis, and finally, ethical considerations.

Chapters four and five deal with the specific themes of strategic management. Specifically, chapter five deals with discussion of major findings, whereas chapter six of the

dissertation presents the proposed framework for strategic management of HEIs in Nepal. The framework comprises national goals and objectives as set by the states' HEIs.

Figure 1

Structure of the Dissertation



The final chapter, titled "Conclusions, and Implications," concludes the dissertation by summarizing the entire study and outlining findings-based conclusions and implications. Finally, the resources cited in the main body have been referenced in the supplementary part of the dissertation, along with the appendices for additional details relevant to the study.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of the existing literature is conducted to examine the foundational principles and theories of strategic management that are directly relevant to the current study. The review specifically focuses on the historical development and core concepts of strategic management, including its application within the higher education system in Nepal. This exploration covers key aspects of strategic management, such as strategy formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control.

Furthermore, the chapter delves into the tools employed in strategic management, explores the challenges faced by HEIs in implementing strategic management practices, and examines the factors that influence strategic management's effectiveness. Additionally, it investigates the relationship between strategic management and institutional performance, highlighting their interconnectedness and impact on the success of HEIs. The review is completed by doing theoretical, thematic, and empirical reviews.

Theoretical Review

This subsection deals with a theoretical review of literature related to strategic management in higher education.

Conceptual Foundations of Strategy

The term "strategic" is derived from the Greek verb "stratego," which means "to plan for the defeat of one's enemies through the use of resources" (Keller, 1983). In Greek, the word for "general of the army" is "strategos," and any tactics employed by a general are assumed to be part of a strategy. However, strategy is not limited to warfare and is widely employed in fields such as

international relations, business, and various sectors of organizations in today's complex environment.

There is a lack of a universally accepted definition of strategy (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lambel, 1998; Wit & Meyer, 2014; Chaffee, 1985) due to its multidimensional and situational nature, which leads to variations across sectors and industries. Most definitions are descriptive, although some take an operational standpoint. In his influential work on strategy and structure, business historian Chandler (1962) defines strategy as "the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out those goals."

Hax and Majluf (1996) highlight that strategy plays a vital role in guiding organizations through change, and they outline six crucial aspects that should be considered when defining strategy. These include decision coherence, establishment of organizational purpose, competitive domain definition, response to external and internal factors, managerial task differentiation, and intended contributions to stakeholders.

Strategy is regarded both as a "consistent pattern of action" and as a "tool of management control." The former view acknowledges the tradition of collegiality in higher education, while the latter relates to the shift from collegiality to managerialism (SUMUP Consortium, 2011). As a forward-looking process, strategy involves establishing targets, developing means to realize those targets, and establishing direct relationships with established goals and objectives (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002).

Mintzberg (1987) presents multiple facets of strategy. He defines strategy as a plan—a consciously and purposefully intended course of action, a set of guidelines to deal with a situation while looking ahead. Strategy can also be seen as a ploy, a specific maneuver intended to outwit

an opponent or competitor. Additionally, strategy can manifest as a pattern, exhibiting consistent behavior over time or a stream of deliberate and emergent patterns observed when looking back at past behaviors. Furthermore, strategy can be understood as a position that involves locating an organization within its environment or niche. Lastly, strategy can be considered a perspective, encompassing the internal view of the organization and the vision of the strategist while perceiving the world at large (Mintzberg, 1987).

Quinn (1980) describes strategy as the model or plan that integrates an organization's main objectives, policies, and sequences of actions into a coherent whole. Certo (1994) emphasizes that a well-structured and articulated strategy should possess the following characteristics:

Establish a clear course of action.

Understand its strengths and weaknesses in comparison to its competitors.

Devote its hard-earned resources to projects that make use of its set of core competencies, the organization's primary skills.

Recognize factors in the political and social environments that require close attention.

Recognize which competitive actions require immediate attention.

According to Schendel and Hofer (1979), the fundamental characteristic of an organization that aligns with its environment is referred to as strategy (p. 4). Strategy involves the creation of a unique and valuable position through a distinct set of activities, as stated by Porter (1996, 2000). This process requires making trade-offs and establishing coherence among the organization's activities. Andrews (1987) defines strategy as the pattern of decisions within a company that determines and reveals its objectives, purposes, or goals. It encompasses the formulation of principal policies and plans to achieve those goals, as well as defining the scope of

the company's businesses, its economic and human organization, and its intended contributions to shareholders, employees, customers, and communities, both economically and non-economically.

According to Andrews (1987), strategy encompasses objectives, purposes, goals, and the policies and plans necessary to achieve them. It serves as the common thread connecting an organization's activities and products or markets, defining the fundamental nature of the business it is currently engaged in and its intended future direction (Ansoff, 1979). Bryson (2018) describes strategy as a collection of goals, policies, programs, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that delineate the identity, actions, and motivations of an organization. Van de Steen (2016), from a business perspective, argues that strategy comprises the smallest set of choices that optimally guide other choices. Mintzberg (1978) characterizes strategy as a pattern emerging from a series of decisions made over time.

Emergence of Strategic Management

In ancient history, strategic management evolved out of warfare. The most frequently referred to oriental strategy manual is Sun-Tzu's Art of War (Haung, 1993). In Oriental society, there are various strategies mentioned in different literature. According to Aithal & Acharya (2016), Vedic philosophy has four basic goals of life: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma*, and *moksha*. As time changes, it can be divided into four main periods: the Vedic period, the Epic period, the Sutra period, and the Scholastic period. In these periods, various strategies have been evidenced, ranging from Blue Ocean, Red Ocean, Green Ocean, Black Ocean, and White Ocean strategies (Aithal and Acharya, 2016). In contrast to the east, strategic management has evolved in western literature in warfare and populated the business sector as a most effective management tool since the early 1960s in North American literature.

Phases of Strategic Management

Gluck, Kaufman, and Walleck (1982) mention that strategic management evolved through four phases, namely, basic financial planning, forecast-based planning, strategic planning, and strategic management and definition, which underwent changes as the phases moved progressively.

Basic Financial Planning

The first phase of strategy evolution is the basic financial planning that began in the 1950s, when the business organization was underway to discover the techniques for searching for a way to decide on how and where the organization would do its future business. In this phase, financial planning, operational control, and the annual budget are the functional focuses that are the basic characteristics of strategic management. The ultimate goal of basic financial planning is *to meet the budget*. Managers seek better operational control by meeting annual budgets and comparing their performance to budgetary targets.

Forecast-based Planning

Forecasting-based planning, also known as long-range planning, is based on forecasting the environmental trend for the future and taking actions accordingly. Forecasting cannot assure the future, but it provides better information about the future. Thus, forecasting is important, and it should be articulated, discussed, debated, evaluated, challenged, modified, and used as we make decisions to achieve a more desirable future (Morrison, Renfro & Boucher, 1984). The goal of forecast-based planning is *to think about the future*.

Long-term planning, according to Morrison, Renfro, and Boucher (1984), consists of four main steps: monitoring the environment, forecasting, goal setting, and implementing, which are all designed to answer questions. 1) What is the current state of the organization? 2) In what

direction is it heading? 3) Where do we want to go? And what does it need to change to get where it wants to go?

Strategic Planning

Outward-looking planning is strategic planning when managers seek to be more market-responsive and competitive, taking into account the environment through situational analysis and competition assessment. The process by which managers jointly formulate the strategy by evaluating strategic alternatives is known as strategic planning. Dynamic resource allocation is an important task for management, and the goal is to think strategically. Planning is the process of designing the future and devising means to achieve it through decision-making processes. For Lockwood (1984), planning is the continuous and collective exercise of foresight in the integrated process of informed decisions affecting the future.

Strategic planning requires a thorough understanding of the environment. Strategic planning is formed by combining long-term planning and environmental scanning and consists of six distinct stages. 1) scanning the environment, 2) appraising issues, 3) forecasting, 4) goal setting, 5) implementation, and 6) monitoring (Morrison, Renfro, & Boucher, 1984).

Strategic Management

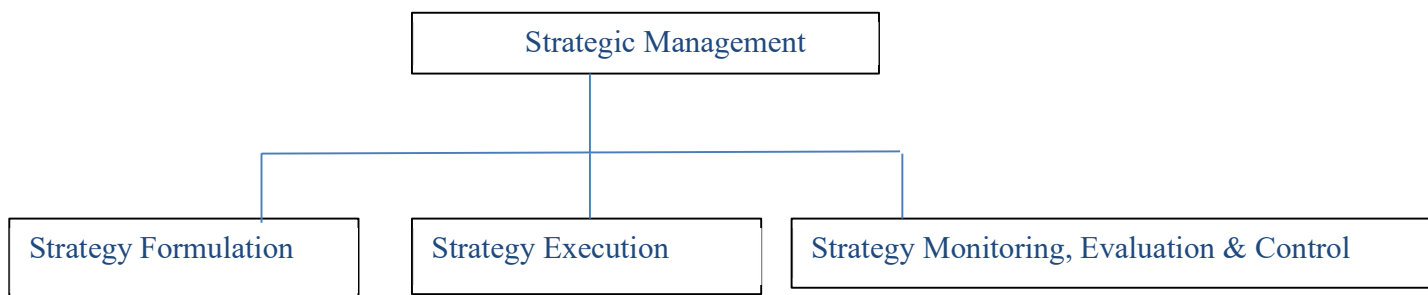
Strategic management is the embracement of the activities of strategy formulation, strategy execution, strategy M&E, and control. Three themes originally appeared in the 1990s, as mentioned by Dooris, Kelley, and Trainer (2004). The first theme, according to them, is a cultural-environmental political perspective tempered with a rational, deductive, formulaic approach to strategic planning. The second theme, as per them, is that strategic planning involves learning and creativity, challenging assumptions, and considering radically changing existing strategies and processes. It focused more on dynamism, flexibility, nimbleness, inventiveness,

and imagination. The focus of planners is on strategic thinking over strategic planning. Third, strategic management moves from formulation to implementation, as remarked by Benjamin Franklin (Well done is better than well said). Thus, strategic management is the scientific perspective that views strategic planning and management as systematically assessing the external environment and the pros and cons of numerous alternatives before selecting one as action, whereas the artistic perspective focuses on the strategist's imagination, creativity, and focus on innovation.

Essentially, strategic management involves redefining the trajectory of an enterprise (Rao, Rao, & Sivaramakrishna, 2009). This includes the processes of identifying the organization's mission and objectives, managing strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategic control. In other words, strategic management is the set of management decisions and actions that determine a company's long-term return. It includes environmental analysis (external and internal), strategy formulation (strategic or long-term planning), strategy implementation and assessment, and control (Wheelen, Hunger & Hoffman, 2016). It is the "art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives" (David & David, 2019). Certo (1994) states that strategic management is a continuous, cross-functional, iterative process aimed at ensuring that an organization is appropriately aligned with its environment

Figure 2

Strategic Management



Source: Wheelen, Hunger, & Hoffman, 2016; Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikuttu, 2012; David and David, 2019

Strategic management is a targeted approach aimed at guiding, motivating, and facilitating both internal and external stakeholders involved in an organization's development. Its primary objectives include defining and refining the organization's identity and reputation, assessing its relevance in a changing environment, and charting a course for sustainable long-term growth. This process involves leveraging existing capabilities while nurturing the organization's potential for further advancement. Further, it prepares people to project themselves into the future, i.e., to face new situations in the near future, at the cost of risk and uncertainty, when dealing with changes in structures, modes of action, role relations, and positions (Tabatoni, Davis, & Barblan, 2000). Byars, Rue, and Zahra (1996) mentioned that strategy is the determination and evaluation of alternatives available to an organization in achieving its objectives and mission and the selection of the alternative to be pursued (p. 18). By nature, strategic management is interdisciplinary and encompasses all the functional areas (external focus), the interactions of the organization with its external environment, the internal focus, resources, and capabilities on managerial activities, and the future direction of the organization (Coulter, 2013). Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) mention strategic management as a position, choices, and actions.

Strategic management is a systematic process for managing an organization and its future direction in relation to its environment in a way that will assure continued success as well as secure it from surprises (Ansoff, 1984; Berry, 1994). It focuses on the orchestration of all resources to create competitive advantage, a strategically chosen planning framework, a creative, flexible planning process, and a supportive value system and climate. It attempts to develop a greater sensitivity to the changing external world and assist the organization in thriving by capitalizing on existing strengths (Cyert, 1983).

Competent execution of a well-conceived strategy is not only a proper recipe for organizational success but also the best test of managerial success (Thompson & Strickland, 1996). People at all levels, not just top management, need to be involved in the strategic management process. Various writers portray strategic management and planning as the same. The researcher assumes that strategic management encompasses planning, implementation, M&E, and control.

Analytical Framework of Strategic Management

Different scholars have proposed various analytical frameworks for strategic management, but there is no consensus on a unified framework (Mintzberg, 1987; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lambel, 1998; Tavernier, 2005; Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington, 2008). Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lambel (1998) describe strategy through ten different lenses or schools of thought, while Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2008) use design, experiential, idea-based, and discourse lenses. Tavernier (2005) identifies frameworks such as the traditional SWOT analysis, the planning school, the learning school, and the entrepreneurial school.

Design School

The design school views strategy formation as a process of conception. It begins with assessing the current environment and employs SWOT analysis to develop a realistic and attainable mission statement. Objectives are then formulated, and continuous performance evaluation and feedback are integral to the process. This approach treats strategy development as a logical process that uses analytical and evaluative techniques to make clear strategic decisions (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2008).

Planning School

The planning school treats strategy formulation as a formal process, emphasizing the separation of thinking and doing. It involves detailed steps supported by data and technical analysis. The strategy is divided into sub-strategies, each with specific goals and budgets, and is controlled by robust mechanisms.

Positioning School

Tracing its origins to warfare strategy as described by Sun Tzu (1983), the positioning school views strategy formation as an analytical process. It focuses on selecting generic strategic positions based on economic and competitive analyses. Analysts play a crucial role in this school, providing calculations that inform managerial decisions.

Entrepreneurial School

In the entrepreneurial school, strategy formation is a mental process led by the chief executive, who acts as the primary strategist. The strategy is a personal construct of the leader, articulated through vision and inspiration. Strategic thinking involves a comprehensive view of the organization's environment (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Cognitive School

The cognitive school focuses on the mental processes of strategists. They develop knowledge structures—concepts, maps, schemas, and frames—shaped by past experiences. This school emphasizes how information is processed and how strategists perceive patterns (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Learning School

The learning school views strategy formation as a developmental process. It acknowledges the complexity of central planning and advocates for decentralized decision-

making. The learning framework emphasizes building institutional competencies to absorb, generate, and use new knowledge, transforming strategic management into an educational process (Tabatoni, Davis, & Barblan, 2000).

Power School

The power school sees strategy formation as a negotiation process, using power and politics to influence strategies that favor particular interests. It differentiates between micro-power (individual motivations) and macro-power (organizational and environmental influences) (Mintzberg et al., 1998) influences.

Cultural School

This school highlights the role of organizational culture in strategy formation. Culture binds individuals into a cohesive entity, and strategy emerges through social interactions and shared beliefs among organizational members. Understanding corporate culture is essential for effective strategy formation (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Environmental School

The environmental school treats external forces as central actors in strategy formation, rather than mere factors. The organization needs to respond to these external forces to ensure its growth and sustainability (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Configuration School

The configuration school views strategy formation as a complex, transformative process that combines various elements like content, statistics, dynamics, cognition, and politics. It integrates pieces from different schools to provide a comprehensive approach to strategy (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Among these schools, the first three (design, planning, and positioning) are prescriptive, focusing on what strategists should do. The other schools (entrepreneurial, cognitive, learning, power, cultural, and environmental) are descriptive, focusing on what strategists actually do. The configuration school integrates these perspectives to provide a holistic approach to strategic management. The choice of framework depends on the complexity of the organization and external influences, as well as the need for coherence and goal orientation (Tavernier, 2005). The configuration school, which integrates various strategic management perspectives, is particularly relevant to my research.

Models of Strategy

The conceptualization of organizational strategy can be categorized into one of the models described by Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lambel (1998), Chaffee (1985), and Bess and Dee (2008a). Particular thinking shapes the type of strategy sought by the thinker. It is a key question about how to marshal vision, fight for survival, and exploit opportunities based on a way of thinking. Mintzberg (1973) mentioned entrepreneurial mode, adaptive mode, and planning mode. According to Mintzberg (1973), the entrepreneurial mode becomes operational when one strong leader takes bold and risky actions on behalf of the organization, and the underlying characteristics are innovation, dealing with uncertainty, and brokerage.

Linear Model

A linear model reflects the assumption of rational decision-making. Chandler (1962) advocated a linear model of strategy. According to Chaffee (1985), planning entails methodical, directed, sequential action. According to Chandler (1962), strategy is developed through a sequential process that leads to a rational alignment of behaviors and goals. In this model, first, a plan is developed, which is then processed into action. The linear model is what Mintzberg

(1973) describes as a planning school. Both ends (goal determination) and means to achieve the determined goals are aspects of strategic decision-making (Chaffee, 1985).

Adaptive Model

Adaptive strategy is concerned with the development of available matches between the opportunities and risks present in the external environment and the organization's capabilities and resources for exploiting these opportunities (Hofer & Schendel, 1978). It is a nonlinear type of thinking. This strategy provides an important link between the organization and its environment (Hatch, 2013).

Interpretive Model

The interpretive model is based on a social construct, i.e., reality is socially constructed. According to Chaffee (1985), the organization is the collection of cooperative agreements entered into by individuals with free will. As a result, a strategy is an orienting metaphor designed to conceptualize and guide individual attitudes or organizational members (p. 5). As Chaffee (1985) affirms, "reality is defined through a process of social interchange in which perceptions are affirmed, modified, or replaced according to their apparent congruence with the perceptions of others." In this model, the focus is on participants and potential participants.

Emergent Model

The strategy that happens as an organization responds to changes in its environment is termed emergent strategy by Mintzberg (1994). In this model, a strategy is revealed through a retrospective assessment of past organizational behavior. The strategy is a sense-making process through which the organization identifies coherent patterns of activity (Mintzberg, 1994).

Symbolic and cultural models

According to Bess and Dee (2008a), the symbolic model suggests that organizational strategy reflects the values, beliefs, and assumptions of organizational members. Strategies that ignore important aspects of organizational culture are likely to fail.

The Post-Modern Model

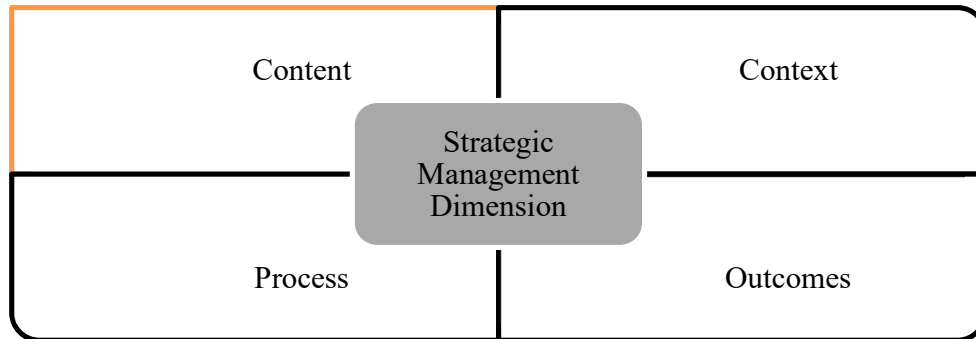
Similarly, postmodern perspectives raise critical questions regarding how power and privilege shape organizational strategies as it offers an alternative model for strategy development that embraces diversity and dissent (Bess and Dee, 2008a).

The conceptualization of strategy is in the minds of strategists. Understanding it by its stakeholders is another layer of understanding through the interpretation of the strategy, in which content, context, and process are vital. The researcher's understanding of the strategic model conceptualized by strategists, stakeholders, and others is shaped by their way of thinking and frame of reference regarding the phenomenon under study. This study aims to explore strategic management practices, and therefore, the integrative lens is suitable and applied accordingly.

Strategic Dimensions

There is a multiplicity of dimensions to strategic management (Dias, 2018; Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson, 2009; Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington, 2008). For Dias (2018), strategic management has three dimensions: content, process, and context. Okumus (2001) adds another dimension. According to Okumus (2001), the dimensions include 1) strategic content, 2) strategic context, 3) strategic process, and 4) strategic outcome, as presented in figure 3.

Figure 3

Strategic Dimensions

Source: Dias, 2018; Okumus, 2001; Hitt, Ireland, and Hoskisson, 2009; Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington, 2008

Strategic Context Dimension

The context dimension of strategic management includes internal, task, and external (or macro-environmental) context. The context may vary from organization to organization and industry to industry. The internal climate (organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational learning), the stakeholders, the industry environment, and the general social, cultural, political, economic, and legal environment set the context for strategic management.

Strategic Content Dimension

The contents of strategic management include vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives, strategies, and strategic actions. Similarly, execution, evaluation, and control are also parts of it.

The Process Dimension

Strategic management processes include strategic analysis, formulation, execution, evaluation, and control. These processes are logically interdependent and interconnected to each other to perform toward a common purpose.

The Outcome Dimension

The outcome of strategic management is the achievement of goals and objectives, expressed as tangible and intangible outcomes. What do we want to be in the future? What sort of institution are we, and what are we doing for whom? The extent of expectations (internal) and challenges as they relate to mission, vision, values, and priorities are briefly noted as:

Vision. One of the most significant components of a strategic plan is the institutional vision statement. It is an image of what might be, an ideal that is unique to the organization and recognizes dissatisfaction with the present. Visions are about dreams, hopes, and possibilities—in sum, a better future (Block, 1987). Vision is an inspirational and motivational statement, guiding us into the future. A vision statement answers the question, *"What do we want to become?"* A strategic vision outlines the future that the organization hopes to achieve (Wit & Meyer, 2014).

According to Certo (1994), an organizational vision encapsulates the organization's values and aspirations in the most general terms (p. 53). A vision is a succinct encapsulation of the institution's desired identity, its target audience, and the strategies it plans to employ to achieve its objectives (Luxon, 2005). The vision statement provides a clear depiction of the institution's future aspirations within a defined timeframe. Its primary focus lies in outlining the institution's envisioned strategic position and the key components of that position concerning the mission statement (Hinton, 2012).

Vision building is the process of crafting the organization's vision, which stems from leadership initiatives. The strategic vision, as described by Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, and Strickland (2013), encapsulates top management's perspectives on the company's long-term trajectory and delineates an optimal product-market-customer business mix for the future. This

strategic vision serves to orient the organization towards a specific direction, charting a strategic pathway and fostering commitment to future actions while shaping organizational identity.

Mission. A mission serves as a public declaration that outlines an organization's purpose, existence, and significance to both internal and external stakeholders. It encapsulates an organization's core purpose, intentions, and priorities, serving as the foundation for planning and decision-making processes (Stott and Walker, 1992, p. 50). According to Certo (1994), an organizational mission represents the overarching purpose for its existence (p. 58). It acts as a guiding beacon for all levels of management, offering a sense of direction and aiding decision-making processes (Byars, Rue, & Zahra, 1996).

Hinton (2012) suggests that a mission statement succinctly articulates an institution's reason for existence and its operational objectives. It is concerned with establishing identity, context, and process, answering questions about what the organization is, who it serves, and how it strives to achieve its goals (Luxon, 2005).

Education has a purpose. It intends to supply learners with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities to be self-sufficient and self-reliant in an interdependent world. (Kaufman and Herman, 1991). Collins and Porras (2000) assert four approaches to creating the mission of an organization: targeting, common enemy, role model, and internal transformation. In an educational setting, educational organizations require a mission statement, which should describe the purpose. According to Downey, O'Connor, and McCormick (1994),

Why are we engaged in the field of education, and what implications does this have for students and other stakeholders—both internal (e.g., parents) and external (e.g., businesses and industry)? Our mission delineates our purpose (the ultimate goal) and our activities (what we engage in). Most significantly, it furnishes criteria for decision-making.

The mission is an important part of the strategic analysis and has an impact on guiding organizational action during the strategy implementation process (Peeke, 1994). Peeke (1994)

mentions several benefits of having clearly articulated mission statements for further education. The mission should focus on encouraging the development of a clear sense of purpose, simplifying decision-making, and facilitating communication both internally and externally, evaluating activities, and clarifying the marketing strategy.

The mission statement is an enduring statement of purpose that distinguishes one organization from other similar organizations. The major focus of the mission statement is to clarify: *What is our business?* The mission is the purpose of the organization and the reason it operates. The mission outlines the fundamental principles guiding strategic choices (Wit & Meyer, 2014). Characteristics such as feasibility, precision, clarity, motivation, distinctiveness, and indicating major components of the strategy have been considered effective mission statements. As mentioned by Conitelli and Galasinski (1998), mission statements are used to negotiate with HEI and the state department on the purpose of post-secondary education.

Statement of Values The institutional value statement is about what an institution is or plans to be rather than what it does or plans to do. The statement of values will identify the key values that reflect the desired institutional culture (Luxon, 2005). According to Hinton (2012), a value statement is a statement of the attributes that we believe are essential to how we undertake our work.

Core values are guiding principles that steer an organization. The core purpose represents the fundamental reason for the organization's existence. The envisioned future depicts the organization's long-term aspirations. Thus, the executive head is typically the primary figure responsible for developing core ideology (core values and core purpose) as well as envisioning the future (10 to 30 years from now, big, hairy, audacious goal, and vivid description) in

connection with strategic plan development, organization, management, and monitoring, including articulating the organization's direction-setting (Collins and Porras, 2000).

Goals. Goals are the end results an organization wants to achieve in the future, and goals are realistic, time-bound, measurable, and specific. Organizational goals serve several functions, such as direction and focus, strategic planning, motivation, performance measurement, coordination and alignment, resource allocation, decision-making, and accountability (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikuttu, 2012).

Objectives. There is a blurring line between goals and objectives. Some authors considered goals and objectives the same, whereas others considered them different. Likely, some give higher rank to goals over objectives, and others rank in the reverse order (Kotler and Murphy, 1981; Hinton, 2012). This ambiguity in the concept of goals and objectives creates problems in goal and objective formation and measurement. Goals are long-term, open-ended attributes or endings a person or organization seeks.

Objectives are intermediate-term targets that are necessary but not sufficient for the satisfaction of goals. It is the statement of outcomes, more or less measurable, that a vision or mission may produce. Objectives such as growth, efficiency, and utilization of resources are such activities that contribute to owners, customers, employees, and society.

Strategies. Strategies are specific courses of action designed to change the existing situation positively. An organization's strategy is the set of actions that its managers take to outperform the organization's competitors and achieve superior performance. The organization can use various strategies, including a low-cost provider strategy, a broad differentiation strategy, a targeted low-cost strategy, a focused differentiation strategy, and a best-cost provider strategy (Porter, 1980).

Process of Strategic Management

The strategic management process outlines how organizations develop, execute, monitor, evaluate, and govern their strategies. It involves three main stages: strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring and control. According to Johnson and Scholes (1993), strategic planning includes strategic analysis and strategic choice. Cohen and Cyert (1973) proposed a nine-step strategy process, which includes goal formulation, environmental analysis, assigning values to goals, micro-strategy formulation, gap analysis, strategic search, selection of strategic alternatives, implementation, measurement, feedback, and control, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4

Process of Strategic Management



Source: Alkhafaji, 2003, p.7; David and David, 2019

Strategic management is designed to effectively relate the organization to its environment for the improvement of organizational performance. From the perspective of society, an organization's effectiveness can be assessed by two complementary criteria: (1) the degree to which an organization's products or services respond to the needs of its customers and (2) the efficiency with which the organization uses resources in supplying these needs (Ansoff, 1984). Organizations are guided by the personal leadership applied through power (persuasion and inspiration) by managers and a system of structures and procedures that enforce a certain performance discipline in the conduct of organizational activity (Ansoff, 1984). Strategic management processes include the activities of environmental scanning, strategy formulation,

implementation, and control. However, there are divergent views regarding the phases of strategic management.

Kaplan and Norton (2000) argue that strategic processes involve translating vision and strategy from various perspectives, including customer, financial, internal business processes, and learning and growth. They outline a strategic process that includes translating vision, communicating and linking it, business planning, and receiving feedback and learning. Additionally, they propose a closed-loop management system that connects strategy with operations, comprising five stages. These stages begin with strategy development, which involves tasks such as applying tools like SWOT analysis, shareholder value management, and competitive positioning to formulate a strategy statement. This statement is then translated into specific objectives and initiatives using tools like strategy maps and balanced scorecards. Strategic implementation links strategy to operations through processes such as quality management, reengineering, and dynamic budgeting. Throughout the process, managers should review internal operational data and external information on competition and the environment. Finally, managers need to assess the strategy regularly for its effectiveness.

Environmental Analysis

Environmental analysis is crucial for understanding how external and internal factors influence an organization's birth, survival, growth, prosperity, decline, and even demise (Chaffee, 1985). Both the environment and strategy are interconnected (Wit & Meyer, 2014), with the environment forming the strategic context—the set of circumstances that impact strategy-making processes and outcomes. Strategy is driven by environmental changes, which introduce new challenges and opportunities for organizations (Mason & Mitroff, 1981).

Strategic analysis involves understanding an organization's position relative to its environment (Johnson & Scholes, 1993). Environmental scanning is crucial for forecasting the institutional future, particularly in higher education (Morrison, Renfro, & Boucher, 1984). A thorough evaluation of internal and external pressures is essential to gauge an institution's alignment with its strategic objectives and vision (Luxton, 2005).

External Environment: Externally driven opportunities and threats demand greater effort and time for analysis than internal factors.

Natural Physical Environment: Natural physical environment resources, wildlife, and climate that affect organizations. Changes in this environment can have both positive and negative impacts.

Societal Environment: This includes social, economic, technological, political, legal, and cultural forces that shape long-term organizational decisions.

Task Environment: Directly influences the organization and its operations (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson & Manikutt, 2012). It provides opportunities and threats through environmental scanning (Pearce, Robinson, & Subramanian, 2000).

Internal Environment: This is within the organization's control, encompassing its strengths and weaknesses. Continuous analysis of resources—whether human, financial, physical, or intangible—is crucial for strategic planning. Organizational culture, a major component of the internal environment, reflects "how things are done" (Byars, 1991) and influences decision-making. Johnson and Scholes (1993) introduced the concept of the cultural web, which outlines how an organization's culture can be understood and adapted for strategic goals (Boyett, 1996).

Key internal factors include the organizational structure, power structure, symbols, stories, routines and rituals, and the control system. Understanding and managing these aspects

are essential for aligning the organization with its strategic vision. Furthermore, stakeholder analysis and internal evaluation provide clarity on expectations and influence within the organization, although internal processes are often easier to manage than external ones (Luxton, 2005).

Strategic Analysis

After analyzing the environment, it is necessary to gain insight into the analysis through tools like PESTEL and SWOC or SWOT analysis.

SWOT Analysis. SWOT analysis is a method of determining an organization's strengths and weaknesses in terms of opportunities and challenges. It is a renowned tool for auditing and analyzing the overall strategic position of the business and its environment. The key purpose of SWOT analysis is to identify the strategies that will create an organization-specific operational model that will better align an organization's resources and capabilities to the requirements of the environment in which it operates (Aithal & Kumar, 2015).

SWOC Analysis. SWOC analysis is a popular method of determining an organization's strengths and weaknesses in terms of opportunities and challenges. The main difference between SWOT and SWOC is only a positive tone instead of the negative connotation of the word threats. It is a well-known method for auditing and analyzing an organization's corporate strategic position and its environment.

PESTEL Analysis. PESTEL is an acronym for political, social-cultural, technological, and legal forces. These forces bring opportunities and threats to the organization. Research into these forces to uncover opportunities and threats is called PESTEL analysis. Now, global forces are also included in the analysis.

Strategy Formulation

Johnson and Scholes (1993) assert that strategy formulation constitutes a strategic choice. According to their perspective, strategic choice encompasses the generation of strategic options, the evaluation of these options, and the selection of a specific strategy. The process of strategy formulation involves multiple key stages. It begins with articulating a clear vision and mission, followed by analyzing external opportunities and threats and assessing internal strengths and weaknesses. The next steps include setting long-term goals, developing various strategic alternatives, and ultimately choosing the most appropriate strategies for implementation (David & David, 2019). For Brews and Hunt (1999), strategy formulation processes are integral to identifying the ends.

Identifying and Evaluating Strategic Options. After analyzing strategic issues, different strategic options are identified. Identified strategic options need to be evaluated, and the evaluation can contribute to the selection of strategies from the options available to the organization. According to Johnson and Scholes (2003), organizations might judge the merit of particular strategic options on the criteria of suitability, feasibility, and acceptability as benchmarks.

Suitability. Suitability is a criterion for assessing the extent to which a proposed strategy ‘fits’ the situation identified in the strategic analysis and how it would sustain or improve the organization (Hardies, 1998).

Feasibility. Whether the strategic options can be implemented successfully or not, or whether options can be financially available within the organization. The questions related to the availability of funding, organizational capacity for performing on strategic options, management capability, skills, knowledge level of the organization, and other aspects.

Implementation of Strategy

Putting strategy into action is important in strategic processes. "Put the strategic plan to work" and "implement the plan" are the next important aspects, as Kaufman and Herman (1991) assert. It is the actual implementation of strategy or means, as narrated by Brews and Hunt (1999). Merely developing a strategy does nothing. Thus, it is necessary to translate the objectives, strategies, and policies into action. Strategy implementation requires an organization to establish annual objectives, devise policies, motivate employees, and allocate resources (David & David, 2019).

Strategy implementation involves fostering a culture that aligns with the organization's strategy, establishing an efficient organizational framework, refining marketing strategies, setting financial plans, implementing information systems, and tying employee compensation to the organization's performance (David & David, 2019). More specifically, planning for programs and tactics (strategic budget-critical mass), allocating resources (people, information, finance, and technology), organization configuration (organizational structure, process, and management relationship), staffing following strategy, leading to implementation, managing corporate culture, detailing activities, and managing strategic change are critical aspects in the phase of implementation. Kaplan and Norton (2008) assert that successful strategy execution has two basic rules. According to them, understanding the management cycle that links strategy to operations and knowing the tools to apply at each stage of the cycle is vital for successful strategy implementation.

Rheinecker (2015) found that the successful implementation of a strategic plan was due to the leadership that created and communicated the strategic plan and its goals, the leadership that created a new culture on campus of appreciation, change, and direct communication, and the

leadership that set expectations and held employees accountable for those expectations, all of which contributed to the new culture on campus. Most of the formulated strategy was not fully realized due to inadequate or unavailable resources, poorly communicated strategy, actions to execute that were not clearly defined, and unclear accountabilities for execution (CorPeum, 2010).

Feedback, M&E, and Control

In light of actual experience, changing situations, new ideas, and new opportunities, it is vital to define performance standards, measure actual performance, and take corrective actions on the organization's vision and mission statement, objectives, strategy, or strategy execution procedures (Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, & Strickland, 2013). Evaluation and control are related to measuring performance.

Monitoring. Monitoring is an ongoing process. It is the process of making adjustments to the plan during implementation. Strategy monitoring is the process that involves questioning the means and ends, as explained by Brews and Hunt (1999). It could entail gathering information through observation and verification, without forming opinions or initiating any actions based on the findings.

Evaluation. Assessment occurs at the conclusion of the strategic planning and execution process. It involves both quantitative measurements and qualitative assessments, along with value judgments. Hardies (1998) proposes that evaluations should be thorough, systematic, unbiased, regular, and dependable.

Evaluating Strategic Outcomes. Did the existing strategies produce the desired results? If the answer to the question is yes, then we have to say that our strategy has come to a happy end and is considered successful. If the answer is no, then it may be due to the various reasons

mentioned by Schmidt (1988): poor communication, weak commitment of operating management, failures to establish proper feedback mechanisms, invalid planning basis, incorrect strategy formulation, inconsistent functional plans, and incorrect assessment of resource requirements.

Strategic Control. Control can be input control, process or throughput control, or output control. Various performance measurement and evaluation techniques can be used. In the modern age, a balanced scorecard is one that measures performance while balancing the entire organization. Feedback and learning processes have to be used in conjunction with processes for setting performance standards, gathering information, measuring performance, and taking corrective action if performance deviates from the plan, revisiting performance standards, or taking corrective actions. The control strategy can be characterized as steering control. The four basic types of strategic control areas are premise control, special alert control, implementation control, and strategic surveillance (Thompson, Peteraf, Gamble, & Strickland, 2013).

A review of literature shows that strategic management has been used as a methodology, tool, and technique for enhancing organizational performance by considering the changing environment. It offers a forward-looking view and produces a description of the route between the perceived present and the desired future, as mentioned by Kettunen (2004), which is also applicable to the present research.

Theories of Strategic Management

Theory aids in understanding the causes of phenomena in our world, the causal relationships that influence them, and the systematic reasons for forming them in all sciences and behavioral disciplines (Sutton & Staw, 1985). With regard to the survey of relevant literature, it

suggests that four major theories dominate the field of strategy and strategy management (Keig & Broutherss, 2013), as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Major Theories of Strategies

Product-market–based views	Industry-based foundations	Resource-based theory	Competition-based theory
Product-market growth matrix	Competitive forces	Resource-based view	Strategic conflict
Three-dimensional market view	Generic competitive strategies	Knowledge-based view	Competitive dynamics
Miles and snow typology		Dynamic capabilities	

Source: Keig and Broutherss, 2013

The early roots of company strategy focus on the intelligent selection of precise product-market combinations to leverage economic growth and competitive success, which is alluded to as "strategic positioning" through specific products and markets.

Product-Market Perspectives

The early roots of company strategy focus on the intelligent selection of precise product-market combinations to leverage economic growth and competitive success, which is alluded to as "strategic positioning" through specific products and markets.

The Product-Market Growth Matrix. One of the most influential foundations of business strategy is Ansoff's (1979) product-market growth matrix. Ansoff (1979) theorized that growth decisions are based on expanding new or existing products into new or existing markets. The resulting 2 x 2 matrix brings out four core strategic choices: market penetration, product development, market development, and diversification.

Miles and Snow's Typology. Due to the change in environment, organizations engage in an ongoing process of evaluating their purpose and try to solve entrepreneurial, engineering, and

administrative problems to align with their environment. Miles and Snow (1978) define organizational strategies as "defenders," "prospectors," "analysts," and "reactors." Based on organizational structures, the organization can choose among the strategies.

Industry-based Foundations

The structure of industry influences the results of firms. The environment in which different companies interact with the environment offers opportunities and threats. The industrial organization (IO) model explains the dominant influence of the external environment on the strategic activities of an organization. Based on economics, the IO model has four underlying assumptions. The first hypothesis is that it is the external environment that creates pressures and constraints for an organization to develop its strategy. Secondly, organizations competing in a particular industry have similar resources under their control. Therefore, organizations within these industries are more or less equal. The third assumption is that the resources that are under their control are highly mobile, and the final assumption is that the organizational people are rational human beings (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikuttu, 2012).

Competitive Forces. Michael Porter's Five Forces (1980; 2000) of the Competitive Position Model provide perspectives for evaluating and analyzing the competitive strength and position of a company or business organization. According to Porter (2000), awareness of the five forces can help an organization understand the structure of its industry and stake out a position that is more profitable and less vulnerable to attack. He emphasizes the position of the organization where the forces are weakest, exploits changes in the forces, and reshapes the forces in the organization's favor. The Michael Porter Five Forces Model includes

The Threat of New Entrants If new rivals can enter an industry easily, then the industry will be more competitive, and vice versa. Barriers to entry can occur due to economies of scale,

experience and learning effects, product differentiation and brand identification, switching costs, access to distribution channels, industry regulation, and behavioral entry barriers.

Bargaining Power of Buyers In an industry, the bargaining power of buyers may be high or low, and it is affected by the number of important buyers and the importance of a product or service to buyers.

Threat of substitute products. The potential for substitute goods or services that closely resemble existing options and possess a low value-to-price ratio compared to current products or services can present threats, and vice versa.

Bargaining Power of Suppliers Bargaining power with suppliers can pose threats or opportunities as compared to the number of important suppliers and the importance of the components or materials being supplied.

Intensity of Rivalry among Competitors. The intensity of rivalry depends upon the number of firms in the industry, the industry growth rate, and the excess capacity of the industry.

Generic Competitive Strategies. Another contribution of Porter (1980) to industrial organization is the use of generic strategies. Organizations should adopt one of three generic product strategies to establish and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage after analyzing and selecting markets (and leveraging and altering their structure accordingly): overall cost leadership, differentiation, or focus.

Resource-based Theory

Resource-based Model. As an alternative to product-based strategic analysis, Wernerfelt (1984) coined the term resource-based view of strategic analysis. Barney (1991) theorizes that strategic resources yield competitive advantages to the organization that are heterogeneously distributed across organizations and strategic resources and are characterized by being valuable,

rare, imitable, and sustained. The resource-based model assumes that each organization has a unique collection of resources and capabilities. The uniqueness of its resources and capabilities is the basis of an organization's strategy and its ability to outperform any other organization (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikuttu, 2012; Hamal & Prahalad, 2005).

Knowledge-based View. Robert Grant (1996) identifies knowledge as a specific resource that can be used to gain a competitive advantage. Individuals, not organizations, preserve knowledge, and knowledge might take the form of tacit or explicit knowledge. Individuals acquire and retain tacit knowledge through their actions and experiences. According to Grant (1996), tacit knowledge is implicit in nature and acts on a subconscious level within an individual, making it difficult to express and transmit across businesses. Unlike tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge can be expressed, documented, institutionalized, and transmitted systematically. However, all knowledge in an organizational setting is tacit.

Dynamic Capabilities. Within the RBV framework, dynamic capability concepts arose that focused on the organizational capabilities to be exploited for developing institutional strategy. The theory about the source of corporate agility is based on the concept of dynamic capabilities: the ability to sense and shape opportunities and threats, seize opportunities, and maintain competitiveness by enhancing, combining, protecting, and, when necessary, configuring the business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets. The ability to integrate, grow, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing circumstances is referred to as dynamic capabilities (Teece, 2009).

Competition-based Theory

Strategic Conflict. Porter's strategies are complemented by the strategic conflict approach. According to Shapiro (1989), corporations can alter their market environment in order

to impose a competitive attitude. Strategic conflict, based on the game-theoretic foundation, can assist a firm in identifying and pursuing a preferred position within their industry by utilizing potential strategic moves such as investment in physical capital, investment in intangible assets, strategic control of information, horizontal mergers, product standardization, and strategic contracting.

Competitive Dynamics Theory The interplay and impact of company activities and rival responses in a specific industry are explained by competitive dynamics theory. According to Smith, Ferrier, and Ndofor (2001), a corporation can initiate competitive moves or actions such as changing prices, launching special marketing campaigns, introducing new items, or exiting a market.

System Theoretical Perspective

The general system theoretical perspective originated from Bertalanffy's general system theory (1969) as well as contributions made by Boulding (1956) and other social scientists. Sociologist Talcott Parson (1991) popularized system theory in a social setting. A system is an interrelated and interdependent set of elements working together to accomplish common goals and objectives in a dynamic environment (Robbins & Coulter, 2005; Robbins, 2005; Griffin, 2005). The system is goal-directed. It is a group of elements, either human or non-human, that is organized and arranged in such a way that the elements can act as a whole toward achieving some common goals, objectives, or end. Systems have inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and impacts with continuous feedback among various components (subsystems). HEIs are part of a broader system that follows the inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes, and impacts in a dynamic environment.

According to the nature of the study, resource-based theories (knowledge, resource-based, and dynamic capabilities), industry-based theories (Porter's competitive forces), system theory, and resource dependency theory seem to be appropriate for adoption to the present study.

Strategic Management Frameworks

A substantial body of literature has been published proposing various strategic management models and frameworks. Some of these models have emerged and developed with a business focus, while others are rooted in the public sector. Additionally, several models have evolved specifically within the higher education domain.

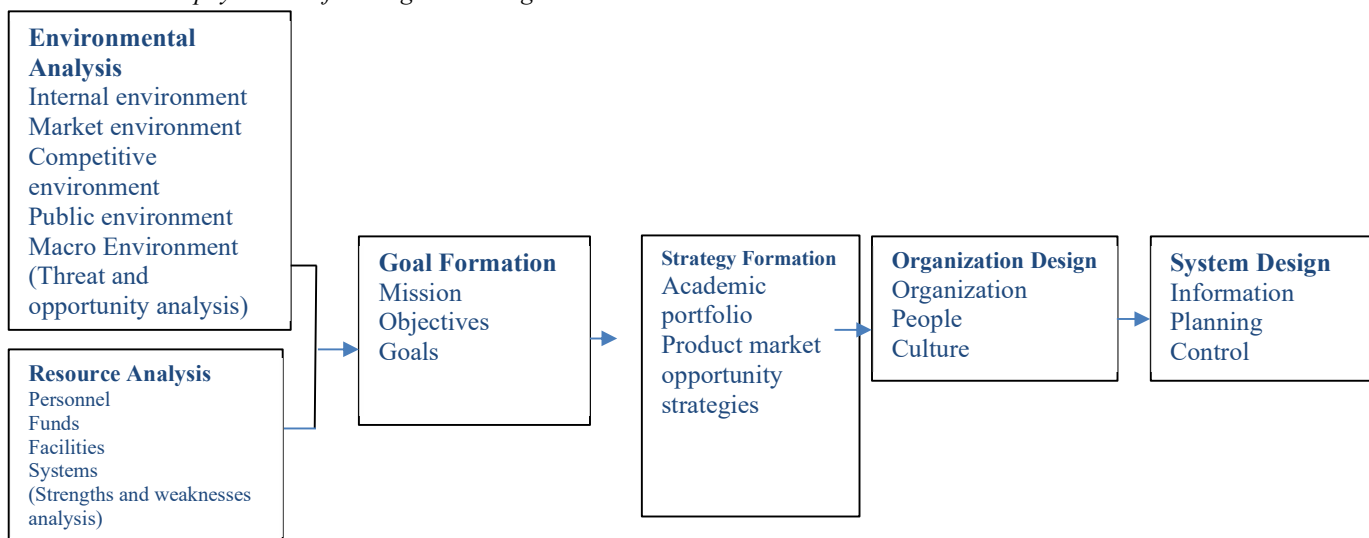
Kotler and Murphy Model of Strategic Planning

According to the Kotler and Murphy model (Figure 5), the first step is environmental and resource analysis. Threats and opportunities, as well as strengths and weaknesses, need to be identified. Following opportunities and threats, as well as strengths and weaknesses thereon, the institutional goal (mission, objectives, and goals) is to be fixed, followed by academic portfolio strategies and product market opportunity strategies.

According to this model, it is essential to design an organizational structure and system to implement the plan. The Kotler and Murphy Model is a linear model, and it focuses on planning aspects only. Organization design and system design are important for strategy implementation.

Figure 5

Kotler and Murphy Model of Strategic Planning

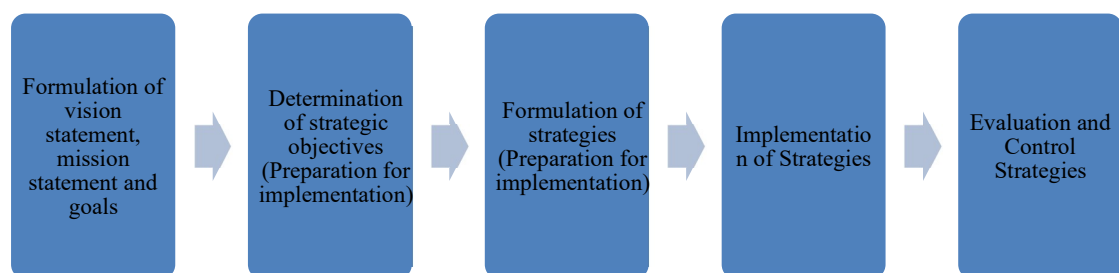


Higgins and Vincze Model

Higgins and Vincze (1989) proposed a five-step strategic management model as depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Higgins and Vincze Model of Strategic Management



Source: Higgins & Vincze, 1989

Higgins and Vincze (1989) proposed a comprehensive five-step strategic management model that outlines the critical stages for effective strategy formulation and execution. The model begins with the formulation of the vision statement, mission statement, and goals, which establish the organization's long-term purpose and direction. Following this, the determination of strategic objectives prepares the groundwork for implementation by identifying specific, measurable targets aligned with the broader mission. The formulation of strategies entails developing actionable plans that guide how these objectives will be achieved. The next step, implementation of strategies, focuses on translating strategic plans into operational actions, ensuring that the institution mobilizes its resources efficiently. Finally, evaluation and control of strategies are essential to monitor progress and make adjustments as needed, ensuring that the organization remains on track to meet its goals. This model underscores the iterative nature of strategic

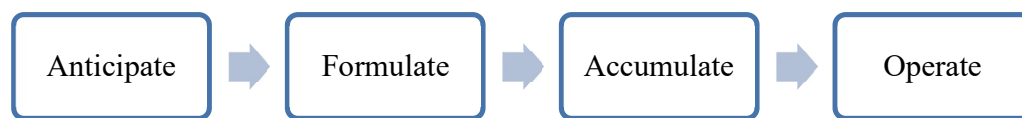
management, where ongoing assessment and realignment are integral to achieving organizational success.

Raynor Model

Raynor (2007) presents a four-step strategy process model that outlines a structured approach to strategic management:

Figure 7

Raynor Model of Strategic Management



Source: Raynor, 2007

The Raynor Model of Strategic Management emphasizes a forward-thinking, adaptable approach to navigating an uncertain future. It is structured in four key steps. First, anticipate involves building scenarios for potential future developments, allowing organizations to prepare for various possible challenges or opportunities. Next, formulate requires creating an optimal strategy for each of these scenarios, ensuring that the institution can thrive regardless of which future materializes. The third step, Accumulate, involves identifying and accumulating the strategic options necessary for success in the anticipated scenarios. Finally, Operate focuses on managing and executing a portfolio of these strategic options to ensure flexibility and adaptability. This model promotes proactive planning and highlights the importance of maintaining a flexible approach to strategic management, allowing organizations to remain agile and responsive to change.

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington Model

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2016) present a model of strategic management in three components. The strategic position includes environment, culture, purpose, and capacity.

Strategic choices include business level, corporate level, international, innovation, and evaluation, whereas strategy in action includes organizing, resourcing, changing processes, and practice.

Figure 8

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington Model



Source: Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington, 2016

The strategic Position: Strategic position refers to the organization's current standing in the market, relative to its competitors. This includes factors such as the organization's market share, its reputation, and its ability to offer unique products or services. An organization's strategic position is important because it determines its competitive advantage and influences its ability to implement its chosen strategy.

Strategic Choice: Strategic choice refers to the process of selecting the best strategy from a range of available alternatives that will help an organization achieve its goals. This involves assessing the organization's strengths and weaknesses, analyzing the external environment, and

identifying opportunities and threats. Based on this analysis, the organization selects a strategy that is best suited to its resources, capabilities, and goals.

Strategy Action: Strategic action refers to the specific steps an organization takes to implement its chosen strategy. This involves making decisions about resource allocation, developing new products or services, entering new markets, and managing the organization's operations. Strategic action is critical because it determines the organization's ability to execute its strategy successfully and achieve its goals.

Gometz and Giroto Model of Strategic Management for Ibero-American Universities

By considering the context, Gometz and Giroto (2015) proposed a novel strategic management model for Ibero-American universities, incorporating elements of thinking, doing, and learning.

Figure 9

Giroto Model of Strategic Management for Universities



Thinking: Thinking encompasses strategic visioning, analysis of the environment, and setting strategic objectives with clear, actionable goals aligned with the university's mission and vision.

Doing: Strategy formulation and implementation is developing action plans and resource allocation.

Learning: Monitoring and evaluation with performance monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and continuous improvements.

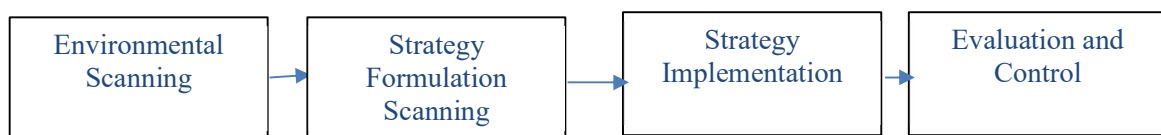
Wheelen, Hunger and Hoffman Model of Strategic Management

The Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford model consists of a four-step strategic management model as presented.

The model of strategic management presents a comprehensive framework that integrates various components of strategy formulation and implementation within an organization. Their model emphasizes the dynamic nature of strategic management and the need for continuous assessment and adoption in response to internal and external changes. The key elements of their model include:

Figure 10

Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman and Bamford Model of Strategic Management



Source: Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman and Bamford, 2016

Environmental Scanning: The model starts with the identification and analysis of external opportunities and threats as well as internal strengths and weaknesses. This step involves monitoring both the external environment (economic, social, political, and technological factors) and the internal environment (organizational resources, capabilities, and culture).

Strategy Formulation: Based on the insights gained from environmental scanning, the model outlines the formulation of strategies that align with the organization's mission, vision,

objectives, and policies. This involves setting long-term goals and determining the courses of action necessary to achieve them, considering competitive positioning and the organization's core competencies.

Strategy Implementation: This step involves putting the formulated strategies into action through programs and tactics, budgets, and procedures. The model highlights the importance of aligning the organization's structure, culture, and resources with the chosen strategies. Effective implementation requires clear communication, leadership, and a supportive organizational culture.

Evaluation and Control: The final component of the model involves the continuous monitoring of implemented strategies to assess their effectiveness in achieving the organization's goals. This includes setting performance standards, measuring actual performance, and making adjustments as needed to ensure the strategy remains relevant and effective.

Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson and Manikutty Model of Strategic Management

Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, and Manikutty's (2012) model of strategic management processes encompass three distinct dimensions: strategic inputs, strategic actions, and strategic outcomes.

Figure 11

Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson and Manikutty Model of Strategic Management



Strategic Inputs: Strategic inputs include the external environment and the internal organizational vision and mission.

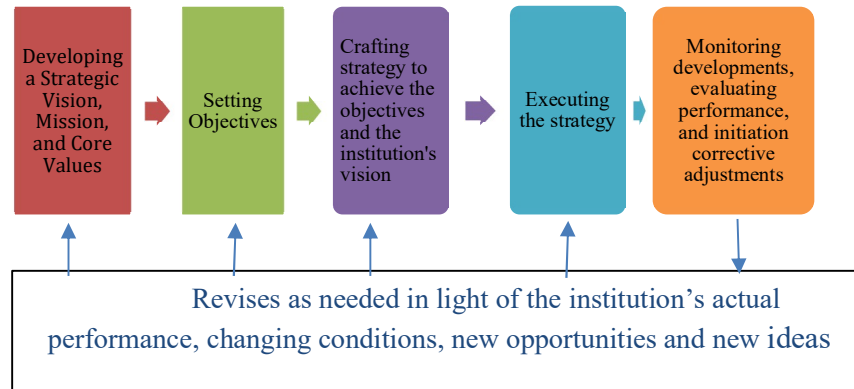
Strategic Actions: Strategic actions encompass both formulation and implementation of strategies. Strategy formulation includes business-level strategy, competitive rivalry and dynamics, corporate-level strategy, merger and acquisition strategies, international strategy, and cooperative strategy. Strategy implementation involves corporate governance, organizational structure and control systems, strategic leadership, and strategic entrepreneurship.

Strategic Outcomes: Strategic outcomes include strategic competitiveness and above average returns, and all these dimensions are integrated into feedback mechanisms.

Thompson, Peter, Garble, Strickland Model of Strategic Management

Figure 12

Thompson, Peter, Garble, and Strickland Model of Strategic Management



Thompson, Peter, Gamble, and Strickland's (2013) model of strategic management focuses on five key stages: (1) developing a strategic vision, mission, and core values; (2) setting objectives; (3) crafting a strategy to achieve the objectives; (4) executing the strategy; and (5) monitoring developments, evaluating performance, and initiating corrective adjustments. This cyclical process ensures that strategies are continually refined to adapt to changing conditions, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and long-term sustainability.

Dyson, Bryant, Morecroft, and O'Brien (2007) propose a strategic development framework that integrates strategic thinking, doing, and learning to inform organizational decision-making. They emphasize the iterative nature of strategic development, involving processes such as establishing direction, creating strategic initiatives, testing strategies, and evaluating performance. This highlights the dynamic nature of strategic development and its role in guiding institutional vision and mission, advocating for a systematic approach to strategic decision-making.

Focusing on higher education, George Keller's (1983) academic strategy model is regarded as an influential one. His model develops academic strategy by taking into account several factors: institutional traditions, values, and aspirations; strengths and weaknesses in academic and financial areas; leadership aspirations and priorities; environmental trends, including threats and opportunities; market preferences, perceptions, and directions; and the competitive landscape, identifying both threats and opportunities.

Taylor and Miroiu (2002) describe strategic planning as a dynamic four-step process: environmental scanning, analysis, idea generation, and implementation. Environmental scanning involves identifying key external and internal factors that may impact an institution's operations, while the analysis step focuses on evaluating these factors to understand strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The generation of ideas then follows, where institutions explore innovative strategies and potential solutions to address the identified challenges and opportunities. Finally, enabling refers to the implementation of these strategies, ensuring that the necessary resources and systems are in place to support their success.

Similarly, Hayward, Ncayiyana, and Johnson (2003) propose a strategic planning model for HEIs that includes several critical stages: envisioning, mission development, goal

formulation, environmental analysis, linking strategies to budget, resources, people, and data, finalizing the strategic plan and action plan, followed by implementation, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This model emphasizes the importance of aligning institutional goals with available resources and ensuring continuous assessment to track progress and make necessary adjustments throughout the implementation process.

Likewise, Jalal and Murry (2017) put forth a comprehensive model for strategic planning in higher education, emphasizing a linear approach that encompasses various stages of the strategy-making process. Their model highlights the sequential nature of strategic planning, focusing on crafting mission, vision, and values; assessing internal and external environments; setting goals and objectives; developing key performance indicators (KPIs); and formulating implementation plans. This framework provides a structured and systematic approach to strategic planning, specifically tailored to the unique context of HEIs.

Azhar Kazmi's (2008) execution model provides a theoretical lens through which to examine strategic execution within the Indian context, placing significant emphasis on the activation of strategies and the management of change processes. His review-based article introduces a strategic execution framework specifically tailored to the nuances of the Indian environment. This framework underscores the critical role of strategy activation, change management, and the attainment of effectiveness through meticulous project implementation, adept leadership, and behavioral adjustments.

This model offers an alternative perspective on strategic implementation, emphasizing the alignment of strategies with organizational objectives and the adept management of change initiatives. Kazmi's framework not only presents a novel approach but also sheds light on areas necessitating refinement and adoption to suit local contexts.

Thematic Review

Thematic review presents two important components of the strategic management system: higher education in Nepal as a specific component and HEIs as a general component.

Higher Education System in Nepal

Development of higher education in Nepal at the system level has its historical roots, which have continued to the current status and challenges. The review in this section explains the major aspects of higher education in Nepal, such as financing, governance and management, quality assurance, and accreditation, along with the problems.

Nepal's higher education system, one of the youngest in the world, has evolved under strong influences from British and Indian academic traditions. Initially, the establishment of the Tribhuvan Chandra Intermediate College in 1918, affiliated with the University of Calcutta and later Patna University, marked the beginning of higher education in Nepal (Bhatta, 2015; Wood & Knall, 1962). Indian professors were brought in to design curricula, conduct examinations, and manage assessments. As a result, the system was characterized by elite education serving the ruling class, with a heavy reliance on the Indian model for teaching, learning, and degree conferral (Malla, 1995; Wood & Knall, 1962). A significant push to establish Nepal's first national university came in 1946, driven by the need to create an indigenous academic institution in the face of internal political pressures and external changes in India, particularly the shift away from English as the primary language of instruction (Parajuli, 2019). Despite the formation of a university planning committee, the initiative was ultimately abandoned due to financial constraints and political dynamics (Parajuli, 2019). By the time Tribhuvan University (TU) was eventually founded, there were already 26 campuses in Nepal, with both government- and community-led institutions playing key roles. Government colleges relied on state funding, while

private colleges used a combination of student fees, donations, and other revenue sources to sustain their operations (Nepal National Education Planning Commission, 1956). Discussions regarding the form and functions of a national university continued into the late 1940s, with debate over whether it should focus on teaching, research, or both.

Establishment of TU

Nepal's higher education system underwent significant reforms, beginning with the Nepal National Education Planning Commission Report (1956), which laid the groundwork for the university system, particularly the establishment of Tribhuvan University (TU). Dr. Hugh B. Wood, under U.S. Aid, played a key role in shaping Nepal's education landscape, despite concerns over foreign influence (Rappleye, 2019). The commission recommended a national university system, followed by the First Five-Year Plan (1956–1960), which focused on establishing a comprehensive university in Nepal (NPC, 2021a, NPC, 2021b). TU was formally organized in 1956 and incorporated in 1959, bringing government and non-government colleges under its umbrella (Nepal National Education Planning Commission, 1956). Further reforms were introduced through the National Education System Plan (NESP) (1971–1976), which aimed to make education more inclusive, employment-oriented, and aligned with the country's development needs (Sharma, 2071 B.S.).

NESP classified higher education into certificate, diploma, degree, and research levels, emphasizing technical and general education funding (NESP, 1971). TU was transformed into a research institution, overseeing technical and general institutes, and was given centralized control of higher education. However, the rapid growth in demand for higher education, coupled with political instability and the government's inability to meet financial obligations, posed challenges to implementing NESP reforms (Joshi, 2018; NPC, 2021a; NPC, 2021b). The withdrawal of strict

entrance exams and the elimination of the semester system further exacerbated the situation, leading to difficulties in maintaining the quality and sustainability of higher education in Nepal (Sharma, 2071 B.S.).

The implementation of the National Education System Plan (NESP) brought the higher education system under the umbrella of TU, making it responsible to accommodate the growing number of students on its campuses, which was coupled with political dissatisfaction and inadequate government funding (NEC, 1992). As the government was still unable to meet the increasing demand for higher education, it permitted TU to affiliate with private sector colleges, thereby reintroducing the affiliation system in higher education (NEC, 1992; Joshi, 2018).

In the early 1980s, neo-economic reforms were introduced globally, and their impact soon reached Nepal, which acknowledged that TU had become a highly centralized institution, both academically and administratively. This realization contributed to the eventual establishment of multiple universities by splitting TU from the concept of a single university moving toward the multiple universities in Nepal's higher education system.

The democratic movement of 1990 in Nepal brought political, social, cultural, and economic changes, resulting in the opening of Kathmandu University (KU), signaling the government's adoption of a liberal economic policy to involve the private sector in higher education.

Exogenous influences shaped Nepal's higher education system through projects like the UNDP-sponsored tertiary education assessment and the WB-funded Higher Education Project (HEP). These efforts aimed to decentralize TU and establish regional universities with lead and satellite campuses, although these plans were not fully realized (Bajracharya et al., 1995a; Bhatta, 2015). Instead, Purvanchal University (PU) and Pokhara University (PokU) were established,

marking the beginning of a multi-university system, but the integration of TU campuses into these new universities faced resistance (NEC, 1992).

The 1992 Education Commission recommendation created UGC as an autonomous body to oversee funding and educational standards in order to advise the government, allocate funds, and ensure quality in higher education (UGC Act, 1992).

In 2003, the government allowed the establishment of HEIs with affiliations from foreign universities, leading to a rise in internationally affiliated HEIs in Nepal. Despite efforts to decentralize and generate resources through reforms like HEP, TU's constituent campuses faced challenges in achieving significant financial and administrative improvements (Malla, 1995).

The High-Level National Education Commission (1998) recommended a multi-university system, open universities, and the decentralization of higher education, though the implementation side was limited. The establishment of Lumbini Bouddha University in 2004 reflected the government's commitment to higher education expansion, and new institutions like Far Western University, Mid-Western University, and Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU) were created. However, efforts to integrate TU campuses into these universities remained only partially successful.

UGC has since focused on quality enhancement through funding programs, scholarships, research support, and the establishment of a QAA Council in 2007 to certify HEIs based on set criteria and benchmarks. Despite these efforts, the government's steering of higher education reform has remained ineffective in fully addressing the challenges in the sector.

Higher Education in the Federal System

The establishment of a federal structure in Nepal following the 2015 Constitution brought a shift in the layers of governance and elections. During this transition, there was a notable

increase in the establishment of affiliated campuses, extension programs, and new universities at various levels, including public, private, and local.

The Open University, a long-awaited initiative, was officially established in June 2016, fulfilling a goal proposed during the ninth five-year plan (2000–2005) (NPC, 2021a). The 2015 Constitution of Nepal, particularly Clause (3) of Article 31, guaranteed free higher education for citizens with disabilities and economically disadvantaged individuals. Articles 57 and 109 outline the federal and state governments’ power related to higher education. Thus, the concept of power sharing between the levels of government through federal and provincial universities also introduced the concept of financing HEIs at different levels of government.

Framework for Governance and Management of Higher Education in Nepal

Governance in Nepal’s higher education system involves federal and provincial ministries, the UGC, professional councils, markets, donors, and internal constituencies within HEIs. The MOEST is responsible for setting criteria and frameworks for universities, formulating national policies, allocating resources, and coordinating the education sector. The UGC plays a critical role in allocating public funds, advising on new universities, coordinating quality assurance, and establishing equivalence of qualifications (UGC, 2013). The QAA system, initiated under the Tenth Five-Year Plan, is overseen by the Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (EQAAC) to ensure quality, facilitate improvement, and promote international and national comparisons of academic programs (UGC, 2019). As of 2024, 105 HEIs have been accredited by the QAA Council. Variation in the operationalization of HEIs is there, but uniformity in managing them strategically was perceived to be a necessity since the beginning of this century, more so with the involvement of the World Bank and ADB.

Supranational organizations, such as the WB and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), have influenced Nepal's higher education through global benchmarking and partnerships with national governments and the private sector. This collaboration reflects a shared responsibility in policy-making, financing, and management (Regmi, 2019).

Emerging Trends and Major Challenges

A growing body of literature highlights various trends and challenges in higher education in Nepal (e.g., Asian Development Bank and Australian Agency for International Development, 2014; ADB, 2015, 2019; WB, 2015; Khaniya, 2000). These challenges include issues related to access, disparities in access, high politicization, low state funding, and high costs associated with private higher education. Additional concerns are poor quality and relevance due to traditional teaching methods, low teaching quality, governance problems, leadership deficit, and general inadequacies. Specific issues identified include poor alignment of higher education with labor market needs, inadequate quality assurance and enhancement, outdated governance and regulatory frameworks, lack of institutional capacity, insufficient research and innovation, and uneven access to higher education.

Scholars also note challenges related to improving stakeholder communication and transparency, managing uncertainty in strategic planning, maintaining focus on strategic goals through KPIs, integrating strategic plans with budgeting and achieving them, and measuring social responsibility and sustainability.

There is substantial evidence of strong pressures—political, cultural, regional, and commercial—to expand HEIs in Nepal, accompanied by increased funding demands (UGC, 2019). This expansion has led to a notable rise in the establishment of universities, constituent campuses, and affiliated campuses, with significant growth in the private sector and the creation

of new teaching and learning environments based on academic programs offered by affiliating universities (ADB, 2015; WB, 2015).

As of 2024/25, Nepal has thirteen universities established through separate acts of parliament, which are involved in teaching, learning, and research. Additionally, there are 200 constituent campuses/schools under these universities and six medical academies under the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP), which is also considered a university. Plans for further universities and medical academies are underway in various states and provinces (Khaniya, 2000).

Financing Higher Education in Nepal

Public financing of higher education is driven by two primary reasons: the government benefits from the human resources produced by HEIs, as economic development is closely linked to a robust higher education system, and it is not merely a private good but also a social public good, making it a mixed good that yields both private and social returns. The social aspect of higher education, which includes its contributions to societal well-being and economic advancement, is increasingly valued with a message that investing in higher education is essential (Thapa, 1993).

Enhancing educational opportunities and their quality and efficiency is a key policy issue. Factors contributing to these opportunities include planning and policy development, administrative effectiveness, teacher development, resource generation, and budget allocation (Thapa, 1993). The GoN has been financing higher education since its inception in Nepal. The primary purpose of public funding is to ensure equitable access to quality education for all students (UGC, 2016).

In Nepal, universities are funded by the MOEST through the UGC, while medical academies receive funding directly from the Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP). Higher education financing operates on a cost-sharing basis (CEDA, 2007; UGC, 2015). Universities collect various fees from students and also receive grants from the government (UGC, 2013).

The level of government funding for higher education fluctuates annually, ranging from approximately 30% to 8%, with a noticeable trend of decreasing government support (Acharya, 2015; CEDA, 2007). External funding has been crucial for higher education reforms. For example, in 2014–15, the total cost of higher education was NPR 85,091, while technical higher education cost NPR 172,729. Households contributed 19.64% and 39.08% of these costs, respectively, while other sources contributed 56.12% and 35.98% (MOEST, 2016).

Overall, higher education in Nepal has been primarily financed by the public sector, except for for-profit HEIs. The volume of funding varies among universities and between affiliated and constituent campuses. Funding is typically allocated through block grants, formula-based funding, and project-based funding from international donors. Since 2007, projects funded by the WB, such as the SHEP and the HERP, have provided additional support for higher education reforms. The public budget for higher education is derived from periodic government plans, higher education policies, sectoral education plans, and the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). Universities receive funding through the UGC, with constituent campuses receiving their share from the university's funding and affiliated campuses receiving direct funding from the UGC.

Increasing enrollment trends and growth in HEIs in Nepal demand quality higher education, which has significantly increased over the past decades. There is an average annual growth rate of approximately 10% in student enrollment. Similarly, as of 2021/22, the number of

HEIs has risen to 1,455, of which 37.29% are CBACs, 10.42% are constituent campuses, and the remaining 52.29% are private-affiliated campuses (UGC, 2023). In terms of student distribution, 27.88% (134,044) are enrolled in CBACs, 35% (168,238) in constituent campuses, 32.98% (158,544) in private-affiliated campuses, and 4.14% (19,892) in foreign university-affiliated private campuses (UGC, 2023). This indicates that the HEIs have to have strategic management practices to respond to this increase.

Reforming Higher Education

Nepal has implemented several externally funded projects aimed at improving higher education, including the Higher Education Project, the SHEP, the HERP, and currently, the NEHEP. These initiatives, supported financially by the WB, focus on enhancing access, equity, quality, and relevance in higher education by providing scholarships and financial aid to students and encouraging the HEIs to adopt strategic management practices.

The reform efforts were intended to address key areas such as goals, orientation, curricula, and institutional directions, aligning them with the country's specific needs. However, as Agrawal (1974) noted, there has historically been a disconnection between the world of work and the education system.

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees every citizen the right to education, with provisions for free higher education for citizens with disabilities and economically disadvantaged individuals. The MOEST is tasked with developing national policies, laws, and standards related to education, including higher education. Additionally, the National Planning Commission (NPC) oversees the national planning framework.

Continuing previous efforts, the Sixteenth Plan (2024/25-2029/30) outlines a vision for Nepal's economic and social development as an independent, prosperous, and socialist-oriented

economy. The plan aims to transform the country into a welfare state with social justice and achieve middle-income status.

Higher education in the Sixteenth Plan has already seen implementation of the Fifteenth Plan, wherein the education sector had been emphasized as a key agency to produce human resources for social and economic transformation of the country. The 16th plan has highlighted the need to create a knowledge-based society and economy by enhancing access to quality higher education (NPC, 2024).

To transform higher education, the Sixteenth Plan introduces several key programs: enhancing international accessibility, improving teaching and management skills, and implementing a national qualifications framework. Additionally, the plan aims to increase enrollment in technical education, prioritize research, and support HEIs with quality assurance certifications. Further initiatives involve establishing research networks, creating a unified service commission, implementing a national eligibility test for teachers, producing entrepreneurial graduates, and setting national standards for new universities. The plan also seeks to attract foreign students, restructure universities, and reform the UGC to better manage higher education in Nepal.

National Education Commission Report, 2019. The GoN formed an education commission to recommend necessary changes in the education sector. The commission has submitted its report to the government, highlighting the need for the higher education sector to work diligently towards achieving the goal of "Prosperous Nepal and Happy Nepali." The commission has the vision for Nepal's education sector: "To produce civilized, prosperous, and healthy human resources with social justice, guiding the nation-building process. Quality

education should drive the all-round development and socio-economic transformation of individuals."

Higher Education Policies. Policies form the foundation of strategies. In Nepal, higher education policies have historically been fragmented, dispersed across periodic plans, annual policies, and government programs, as well as the budget speeches of finance ministers.

The policy envisions developing HEIs into centers of academic excellence that support the comprehensive development of the country by promoting research, knowledge generation, and the production of high-quality human resources aligned with international standards (GoN, 2015, p. 3).

The mission outlined in the policy is to achieve excellence through the operation of equitable, inclusive, competitive, quality, and results-oriented teaching and research-focused HEIs (GoN, 2015, p. 3). The 2015 higher education policy includes goals such as issuing comprehensive policies, strategies, and action plans, along with establishing necessary organizational structures and funding considerations for implementation. However, Baral (2016) notes that centralized institutional arrangements for different structural provisions may hinder achieving the expected outcomes.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2076 B.S. emphasizes key initiatives for enhancing higher education, including improving grant disbursement, quality assurance, and national eligibility test administration. It advocates for periodic upgrades to teaching methods, curricula, and ICT integration. The policy also encourages provincial governments to collaborate with or establish new universities, increase research funding in national priority areas, restructure Tribhuvan University as a research-based institution in science, technology, and engineering, and establish centers of excellence across various faculties and departments.

Political Economy and Higher Education in Nepal

According to Scott (2008), the political economy is closely tied to the education system and its development. In a market-oriented system, education is viewed as a semi-public good, where individuals are encouraged to contribute to its costs. In contrast, a social welfare system regards education as a public or social good, with public funding covering the costs. This difference reflects varying philosophies of education and its role in society between the two systems.

Strategic Planning at the National Level

Strategic management is widely utilized across various levels of public sector governance (Bryson, 2018). At the national level in education, Chang (2006, 2008) identifies key components of "upstream" planning: (i) sector analysis, (ii) policy formulation, and (iii) action planning.

Sector analysis involves systematic research and critical evaluation of higher education aspects, including internal dynamics and contextual factors affecting the system.

Policy and Strategy Formulation addresses how the sector should tackle major issues, challenges, and opportunities. This includes setting strategic goals and employing methods to achieve these objectives through well-designed policies.

Action planning translates policy statements into actionable, measurable tasks. It involves setting objectives, outputs, strategies, responsibilities, and timelines to create a detailed action plan.

Planning for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is essential for assessing plan effectiveness. Performance indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, guide M&E. Evaluation can be internal, self, or external; formative, summative, or ex post; and focuses on relevance,

efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. Monitoring is a review of implementation, focusing on inputs, outputs, and outcomes.

In Nepal, strategic planning in higher education is guided by documents like the periodic plans and policy statements. However, a comprehensive plan for higher education is lacking. Khaniya (2000) highlighted the absence of clear future directions for higher education.

To address these issues, Nepal has set a vision of "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali," with goals to become a developing country by 2026 and a developed country by 2043. The MOEST has developed the School Education Sector Plan (2023-2030) and the TVET Sector Strategic Plan (2023-2032), outlining strategic components such as equity, quality, coherence, and governance (MOEST, 2022).

The UGC's Strategic Plan (2024-2029) for higher education includes a vision, mission, core values, goals, and seven strategic pillars: governance and management, quality assurance, equitable access, research and innovation, collaboration, institutional development, and financing (UGC, 2023). This plan, along with the Higher Education Policy of 2019 and the Sixteenth Five-Year Plan (2024-2029), provides a comprehensive roadmap for the future development of HEIs in Nepal.

Nepal has undergone more than sixty years of planned development, completing fifteen developmental plans without achieving expected outcomes compared to other countries with similar timelines. The Universities Act mandates that universities develop long-term plans, with approval authority granted to their Senates. These universities are expected to follow national higher education policies, which should guide their planning and budgeting processes. The alignment between the GoN's plans and the universities' plans is crucial for ensuring coherence

across all educational levels. This strategic alignment is essential for effective university-level, campus-level planning and resource allocation for both affiliated and constituent campuses.

Strategic Management in HEIs

Administration sees that things are done right, but management sees that the right things are done (Keller, 1983). The administration seeks efficiency in the present structure; management strives for effectiveness through the improved structure. The way that young people learn has changed radically, and the sources of their education have multiplied (Keller, 2008). In addition to this, stakeholders expect different roles from HEIs. As a result, HEIs should aim to address the expectations of heterogeneous stakeholders in a dynamic environment. The HEIs have to keep all changes in mind, and a clearer sense of strategic vision for the organization is necessary. A sharper focus on what is strategically important is also necessary. An improved understanding of a rapidly changing environment is equally essential for survival.

Strategic management is based on strategic decision-making. Strategic decisions are those that determine the overall direction of an organization and its ultimate viability in light of predictable, unpredictable, and unknowable changes that may occur in its most important surrounding environment (Mintzberg et al., 1998; Mintzberg, Lampel, and Quinn, 1991). University decision-making is a peculiar activity and quite a different process than in the corporate world, as the governance systems have an impact on the design of decision-making systems at institutions (Gomez & Giroto, 2015).

Strategic decisions differ from day-to-day decisions in that they have a long-term impact on the general health of the organization, are irreversible, commit considerable resources, and have a far-reaching impact on the organization. Thus, strategic decision-making is a critical process in which institutions decide on their markets, competitive position, and core strengths

(Pedraja Moreno, & Rodríguez, 2008). According to Keller (1983), academic strategic decision-making indicates that a college, school, or institution and its executives are more active than passive regarding their historical position.

HEIs and Business Organizations: Are they the same?

Education and business have been regarded as two distinct domains. Tsiakkiros and Pashiardis (2002) mention differences between education and business on a number of grounds. The first difference is the structure, where the organizational structure of businesses is unstable and flexible against the rigid organizational structure of educational organizations. Second, the business can control its inputs with a flexible transformational process as it has to respond to market demands. The next important difference between educational organizations and businesses is that business is more decentralized, whereas education is more centralized. Lastly, the products or services of businesses are more visible in contrast to less visible educational products or services. There are also similarities between business and educational organizations in a number of ways, as Tsiakkiros and Pashiardis (2002) mention. The major task of business and higher education is to achieve goals, as the goals have similar characteristics, and their achievement results in beneficial rewards for their stakeholders, or shareholders. Businesses and education use resources that are scarce and limited and thus require management's nimbleness to meet unlimited needs. Both business and education have demanding customers who demand quality goods and services at a minimum cost. And businesses and educational organizations have competitors. They have to face competition, though they may vary within the sector.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Strategic planning, originally rooted in military tactics, involved maneuvering before engaging opponents. In the 1950s, strategic planning systems were developed in the United States

military as planning, programming, and budgeting systems (PPBS) (Petruschell, 1968; Donvita, 1969), before spreading to the business sectors (Mintzberg, 1994). By the 1960s and early 1970s, the for-profit sector began to adopt strategic planning, showcasing its adoptability and effectiveness (Mintzberg, 1994).

Some universities in the USA had already initiated strategic planning as early as the 1950s to address immediate budget and planning needs in areas such as student recruitment, enrollment and resource growth, academic program offerings, and facilities (Kotler & Murphy, 1981). The rapid economic growth, demographic shifts, and technological changes experienced by the US in the 1970s compelled both public and private sectors, including higher education, to embrace business-oriented strategic planning models (Bryson, 2018; Dooris, 2003).

Before the 1980s, most postsecondary institutions employed a long-term fiscal planning approach characterized by budget-driven incremental processes aimed at ensuring financial stability over time (Hinton, 2012). However, throughout the 1960s and 1980s, American higher education encountered various challenges, including fluctuating enrollment, shifting student demographics, and unstable funding. Consequently, strategic planning in higher education emerged alongside advancements in future research and the utilization of technology-enabled data collection and analysis. This facilitated strategic planning as a proactive response to changing environments and resource constraints (Keller, 1983).

Recognizing the multifaceted challenges faced by HEIs (Keller, 1983), universities in the USA pioneered the adoption of strategic plans as a proactive response to these challenges. The 1980s saw the widespread adoption of strategic planning in higher education in the United States (Chaffee, 1985). Keller's book "Academic Strategy: The Management Revolution of American

Higher Education" played a crucial role in promoting the diffusion of strategic management in HEIs.

Furthermore, trends worldwide towards a greater influence of market forces on HEIs have accelerated the adoption of strategic planning processes derived from the business sector (Taylor, De Lourdes Machado, and Peterson, 2008). The emergence of New Public Management and the concept of 'managerialism' in the 1980s marked a shift in the public sector, where demands for improved public services necessitated greater efficiency and effectiveness (Hood, 1991).

Strategic planning began to emerge as a phenomenon at European universities in the mid-1980s, initially seen primarily in Anglo-Saxon institutions. Drawing lessons from various sectors, including military strategies, business acumen, and public administration, HEIs globally are increasingly embracing strategic management to navigate the complexities of the modern educational landscape. This evolution reflects a concerted effort by institutions to manage strategically and enhance their adoptability in a rapidly changing environment.

Addressing Challenges of Higher Education through Strategic Management

HEIs are complex organizations, functioning as talent supply chains. Like any other organization, they possess goals, hierarchical systems and structures, officials with specified duties, decision-making processes for setting institutional policy, and bureaucratic administrations handling routine business (Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1991). Notably, HEIs have been characterized by goal ambiguity, poor client service, problematic technology, professionalism, and vulnerability to environmental changes (Baldrige et al., 1991).

Observing the environment, HEIs must acknowledge that the old days are gone and will never return (Clark, 1998). They now operate in an entirely different universe with a very different atmosphere (Tavernier, 2005). One major observation is that governments worldwide

are increasingly unable or unwilling to assume full responsibility for higher education due to fiscal austerity or investment priorities.

Consequently, HEIs have become both semi-public and semi-private institutions. Furthermore, they face the challenge of managing the explosion of knowledge. In today's world, HEIs have to be selective in networking with other knowledge providers where stakeholders closely monitor them due to the societal value of knowledge, demanding accountability for expenditures, product quality, and societal relevance (Tavernier, 2005).

To address these challenges, HEIs need to engage in strategic planning, decision-making, and targeted change initiatives. This involves adopting new procedures, structures, and mindsets (Keller, 1983). HEIs are undergoing a revolution and should integrate planning and organizational politics, as well as develop strategies for strategy formulation and implementation (Keller, 1983).

Strategic management in higher education encompasses various interconnected components, including institutional culture, leadership, strategic planning, institutional research, resource allocation, financial management, personnel management, research and scholarly activity, student and campus support services, academic support services, internationalization, and external relations (Taylor and Machado, 2006).

Advantages of Strategic Management in Higher Education

Several benefits of strategic management are found in the literature (Rowley, Lujan, & Dolance, 1997; Coulter, 2013; David & David, 2019). Strategic planning and management, according to Steiner (1979) and Barry (1997), can help an organization achieve a clear future direction, think strategically and develop effective strategies, establish priorities, deal effectively with rapidly changing circumstances, build teamwork and expertise, solve major organizational

problems, and improve organizational performance. Allowing HEIs to set priorities, aligning with their environment, allowing dialogue between participants to create ownership, providing a framework for achieving competitive advantage, and creating future directions are benefits of strategic planning, as pointed out by Lerner (1999).

Levels of Strategy in Higher Education

Organizations develop strategies at multiple levels to address various operational and external relationship aspects, including network, corporate, business/competitive, functional, and operational strategies (Wit & Meyer, 2014; David & David, 2019; Coulter, 2013; Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2016). At the network and corporate top levels, strategies encompass strategic alliances and growth strategies such as concentration, vertical and horizontal integration, and diversification (both related and unrelated). Stability and retrenchment strategies, including turnaround and renewal approaches, are also included at this level. Middle-level strategies, or business/competitive strategies, cover traditional approaches, Miles and Snow's (2003) adaptive strategies (Prospector, Defender, Analyzer, Reactor), Porter's (1980) generic competitive strategies (Cost Leadership, Differentiated, Cost Focus, Differentiated Focus), and contemporary competitive strategies. At the functional or operational level, strategies focus on specific operational areas, including product/service strategies (design, production-operation, and marketing), people strategies (human resources), and support process strategies (information systems and financial accounting systems). Network strategies involve inter-organizational relationships shaped by legitimacy and power, leading to cooperation or competition (Wit & Meyer, 2014). Corporate strategies aim to diversify operations across markets, guided by growth, stability, or retrenchment, including vertical and horizontal integration (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikutty, 2012; Coulter, 2013; Wit & Meyer, 2014). Business strategies seek to improve

competitive positioning through cost leadership and differentiation (Porter, 1980; Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2016). Functional strategies enhance specific organizational areas such as marketing and finance to support higher-level strategies (Coulter, 2013; Wheelen et al., 2016). Operational strategies translate these plans into actionable steps to achieve desired outcomes (Wheelen et al., 2016). In a higher education context, Shirley (1983) discusses four levels of strategy in universities.

Institutional Level Strategy. According to Shirley (1983), institutional strategies are pivotal for decision-making and revolve around six key strategic variables. Firstly, institutions must clearly define their primary mission to establish a collective understanding of their purpose and intent. Secondly, they need to identify the target clientele groups they aim to serve. Thirdly, setting specific goals and objectives that align with the mission is crucial, along with outlining the services provided to achieve these goals. Fourthly, determining the appropriate mix of programs and services is essential for meeting the institution's objectives. Fifthly, institutions must delineate their geographic service area to effectively plan and deliver their services. Lastly, defining the institution's desired competitive advantage over similar entities helps to position it uniquely in the competitive landscape. These strategic variables collectively guide institutions in their strategic planning and decision-making processes.

Campus Level Functional Strategies. The second level is campus wide functional strategies intended to achieve the first level of strategies by seeking answers through how they address functional areas like finance, human resources, enrollment, recruitment and admissions, organization, and fa The second level of strategy is campus-wide functional strategies, which are intended to achieve the first level of strategies by seeking answers through how they address

functional areas like finance, human resources, enrollment, recruitment and admissions, organization, and facilities.

Program Level Strategy. It is related to program strategies or clusters of program strategies. Each school or department should prepare the program strategies. Program strategies are heavily focused on the strategic profile, action priorities, and resource requirements.

Program Level Functional Strategies. Program-level functional strategies include student admission, curriculum, staffing, recruitment, budgeting, and lab and library.

As Shirley (1983) mentions, level 1 and level 2 strategies are institution-wide (university-wide) in nature, whereas level 3 and level 4 are subunits (colleges or departments) of the HEIs.

Types of Strategies in Higher Education

Strategies can be classified in various ways based on their formation and realization. According to Hardy, Langbay, Mintzberg, and Rose (1983), strategies can be intended, deliberate, unrealized, emergent, and realized. Mintzberg (2007) argues that strategy originates from the intentions of strategists, called "intended strategy," which are consciously chosen by decision-makers. When these intentions are made explicit, they become deliberate strategies. Systems like strategic planning, strategic leadership, and externally imposed strategies help surface these deliberate strategies (Yee, 2012).

The strategies that are actually implemented within the organization are termed "realized strategies," while the portion of intended strategies that do not materialize is known as "unrealized strategies." In contrast, emergent strategies arise spontaneously from the behaviors of strategists and are realized through a course of action known as deliberate strategy. Mintzberg (1994) also introduced the concept of umbrella strategies, which are a mix of deliberate and emergent strategies. Emergent strategies can surface through logical incrementalism, political

processes, cultural processes, and resource allocation (Yee, 2012). Table 2 presents types of strategies described by Langbay, Mintzberg, and Rose (1983).

Table 2

Types of Strategies

Strategy	Description
Intended strategy	Wish to accomplish
Deliberate strategy	Part of the intended strategy
Unrealized strategy	Part of an intended strategy that is not realized
Emergent strategy	Emerged out of the stream of decision
Realized strategy	Part of the intended and emergent strategy realized as a whole

Source: Hardy, Langbay, Mintzberg, and Rose (1983)

Various scholars have different perspectives on strategy. Porter (1980) describes the competitive "red ocean" strategy, where organizations compete in existing markets, strive to outperform rivals, and align their activities with either differentiation or low-cost strategies. Kim and Mauborgne (2000) propose the "blue ocean" strategy, advocating for the need to create uncontested market spaces where competition is irrelevant, focusing on new demand, and aligning activities for both differentiation and low cost.

Aithal and Acharya (2016) introduce several other strategies, such as Green Ocean, Purple Ocean, White Ocean, Black Ocean, and Ideal Strategy; however, their applicability is limited.

Academic Portfolio Management. Kotler and Murphy (1981) and Keller (1983) mentioned a program portfolio strategy based on the evaluation of programs by applying the BBG approach as a star, cash cow, question mark, and dog based on the quality of the academic programs students demand or need. The quality evaluation dimensions are the quality of faculty, students, library holdings, facilities, and equipment. Similarly, demand or need includes the

centrality of the mission, present student demand, demand for graduates, location advantage, and comparative advantage.

Keller's (1983) academic portfolio strategy categorizes programs into four quadrants based on their quality and student demand: Stars, Question Marks, Cash Cows, and Dogs. "Stars" are high-quality programs with high student demand, making them desirable for institutions. In contrast, "Question Marks" are high-quality programs with low demand, presenting uncertainties for future success. "Cash Cows" have high demand but lower quality, offering significant financial returns despite their academic limitations. Lastly, "dogs" are programs with both low quality and demand, making them the least valuable and potentially suitable for discontinuation. Keller highlights the importance of considering not only student demand but also financial and quality factors when evaluating academic programs for long-term sustainability.

Product/Market Opportunity Strategy. Kotler and Murphy (1981) mentioned nine types of strategies, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Product/Market Opportunity Strategies

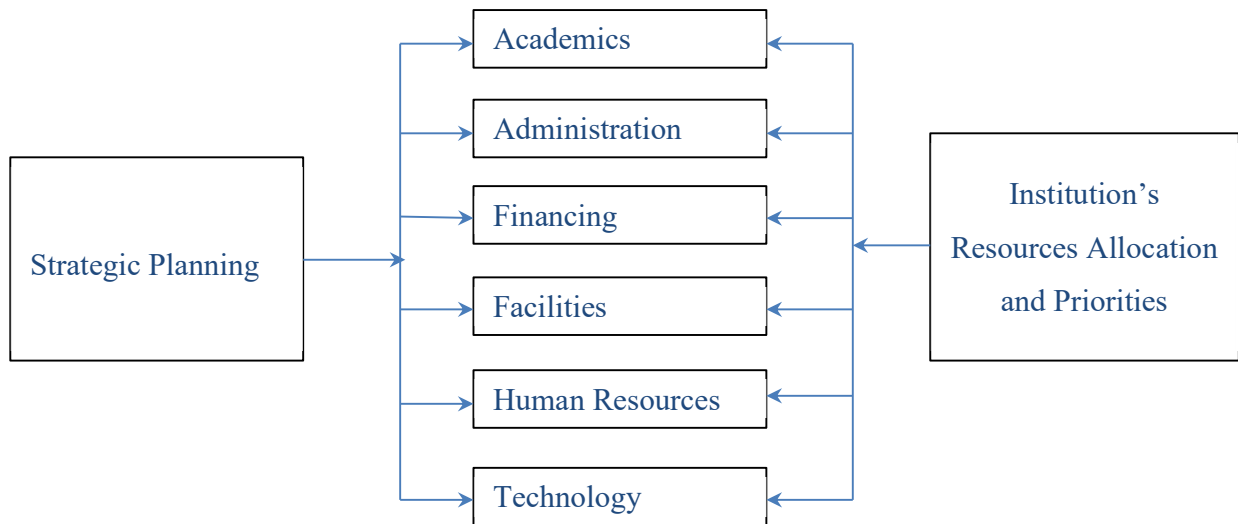
Strategies
Market penetration: Focus on existing markets
Modification of dispersed markets
Geographic expansion: new areas of cities; new cities; foreign
Product innovation: new courses, new departments, new schools
New markets: individual, institutional
Geographic innovation
Product Modification: short courses, evening programs, weekend programs, new delivery system
Total innovation: new courses, new departments, new schools
Modification of dispersed markets

Source: Kotler and Murphy, 1981

Functional Areas of Strategic Planning

Taylor and Miroiu (2002) described numerous operational strategies that are used by HEIs and organizations. As per them, the major operational strategies are as follows: 1) Strategy

for teaching and learning; 2) Strategy for research and innovation; 3) Strategy for human resources; 4) Estates; 5) Internationalization strategy; and information strategy, as shown in Figure 13, there are at least six functional strategy areas.



Critical Factors of Strategic Management in Higher Education

External environmental factors determine the parameters of the strategic management capacity of HEIs (Martin, 1992). Along with external factors, factors directly related to the institutions equally contribute to the strategic management capacity. Martin (1992) mentioned various factors such as organizational structure, internal locus of governance and control, institutional leadership, analytical sophistication, autonomy, participation, and commitment as major factors that contribute to strategic management positively or negatively. Bilanishvili (2000) identified sixteen critical factors for strategic implementation, such as participatory process, consensus, commitment, communication, organizational culture, leadership, motivation, flexibility, and structure. The effectiveness of strategic management is influenced by leadership, participation, communication, strategic planning, data analysis, and monitoring (Hartunian,

2011). The strategy formulation process, the strategy executors (managers and employees), the organization structure, the communication activities, the level of commitment to the strategy, the consensus regarding the strategy, the relationship among different units and departments and different strategy levels, the employed implementation tactics, and the administrative system in place are critical factors for strategy implementation, as mentioned by Young, Guohui, and Martin (2008).

A study conducted by Koech and Were (2016) revealed that organizational structure and culture have a direct influence on strategy implementation. The study established that organizational culture, as reflected through shared beliefs and values, is aligned with strategies. Further, the organizational structure facilitates decision-making at all levels of management through the free flow of information, coordination, and cooperation between different levels of management and functional areas.

Organizational Structure. Organizational structure is the clustering of tasks and people into smaller groups. Wit and Meyer (2014) mentioned that the business model of an organization is based on the organizational structure, which consists of an organization's anatomy, organizational process in the form of an organization's psychology, and organizational culture held by organizational members (p. 199), and that the structuring can be done on an input, throughput, and output basis. Chandler (1962), based on his study of American conglomerates, argues that structure follows strategy; alternatively, changes in corporate strategy led to changes in organizational structure. Chandler (1962) argues that structural changes have occurred since the old structure resulted in inefficiencies and that a new structure is required for organizational progress. He proposed sequential events as (1) developing a new strategy, (2) the new

administrative problem, (3) declining economic performance, (4) creating a new, appropriate structure, and (5) rising economic performance.

Chandler's views have been challenged by Hall and Saias (1980), who say that strategy follows the structure instead of the structure following the strategy. Structure, strategy, and the environment need to be closely aligned. Whereas men may build the structure of an organization, in practice, it is this very structure that later constrains the strategic choices they may make (Hall and Saias, 1980). Otherwise, the organization's performance will likely suffer. Mintzberg (1990) offered a balanced view of strategy and structure. According to him, there is a reciprocal relationship between strategy and structure, as structure follows strategy as the left foot follows the right foot and vice versa.

Kaplan and Norton (2006) suggest that a management system based on the balanced scorecard (the financial perspective, the customer perspective, the process perspective, and the learning and growth perspective) is the most effective technique to align strategy and structure. They further assert that it is more effective to choose an organizational design that works reasonably well and then develop a strategic system to tune the structure to the strategy. Structure facilitates or inhibits strategic planning, execution, M&E, and control.

Governance of Higher Education. Governance in higher education plays a pivotal role at both the state and national levels, with governments significantly influencing the provision and financing of HEIs. Ministries and higher education boards are typically established to coordinate the activities of HEIs, and the management of these institutions is generally the responsibility of top-level leaders appointed by a competent authority, with appointment practices varying globally. The management of HEIs is often a collective effort involving the academic community, academic managers, and other professionals (Cummings, Loke, & Fisher, 2011).

Neave and van Vught (1991) identified two distinct roles of government in higher education: the facilitating state and the intervening state. In a facilitating state, the government underwrites higher education as an opportunity for qualified individuals without directly influencing academic policies, participation patterns, internal governance, or institutional authority. In contrast, the intervening state actively seeks to influence aspects such as student outcomes, internal institutional affairs, and the relationship between institutions and their external environments.

Clark (1986) categorizes higher education governance systems into four basic types based on the distribution of authority across national, institutional, and departmental levels: the continental European model, the British model, the American model, and the Japanese model. These models vary in terms of the level of authority exercised by the state, universities, and departments.

Governance Structures and Management in Higher Education. The governance of higher education is shaped by the long-standing history of these institutions, which have developed unique organizational attributes, including governance, management, administration, leadership, and culture. The management of colleges and universities is complex, incorporating elements of business management, political management, and even military management. In higher education, management comprises four components: governance, administration, leadership, and management itself.

Governance in higher education encompasses the structures, processes, and activities involved in the strategic planning and direction of institutions and the individuals who work within them (Fielden, 2008). Governance involves the formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies, and rules that define the rights and responsibilities of university

stakeholders. It is concerned with managing the strategic actions and decisions of top management, ensuring that strategy remains the core focus (Wit & Meyer, 2014). According to Wit and Meyer (2014), the three main functions of corporate governance are the forming function, the performance function, and the conformance function. Governance also addresses how different stakeholders influence decisions (Peterson, Chaffee, & White, 1991) and how they are held accountable.

Models of Governance in Higher Education. Neave and van Vught (1994) propose four basic models of governance in higher education: the state control model, the semi-autonomous model, the semi-independent model, and the independent model. These models are also referred to as the external regulation model, the external guidance model, the managerial self-government model, and the academic self-governance model, respectively. Each of these models has significant implications for institutional planning and other institutional affairs.

McDaniel (1996) identifies five key areas—finance, general management, educational matters, personnel policies, and student relations—that significantly influence the governance model adopted by an institution. Government involvement in higher education varies, with steering mechanisms such as funding, planning, evaluation, and regulation directly impacting their internal governance, management, and administration. The extent of state control and supervision often leads to trends such as entrepreneurial management, corporate rationality, and managerial professionalism within HEIs.

The literature on HEI governance outlines various approaches, including collegial, bureaucratic, professional, corporate (Middlehurst, 2004), entrepreneurial (Clark, 1998), political (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1991; Birnbaum, 1988), and cybernetic (Birnbaum, 1988) models. Clark (1998) further posits that entrepreneurial universities can be understood both as

processes and outcomes, with pathways to transformation that include a strengthened steering core, an expanded development periphery, a diversified funding base, a stimulated heartland, and an integrated entrepreneurial culture.

Internal Governance and Control in Higher Education. The higher education sector is facing emerging challenges globally, prompting the need for institutions to adopt and respond. These challenges include the creation of knowledge, the promotion of equity, the response to student needs, and the demand for greater efficiency. As a result, governance, management, and administration within higher education are undergoing significant changes. HEIs must strengthen their positions in response to competitive pressures, resource constraints, accountability requirements, external interactions, and internal management challenges.

Universities and HEIs are complex bureaucratic organizations, where effective governance and management are crucial for the continuous improvement of facilities, resources, and personnel necessary for academic work (Cummings, Locke, & Fisher, 2011). Globally, higher education governance can be understood through four continuums: the state agency model, the state supervision model, the autonomous model, and the market-based model. The model adopted by a government influences various areas, including finance, management, governance, education, and personnel policies.

Governance involves creating structures of relationships that promote organizational coherence, authorize policies, plans, and decisions, and ensure their integrity, responsiveness, and cost-effectiveness. In contrast, management focuses on achieving desired outcomes through the allocation of responsibilities and resources and monitoring their efficiency and effectiveness (Gallagher, 2003). Governance encompasses broader concepts, while management is a component within governance. Administration, on the other hand, involves the implementation of

authorized procedures and systems to achieve agreed-upon results. The patterns of governance, management, and administration have evolved to address changes in both the internal and external environments.

As Wit and Meyer (2014) explain, individuals with an internal locus of governance and control believe they can shape events and impact their environment. Conversely, those with an external locus of governance and control feel they are subject to events beyond their influence.

In the context of Nepal, Acharya (2021) highlights the internal, external, and network governance of higher education, providing insights into shared governance and offering a fresh perspective on higher education governance within the country.

Organizational Culture. Organizations are influenced not only by powerful external factors such as political, legal, social, technological, and demographic factors but also by strong forces within them, such as organizational culture. It is the worldview and behavior patterns shared by the members of the organization (Schein, 1992). Organizational culture is thus understood as a way of organizing life. Raynor (2007) asserts that corporate culture is the result of numerous factors. Among them are the nature of the organization, its products, customers, size and location, competitive position, financial and human resources, formal structure, methods of operation, and facilities. Even more important are intangibles such as assumptions, beliefs, values, and the unwritten and unspoken norms and rules of culture. Culture, according to Kaufman and Herman (1991), is (1) the way we do things, (2) what we stand for, (3) the symbols we use and honor, (4) our philosophy and approach, and the way we interact among ourselves and with our clients (p. 61).

Bess and Dee (2008a) stress that culture denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms

by means through which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge of and attitudes toward life. Culture can be a philosophy, ideology, values, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and assumptions shared by members of a social system (Bess and Dee, 2008a). Schein (1992) suggests that culture exists at three levels: artifacts (physical environment, social environment, technology, written and spoken language, overt behavior, and symbols), values (institutionalized as beliefs), and basic assumptions (relation to the environment, nature of reality, nature of human nature, nature of human activity, and nature of human relationships).

Organizational culture affects strategy formulation and implementation in many ways. Tierney (1988) suggests a framework for organizational culture, focusing on how organizations deal with environmental, mission, strategy, socialization, information, and leadership dimensions.

Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2016) narrate that "organizational culture is the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization and that operate unconsciously and define in a basic, taken-for-granted fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment" (p. 190). Organizational culture has four layers: values, beliefs, behavior, and paradigms (taken-for-granted assumptions). They further assert that culture influences strategy. The cultural web of an organization and the elements of the web include stories, symbols, power structures, organizational structures, control systems, rituals, and routines (p. 198). Culture, according to Sahein (2009) and Johnson and Scholes (2002), is more than just human interaction systems.

There are different worldviews on culture and strategy. The first point of view, as stated by management guru Peter Drucker (2006), is that culture eats strategy for breakfast. The second view is that culture and strategy nurture each other. The last view is that strategy drives culture. Culture (beliefs, values, and attitudes) is shaped by structure, external environment, mission, and

intentions that ultimately influence goal formulation, strategy formulation, and strategy management on one hand and, on the other, all of which are conversely influenced by culture (Sporn, 2006). Martins and Terblanche (2003) mention that strategic vision and mission, customer focus (external environment), means to achieve objectives, management processes, employee needs and objectives, interpersonal relationships, and leadership are the dimensions of organizational culture. According to them, strategy (vision and mission, purposefulness), structure (flexibility, freedom, autonomy, empowerment, decision-making), cooperativeness, group interaction, and support mechanisms (reward and recognition, availability of resources, time, information technology, and creative people), behavior that encourages innovation (mistake handling, idea generation, continuous learning culture, risk-taking, competitiveness, support for changes, and handling of conflict), and open communication are determinants of culture that influence creativity and innovation.

Martin's (1997) cultural model describes the interaction between the organizational subsystems (goals, values, structural, managerial, technological, psychological, and sociological subsystems), the survival functions of the external environment (social, industrial, and corporate culture), the internal subsystems (artifacts, values, and basic assumptions), and the dimensions of culture (mission, external environment, means to achieve objectives, image of the organization, management processes, employee needs and objectives, interpersonal relationships, and leadership).

A comparative study of organizational culture in higher education by Coman and Bonclu (2016) reveals that mission, structure, governance, and decision-making; teaching; research culture; and support are the most important dimensions of a university culture and suggests that HEIs should give due attention to those aspects to move towards success.

Institutional Leadership. Leadership is critical in any organizational setting. Sun-Tzu (1993) mentions that "leadership causes people to follow superiors willingly; therefore, following them in death and in life, the people will not betray them" (p. 38). Leadership plays a central role in any organization. It is the exertion of power to perform the tasks of the organization so that the organization's goals are achieved. According to Whitlock (2003), leadership "is the creativity, intuition, emotion, values, relationship building, and vision that are necessary in setting a new direction, redefining, reframing, reinforcing, and communicating the *raison d'être* for the organization" (pp. 11–12).

Leadership in higher education is the process of taking effective action to shape the character and direction of a college or university, presumably for the better (Trow, 2010). According to him, four dimensions of leadership can be found in academia: symbolic, political, managerial, and academic. Strategic leadership is the foundation for using the management process of shaping the devising of vision and mission and inducing effective strategic actions through the formulation and implementation of strategies to yield strategic effectiveness (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikutty, 2012). Effective leadership has six key components: determining a strategic direction, effectively managing the organization's resource portfolio (exploiting and maintaining core competencies along with developing human capital and social capital), sustaining an effective organizational culture, developing human capital, emphasizing ethical practices, and establishing balanced organizational controls (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikutty, 2012). Leadership exists between bureaucracy and the environment. Leadership has to mediate appropriately between the bureaucracy and the environment (Mintzberg, 2007). In a study of the relationship between leadership styles and strategic management implementation in Jordanian higher education, strategic management was found to be more effective in private HEIs

than in public HEIs, and transformational leadership was more effective than transactional leadership (Alsheleh, 2016). Charismatic leadership and behavioral roles in transforming HEI by seeking opportunities, developing a shared vision, and devising means to achieve the vision are highly relevant and necessitate the inclusion of an ethical dimension.

Table 4

Organization Type and Leadership Roles

Organizational Type	Leaders' Role
Professional bureaucratic	Making decisions, getting results, and establishing a system of management
Collegium	Participative decision making
Political system	Influencing through persuasion and diplomacy; being open and communicative
Organized anarchy	A mediator or negotiator between shifting power blocks

Source: Taylor and Machado, 2006

A study by Palladon (2018) reveals that strategic leadership has a positive contribution to effective strategic implementation. The knowledge, skills, and traits of a leader have a positive impact on strategic planning, execution, and control. Jaoua and Radouche's (2014) research reveals that a leader's managerial and entrepreneurial skills have a positive contribution to successful strategic management and institutional performance. Thus, leadership is a key determinant of the strategy process and a key driver as well.

Information and Communication System. Strategic management is strongly reliant on the availability and effective processing of qualitative and quantitative data for strategic decisions and goal achievement (Uvali-Trumbi & Martin, 2021). According to Martin (1992), five categories of data are required in relation to strategic management: information about the external environment, the internal environment, input, throughput or process data, and output data. The articulation and pertinence of study programs for the labor market is one of the most important

areas for HEIs (Uvali-Trumbi & Martin, 2021). Information about the external environment relates to the forces outside the HEIs, and they have an impact in the organization both positively and negatively. The information required is in broad PESTEL categories. Information on the immediate and internal environment consists of task environmental forces as well as internal environmental factors such as resources, culture, organizational structure, and leadership. According to Gratz and Salan (1981), information flow (gathering information, disseminating information to needed parties, restricting information to those who don't need it, and improving efficiency and quality of communication); information quality (for persuasion, motivation, and satisfaction); and communication process (changes in communication types that influence decision-making and decision makers) are all important aspects of communicating with internal stakeholders.

Universities and HEIs are surrounded by stakeholders, both internal and external. How to manage smooth relationships with various stakeholders in line with the organization's values, principles, and mission is a vital aspect of the organization. In this connection, communication management raises its head, as indicated by various research studies. Communication and management emerge as dimensions of a common goal to achieve a culture that develops the link between decision-making and relationships with people and organizations in the environment. Uwitonze (2017) asserts that lines of communication between managerial and non-managerial staff should be improved to encourage and support the flow of information and feedback mechanisms.

Institutional Autonomy. Institutional autonomy is the most important element for every HEI in making independent decisions regarding goals, successes, and failures while maintaining accountability regarding those outcomes (Nikel, 2011a). What constitutes autonomy in higher

education is ambiguous and differs from context to context and in different countries (van Vaught, 1993; Nickel, 2011a). University and HEI autonomy can be understood as the freedom and authority enjoyed by universities and HEIs to play their roles and contribute to societal development within the framework provided by public authorities. Berdahl (1990a; 1990b; 2010a; 2010b) asserts that academic autonomy in terms of academic freedom, substantive autonomy, and procedural autonomy is crucial. Institutional autonomy implies the freedom of an institution to run its own affairs without direct control or influence from the government. According to Berdahl (1990a), academic freedom is the freedom of the individual scholar in one's teaching and research to pursue the truth wherever it seems to lead without fear of punishment or termination of employment for having offended political, religious, or social orthodoxy. Institutional autonomy can be substantial and procedural (Berdahl, 1990a). Substantive autonomy is the power of the university or college in its corporate form to determine its own goals and programs. What does this mean for academia? Procedural autonomy is the power of a university or college in its corporate form to determine the means by which its goals and programs will be pursued. Similarly, Estermann and Nokkala (2009), Estermann, Nokkala and Steinel (2011) and Pruvot and Estermann (2017) classified four categories of institutional autonomy (organizational, financial, appointive/staff and academic) in higher education.

Berdahl's concept of academic freedom and autonomy has essential ingredients of institutional autonomy, such as a) the freedom to select staff and students and to determine the conditions under which they remain in the universities; b) the freedom to determine curriculum content and degree standards; and c) the freedom to allocate funds across different categories of expenditure.

Participation and Ownership. Involvement of CEOs and central decision makers during strategy formulation processes improves the quality of the strategy as well as its implementation. Similarly, a strategist's vision, in the sense of a strong belief about the strategic decision and the strategist having control over that decision, can improve strategy implementation (Van den Steen, 2016). The only involvement of the top team is not sufficient for successful strategic management. Involvement of all levels of employees is necessary, along with ownership of the strategy based on their respective roles.

Obstacles to Strategic Management in Higher Education

Once the plan has been established, it has to be implemented (Rowley & Sherman, 2001). However, the plan does not get implemented due to various reasons. Silent killers are mentioned by Beer and Eisenstat (2000), impeters are mentioned by Alashloo, Castka, and Sharp (2005), and obstacles are mentioned by Carter and Pucko (2010). According to Beer and Eisenstat (2000), there are six silent killers of strategic implementation. They include an ineffective senior management team, unclear strategies and conflicting priorities, a top-down or laissez-faire senior management style, inadequate down-the-line leadership skills and development, poor consideration across functions, businesses, or boards, and poor vertical communication.

Numerous obstacles are mentioned to strategic management (Alashloo, Castka, & Sharp, 2005; Carter & Pucko, 2010). There are various problems that hinder the implementation. But the HEI leader must cope with these problems. Alexander (1985) mentions ten problems with strategy implementation based on his research on ninety-three companies in the USA. Alashloo, Castka, and Sharp (2005) listed 32 impeters, categorizing them into four groups: planning consequences (eight impeters), organizational issues (ten impeters), managerial issues (seven impeters), and individual issues (six impeters). Their findings show additional impediments to to

strategy implementation, such as a lack of choice in real strategy, a lack of national attitude toward strategy (planning consequences), a lack of an incentive system (organizational issues), a lack of enough motivation among the managers (managerial issues), and a lack of sufficient motivation among employees (individual issues).

Cater and Pucko (2010) mention fourteen obstacles to strategy implementation. They categorized the obstacles into strategy formulation, change management, organizational culture, organizational power structure, and leadership. Hrebiniak (2013) conducted a study in the context of Pakistan and found that organizational, individual, and environmental obstacles are major problems in strategy execution. Hrebiniak (2013) mentioned various problems with strategy execution, such as longer time frames needed for execution, the need for involvement of many people in the execution process, poor or vague strategy, conflict with the organizational power structure, poor or inadequate sharing of information, lack of understanding of organizational structure including information sharing and coordination methods, unclear responsibility and accountability in the execution process, and an inability to manage change, including cultural change, are obstacles.

Timoc and Danijel (2010) uncover major obstacles to strategy implementation, ranging from improper reward systems to inadequate leadership skills. This research highlights the challenges HEIs encountered in translating strategic plans into actionable initiatives by underscoring the importance of addressing these impediments to ensure successful strategy execution. Understanding and addressing these barriers are crucial for effective strategy execution and organizational advancement. Implementing improved reward systems, enhancing communication channels, and investing in leadership development initiatives are essential steps to ensure the effective execution of strategic initiatives.

Similarly, Neilson, Martin, and Powers (2008) narrated that decision rights, information, motivators, and structure are the success factors in strategy execution. Structural, behavioral, governance, financial, and operational issues are major clusters of issues in strategy execution, as pointed out by Kazmi (2008). Taylor, Machado, and Peterson (2008) found that lack of resources (financial, human, and technological), inadequate implementation of the processes, excessive fast change in the environment, lack of time, absence of communication, lack of information, lack of motivation of staff, and lack of engagement of senior administration are problems affecting planning in Portuguese higher education. They also agreed that leadership, expectations of the students, financing resources, innovation, citations of the academic staff, judgment of the scientific community, government regulations, families, needs of internationalization, and competitions with other HEIs are factors that influence institutional directions, and leadership was found to be the most important factor among them.

Strategic Management and Institutional Performance

HEIs face complex and multivariate challenges when it comes to performance or organizational effectiveness (Cameron, 1986). Despite numerous studies, there are no universally accepted measurement criteria for HEI performance. Essentially, HEI performance is defined as an organization's ability to achieve predetermined goals by utilizing its resources most effectively (Daft & Armstrong, 2021; Oyman, 2009), with an emphasis on assessing the efforts made to achieve strategic goals (Akal, 2005). The Jarratt Committee (UK, 1985, as cited in Higgins, 1989) recommended three categories of performance: internal performance indicators, external performance indicators, and operating performance.

In the same line but quite differently, Higgins (1989) suggests teaching quality, research and scholarship, acceptability of graduates in employment, support services, individual staff

performance, and social rate of return of HEI as contributions to national culture or the life of communities (pp. 362-366).

Kushner and Poole (1996) proposed a model that identified four components contributing to overall organizational success: constituency satisfaction, resource acquisition effectiveness, internal processes, and goal attainment. Stakeholder satisfaction, profit (surplus), market share, social responsibility, and scientific research are performance areas, as narrated by Mohammed Ayedh and Mohammed Omar (2020). Research has shown that strategic planning and implementation play a vital role in addressing current challenges and shaping the future of HEIs in a changing environment (Sawhney, Gupta, and Kumar, 2017).

Environmental scanning has a significant impact on organizational performance (Zhang, Majid, and Foo, 2011; Ahituv, Zif, and Machlin, 1998; Kumar, Subramanian, and Strandholm, 2001). Engaging in strategic planning or strategy formulation affects institutional performance. Proper strategy implementation enhances organizational performance, and regular M&E contribute positively to organizational performance. Failure in strategy implementation can result in a gap between strategy and performance, with weaker strategy implementation leading to poorer performance and vice versa.

Strategic planning is vital to the survival, growth, and prosperity of organizations, including HEIs. However, studies on the relationship between strategic planning and organizational performance have yielded mixed results (Owolabi and Makinde, 2012). Some studies have found a positive correlation between strategic planning and organizational performance, while others have not.

Owolabi and Makinde's (2012) quantitative study at Babcock University in Nigeria revealed a positive correlation between corporate performance and strategic planning. The

participatory nature of strategic planning facilitates the achievement of planned outcomes, and adherence to the strategic plan significantly influences performance, ultimately demonstrating that strategic planning contributes positively to corporate performance.

A study by Birinci and Eren (2013) by adopting quantitative methods of HEI of Turkey showed the blurring results in terms of environmental analysis (internal and external) and developing proper strategies, executed properly and evaluated and controlled properly. They further state that

... particularly external environmental analysis is not carried out adequately in universities in Turkey and thus universities cannot keep up with the development and transformations in the world mainly regarding higher education. Consequently, universities cannot create a competitive environment within themselves and cannot compete with the world universities and that they exhibit an inward-oriented concept of management (p. 30).

Usoh and Preston (2017), in their study of public universities in Sulawesi, Indonesia, by applying empirical survey methodology, showed that strategic planning had positive effects on the performance of public universities in Indonesia with balanced card spreading to organizational, financial, customer/stakeholder, and learning and growth perspectives (pp. 183-190). Through empirical survey methodology, they uncover the positive impact of strategic planning on university performance, emphasizing a balanced approach across organizational, financial, customer/stakeholder, and learning and growth perspectives. The evidence of positive effects on multiple dimensions of university performance supports the argument that strategic planning is a valuable tool for enhancing organizational effectiveness, financial sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and overall institutional development.

Mhumbira's (2019) case study on the University of Dar es Salaam revealed that strategic planning improved performance, with positive results seen in increased undergraduate and postgraduate volume and quality, improved research and development, improved institutional

entrepreneurship, improved learning methodologies, increased consultancy and public services, improved human resource management, improved university branding and visibility, improved financial resource mobilization, improved leadership and governance, improved student welfare, and improved infrastructure and maintenance.

A study conducted by Angiola, Bianchi, and Damato (2019) demonstrated positive outcomes in the institutional performance of Italian public universities through the implementation of a performance measurement system integrated with strategic management. Their research in Italian HEIs revealed enhancements in the quality measurement system, resulting in a positive impact on the outcomes of public universities. This study affirms the importance of utilizing performance management to leverage quality, emphasizing its significance in enhancing the overall quality of higher education.

Another research study conducted by George, Walker, and Monster (2019) using meta-analysis techniques asserted that strategic planning has a positive, moderate, and significant impact on organizational performance—effectiveness, responsiveness, financial performance, outcomes, and efficiency. They also affirmed that a long-standing debate about whether strategic management enhances performance or not has been settled with their findings. They suggested that strategic planning should be standardized managerial approaches, formalization of strategic planning processes including internal and external environmental analysis, setting goals, strategies, and plans, and executing properly rather than simply taking for granted approaches enhancing the desired results.

A recent study conducted by Mohammed Ayedh and Mohammed Omar (2020) examined the impact of three strategic planning dimensions (environmental analysis, strategic direction, and strategy formulation) on the performance of Yemeni universities. The study encompassed various

performance indicators such as profitability, market share, social responsibility, customer satisfaction, and scientific research dimensions. Their findings showed a positive impact on the performance of Yemeni universities.

Fumasoli and Hiadchenko (2023) assert that researchers have engaged in strategic management research across various levels of analysis: institutional, organizational, and individual levels. They emphasize the significance of strategic management in university strategic positioning, the emergence and early institutionalization of competition in higher education, organizational strategizing in complex and coherent higher education fields, university internationalization strategy, and sustainable quality management.

In a systematic review of twenty-five research articles, Kuusisto-Ek (2022) contends that strategic management and leadership in higher education are fragmented and multidimensional. He highlights the existence of diverse perspectives, emphases, and challenges faced by leaders in HEIs when making strategic choices. Kuusisto-Ek advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of strategic management theories, frameworks, and tools to enhance their implications for organizational success.

As most authors assert, the critical role of strategic management has a positive impact on HEIs' performance. Specifically, strategy formulation emerged as the most influential dimension, while strategic direction was identified as the least influential. Market share was found to be the most achieved performance indicator, whereas profitability was the least achieved among HEIs. However, the effectiveness of strategic management varies significantly depending on institutional autonomy and governance structure, leadership commitment and faculty engagement, the external regulatory and funding environment, the limitations of formal strategic planning in dynamic environments, the influence of external stakeholders on strategic

management, and the risk of strategic management as symbolic exercises. Thus, the effectiveness of strategic management depends on the context, is not always the best approach, and is prone to becoming a compliance-driven exercise.

Empirical Review

This section presents the review of strategic management practices of HEIs.

Strategic Management Practices

Research in strategic management practices within higher education has been expanding, with a growing body of work investigating various strategies in an international context. In large HEIs with multiple campuses, multi-level management and strategy are prevalent. Higher-level strategies typically guide lower levels, necessitating effective integration to achieve desired outcomes. Given that HEIs are complex organizations, they require strategies that span across multiple levels—network, corporate, business, functional, and operational. A comprehensive understanding of these diverse strategy types and categories is essential for a thorough grasp of strategic management within these institutions, rather than focusing on individual strategy sets alone.

Guillotin (2015) integrates neo-institutionalism, international business, and strategic management frameworks to analyze internationalization and differentiation strategies in American and European business schools. He suggests expanding the Uppsala internationalization model to address the tensions between internationalization and globalization, as well as the complexities of audience dimensions and risk management. Guillotin also notes the decreasing effectiveness of trust and reputation-building mechanisms in the face of global mimicry, advocating for more nuanced and innovative approaches to internationalization strategies.

Similarly, Rudzki (1998) critiques the internationalization of UK higher education, noting that it often lacks strategic management and is primarily driven by financial motives, such as increased fees from international students. He proposes a strategic management model for internationalization that emphasizes organizational change, curriculum innovation, staff development, and student mobility. Rudzki further argues for a structured approach to managing institutional change, highlighting the need for strategic planning to ensure that internationalization efforts are effectively integrated into the university's overall strategy to contribute to long-term goals.

Shattock (2003) distinguishes between strategic planning in stable environments and strategic management in turbulent contexts for HEIs. He highlights the need for universities to integrate academic, financial, and physical planning strategies to address competitiveness, opportunism, income generation, and cost reduction. Shattock argues that as higher education environments become more dynamic, universities must adopt a holistic and interconnected approach to strategic management to effectively respond to changing conditions and reinforce institutional strengths.

Martin (1992) presents a comprehensive case study on strategic management in European universities, focusing on its role in addressing issues of fragmentation and diffused decision-making. She defines strategic management as encompassing several key components: environmental scanning, internal assessment, mission statement formulation, goal setting, and implementation. Martin emphasizes the complex interplay of factors that influence strategic management capacity within HEIs.

Kettunen's (2000) case study at Turku University demonstrates how the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and strategy map, originally designed for the corporate sector, can be

effectively adopted for strategic planning in higher education. The study illustrates how these tools help align a university's mission with measurable objectives across various perspectives, such as educational quality, research, and financial sustainability. By using the strategy map to visually communicate strategic priorities, Turku University successfully embedded the BSC into its planning processes, fostering a culture of strategic thinking and continuous improvement. The research also highlights the importance of leadership in implementing these tools and addresses the challenges of resistance to change within the academic environment.

Kettunen (2002) explored how heads of departments in HEIs can effectively implement Porter's three competitive strategies—overall cost leadership, differentiation, and focus—within a market-led environment. His research emphasized the importance of applying these competitive strategies in the context of HEIs, highlighting how market-oriented approaches can influence strategic decision-making. By demonstrating the relevance of Porter's business strategies in the realm of higher education, Kettunen advocates for the adoption of these principles to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of educational institutions. This underscores the potential for HEIs to adopt strategic management practices traditionally associated with the corporate sector to achieve long-term success in an increasingly competitive educational landscape.

Rowley (2001) proposes eleven implementation methods for HEIs in developing economies, highlighting the importance of aligning these strategies with institutional goals and considering critical determinants such as resources, culture, and governance. His work emphasizes that a diverse range of implementation options exists, each of which must be tailored to the specific context of the institution. Rowley advocates for a nuanced approach to strategy implementation that takes into account the unique challenges and opportunities faced by HEIs in developing economies. By recognizing the variability in resources, cultural contexts, and

governance structures, Rowley's research underscores the need for customized implementation strategies that effectively address the specific needs and goals of each institution. This approach ensures that strategic initiatives are more likely to succeed and have a meaningful impact on institutional development.

Taverner's (2005) research highlights the importance of integrating thinking, doing, and learning in strategic management practices at European universities. He emphasizes that effective strategic management involves not only formulating strategies but also aligning them with practical execution and fostering continuous learning. This integrated approach helps universities enhance their strategic capabilities, improve performance, and adapt to evolving challenges, ultimately supporting long-term success and competitiveness in higher education.

Shawhney, Gupta, and Kumar (2017) provide a critical review of the theoretical foundations of strategic management within the Indian higher education sector. Their article highlights a significant gap in both literature and strategic management skills among current HEI leaders in India. They critique the state of strategic management by identifying deficiencies in leadership skills, decision-making systems, and strategic understanding, underscoring the need for enhanced strategic competencies in Indian HEIs.

Jarzabkowski (2000) explores strategy as practice by analyzing the actions of top management teams at three UK universities within the framework of organizational material and social structures at three management levels: institutional, organizational, and individual. Her study reveals that strategy is a dynamic practice shaped by interactions between people and their organizational contexts. By examining how institutional policies, internal contexts, and individual behaviors influence strategic decisions, Jarzabkowski provides insights into the complex processes of strategy formation and implementation in HEIs.

Bob (2004) emphasizes the critical role of strategic enrollment management in HEIs, highlighting its importance in aligning institutional goals with student success and financial sustainability. He identifies key SEM objectives, such as clear goal establishment, academic success promotion, effective program delivery, revenue generation, financial planning, and organizational efficiency improvement. Bob advocates for a strategic approach to student recruitment and retention, ensuring that institutions attract and retain students who align with their mission. By integrating strategic enrollment management into broader strategic planning, HEIs can better navigate challenges, sustain operations, and achieve long-term success.

Shamugia (2020) investigates strategic management for sustainable development in British higher education, highlighting the importance of integrating economic, social, and environmental considerations. The study employs corporate strategies such as stability, growth, differentiation, focus, and cost leadership, along with operational flexibility, to address environmental challenges. Shamugia (2020) underscores the significance of incorporating these dimensions into strategic decision-making, advocating for a holistic approach to institutional planning that aligns with sustainable development goals.

Kothamaki (2010) explores strategy implementation in Finnish polytechnics, emphasizing the critical role of strategy preparation, the adoption of shared strategic goals, the cultivation of a sense of community, and the importance of effective internal and external communication. The study highlights the significance of collaboration and communication in the successful execution of strategies, advocating for a participatory approach to implementation.

Liu (1998) examines strategic marketing management in HEIs in Hong Kong and the UK, highlighting the growing importance of attracting students to reputable universities that offer quality services aligned with market demand. He observes a shift towards market orientation,

with increased internal and external marketing efforts and entrepreneurial activities within universities. Liu (1998) emphasizes the significance of market orientation and entrepreneurial initiatives in enhancing institutional competitiveness and attracting students. The study underscores the evolving nature of marketing strategies in higher education, advocating for a customer-centric approach to institutional branding.

Makhdoom (2012) identifies stakeholder engagement and facilitative leadership as key strengths in a strategy implementation model while noting information gaps and resistance to change as significant weaknesses. The study underscores the crucial role of leadership in successful strategy execution, emphasizing the importance of leadership in driving strategic change and fostering a culture of innovation. Makhdoom (2012) advocates for increased investment in leadership development to enhance strategic management practices.

Huang's (2012) study on strategic management in Taiwanese higher technical and vocational education institutions highlights the importance of gaining a competitive advantage through organizational, human, financial, physical, marketing, and R&D resources. The study identifies competition levels and internal and external factors as key drivers of institutional performance. Huang (2012) further emphasizes the significance of competitive advantage and performance measurement in strategy formulation, underscoring the relevance of applying business principles in educational settings. The findings advocate for a strategic approach to institutional management to enhance overall effectiveness.

Raghunadhan and Squeira (2011) examine strategic management in centrally funded technical institutions in India, highlighting the reliance on conventional administrative systems and the absence of strategic management models. Their findings underscore the need for long-term planning, monitoring, and evaluation systems. The study reveals significant gaps in planning

and performance measurement within these institutions, stressing the importance of systematic approaches to planning and evaluation in higher education. Raghunadhan and Squeira (2011) advocate for greater investment in building strategic management capacity to address these shortcomings.

Elwood's (2010) survey on strategic planning in Irish Institutes of Technology reveals the significant influence of managerialism on strategic management practices. His research highlights several challenges, including difficulties in aligning strategic plans with institutional goals and engaging stakeholders effectively. Despite these challenges, there is limited evidence of successful transitions to new management approaches or alignment with published strategic plans. Academics often perceive the strategic planning process as offering minimal benefits beyond fulfilling bureaucratic requirements. Elwood's study underscores the impact of managerial ideologies on strategic decision-making within HEIs, pointing to a need for greater attention to stakeholder needs and improved strategic alignment.

Guillotin (2015) examines internationalization and differentiation strategies within business schools, emphasizing the need to extend existing models to address emerging challenges such as global mimicry and audience diversity. His study highlights that traditional models of internationalization may be insufficient in the face of evolving global trends and the diverse needs of international audiences. His argument for a more nuanced approach to internationalization goes beyond conventional strategies.

Yee's (2012) study on strategy formation in Malaysian HEIs reveals that emergent strategies are more prevalent than deliberate ones. These emergent strategies are primarily driven by logical incrementalism, political or cultural processes, and resource allocation. External strategies and resource allocation processes tend to foster more deliberate strategies, which are

shaped by various moderating factors. Yee's research highlights the prominence of emergent strategies in Malaysian HEIs and the significant impact of both internal and external factors on strategic decision-making.

Abdul-Kadir's (2012) case study on the strategic management practices of a Malaysian public university sheds light on the complexities and challenges of government-led, top-down strategic formulation in a highly controlled environment. The study highlights the focus on communication within the strategic process but also identifies significant issues such as conflicts, politicization, and the inherent challenges in implementation. Abdul-Kadir notes that the monitoring and evaluation processes tend to be more politically driven and documentation-oriented, which can hinder effective strategic management. In his analysis, Abdul-Kadir (2012) also emphasizes the drawbacks of a top-down approach to strategic planning and advocates for a more participatory decision-making process, where stakeholders at all levels are involved in strategy formulation.

Theeb (2009) emphasizes the critical role of strategic change management within the Libyan higher education system, advocating for the development of flexible action plans, effective strategy implementation methods, resistance management, and broad stakeholder participation to enhance institutional performance. His study highlights that adaptive leadership and change management skills are essential for successfully navigating institutional transitions and overcoming challenges associated with change. Theeb's research underscores the need for universities to adopt a proactive approach to change implementation, integrating flexible strategies that can adapt to evolving circumstances.

Bassa (2005) identifies several key challenges and opportunities in strategic planning and implementation for HEIs, including stakeholder participation, environmental analysis,

communication, and leadership. His research underscores the inherent complexity of strategic management within HEIs and emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches to effectively navigate these challenges and capitalize on opportunities. Bassa's study on strategic planning in Ethiopia highlights particular difficulties related to stakeholder engagement and external policy influences, as the findings underscore the critical role of involving stakeholders in the planning process and conducting thorough environmental analyses to ensure that strategies are both contextually relevant and responsive to external factors.

Miller, Wilson, and Hickson (2004) identify key factors that enhance strategic decision-making in universities, including familiarity, assessability, specificity, acceptability, receptivity, and structural facilitation. Their research provides a framework for improving strategic performance by emphasizing the need for a supportive environment that fosters these factors. By focusing on these elements, universities can make more informed and effective strategic choices, leading to better overall outcomes and institutional success.

Similarly, Meesilapavikkai's (2000) study on strategic planning in Thai universities offers valuable insights into the organizational structures and planning processes these institutions have adopted. The research highlights efforts to improve services, prioritize goals, and align budgets with institutional objectives. However, it also identifies challenges, such as the lack of knowledge and training, which underscore the critical need for capacity-building in strategic planning.

Hilman and Siam (2014) emphasize the crucial role of organizational culture and structure in shaping the performance of HEIs. Their research highlights that understanding and leveraging organizational dynamics are essential for HEI leaders to enhance institutional performance through strategic management. This underscores the importance of aligning organizational culture and structure with strategic goals to improve overall effectiveness.

Ofori and Atiogbe (2012) highlight the significance of stakeholder participation, organizational alignment, and strategic management frameworks in achieving institutional success. Their findings stress the necessity for HEIs to adopt a collaborative approach to strategic planning and implementation, ensuring that institutional strategies are closely aligned with organizational goals and objectives.

Palladon (2018) focuses on the critical role of leadership, organizational innovativeness, and information technology capacity in effective strategy implementation within HEIs. His research underscores that strong leadership is essential for driving strategic initiatives and cultivating a culture of innovation and adoptability. Additionally, he highlights the importance of leveraging information technology to support and enhance strategy implementation, ensuring that HEIs can effectively adapt to changing environments and achieve their strategic objectives.

Hayward (2008) highlights the positive outcomes of strategic planning in developing countries, emphasizing the importance of a well-defined plan to address the increasing demand for quality higher education and to support national development. Through extensive research in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Malawi, Bangladesh, Ghana, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, The Gambia, Ethiopia, and the United States, Hayward stresses that a clear strategic plan is essential for managing the growing need for higher education and fostering progress. He identifies several critical issues and challenges associated with strategic planning: the necessity of articulating clear goals, prioritizing actions, leading change, engaging stakeholders, securing funding, and facilitating the planning and implementation processes. Hayward argues that higher education leaders must navigate uncertainty, cultivate a culture of negotiation and planning, advocate for resources, and enhance institutional integration and legitimacy.

Issac (2002) identifies that colleges with the most effective strategic planning processes excel in several key areas: selecting strategic institutional priorities from overarching goals and objectives, developing alternative strategies, establishing a feedback system, implementing a reward system, and creating a reporting system. His research indicates that institutions incorporating more elements of results management into their planning processes tend to evaluate their planning efforts more positively compared to those with fewer elements. Issac's study underscores the critical role of results management and stakeholder engagement in driving effective planning efforts within HEIs.

Strategic Management at HEIs in Nepal

Research on strategic management practices within HEIs in Nepal remains relatively scanty and sporadic. Most existing literature focuses on the historical development, policy implications, and evolution of the Nepali higher education system. Shrestha (2009) conducted an in-depth study on the management practices of HEIs in Nepal, examining institutional characteristics such as location, establishment duration, faculty offerings, student and staff numbers, and physical and educational facilities. Personal characteristics of campus chiefs and principals, including age, gender, qualifications, and training, were also analyzed. Shrestha found that while various colleges exhibit differences in institutional characteristics, personal characteristics of the institution heads do not significantly impact management practices, except for gender differences in leadership. Shrestha (2009) further asserts that:

Multiple determinants shape management practices in HEIs. Academic level, years of experience, training, and exposure of education managers do not always correlate with management practices. Organizational culture, strategy, systems, structure, and training are inseparably interlinked. Other factors, such as an unfavorable internal and external environment, financial constraints, lack of autonomy, lack of trained and qualified staff, lack of adequate knowledge of management principles and skills etc., have greatly limited the management practices in institutions of higher education. Further, organizational factors—pay and promotion policies, environmental constraints—and social factors—

peer group and supervisory support—largely affect the extent of management practices in the institutions for higher education in Nepal (p. 16).

According to ADB (2015), Nepali HEIs have not engaged themselves in strategic planning, and institutional leadership has not recognized strategic planning as an essential dimension of higher education management. However, evidence suggests that HEIs in Nepal have been involved in strategic planning and management practices to some extent.

Rosenbloom and KC (2005) noted that KUSOM has effectively responded to market needs, addressing challenges such as political instability by focusing on mission, curriculum, pedagogy, and social responsibility.

Sapkota (2014) applied the analytic hierarchy process (AHP) to analyze strategic planning and implementation at Nepali universities and colleges, identifying a four-level strategic hierarchy encompassing mission, goals, objectives, and academic and research excellence. The pairwise comparison of goals showed a positive correlation.

Timsina (2019) explored the development of higher education in Nepal through neoliberal reforms, highlighting shifts from centralization to decentralization and increased autonomy. Timsina further discussed the impact of the WB-funded SHEP project, which aimed to improve higher education quality, market relevance, and financial sustainability. Key reforms included the reintroduction of the semester-based education system to enhance teaching and assessment methods and align higher education with social changes and demands.

The evidence indicates that TU developed a twenty-year strategic vision in 2000 under the higher education project. The SHEP of 2007 required HEIs to develop strategic plans to qualify for financial assistance. By the end of SHEP in 2015, over one hundred campuses and seven universities had prepared strategic plans. The recently concluded Higher Education Reform Project (HERP) mandated the formulation of strategic plans for financial assistance eligibility,

resulting in over 150 HEIs with institutional strategic plans. The HEIs that are not part of HERP are not required to have strategic plans, though they can still develop and practice strategic management voluntarily.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Strategic management is a comprehensive framework, methodology, and process for designing and achieving the desired future. Organizational elements such as institutional purposes, structure, governance, policies, processes, information, infrastructure (human, physical, technology, and finance), and culture have a significant influence on strategic management (Toma, 2010). In addition, external and task-related elements also play a crucial role in strategic management. With this in mind, a conceptual framework for this study has been developed as shown in figure 14.

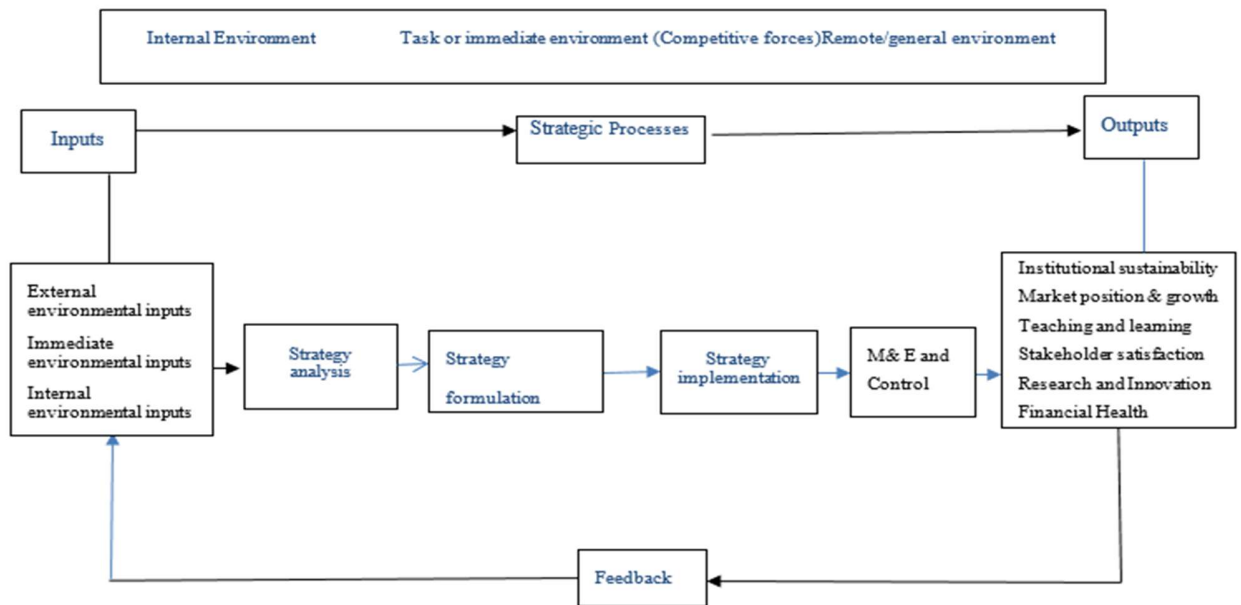
Figure 14 covers (a) the environment, which includes internal, immediate, and macro forces; (b) the strategic management process; (c) internal, task, immediate, and external inputs; and (d) a process that begins with analyzing the internal and external environments, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and tracing opportunities and challenges based on SWOT analysis, and then moves on to strategy formulation, implementation, strategic M&E, and control. (e) outputs that range from institutional sustainability, market position, effective teaching and learning, knowledge transfer, financial health, system of governance and administration, quality education, and many such aspects associated with it, followed by outcomes, impacts, and indicators of success, (f) feedback that begins with outputs and continues with inputs, as well as feedback to and from the environment.

HEIs are an integral part of society, and society is surrounded by its environment. Everything HEIs acquire from society, process, and send back to society builds a system of

inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes, impacting the chain in a continuous and dynamic environment. HEIs obtain inputs from the external, immediate, and internal environments.

Figure 14

Conceptual Framework of the Study



The strategic process involves evaluating the existing vision, mission, objectives, and strategies of the HEIs, followed by an analysis of the internal, immediate, and external environment to identify opportunities and threats as well as strengths and weaknesses. Strategy formulation involves crafting a vision and mission, setting goals and objectives, identifying and evaluating strategic options, and selecting the best ones. Strategic implementation is the process of translating strategies into reality by mobilizing resources and activating management processes. The M&E and control phase is the final stage of the strategic management process, designed to monitor and evaluate progress and take corrective action based on the systemic feedback.

Strategic management yields results by aligning goals and objectives with devised strategies. These strategies may result in financial, academic, and non-academic performance outcomes for HEIs.

The outcomes are reflected in high-quality teaching and research, highly capable graduates who are equipped to lead contemporary and future societies, and leaving a positive impact on highly knowledge-based societies.

Research Gaps

Research on strategic management in Nepali higher education remains notably sparse, with existing studies primarily focusing on historical development and policy implications rather than contemporary strategic practices. Shrestha (2009) offers a detailed examination of management practices within Nepali HEIs, identifying challenges related to institutional and personal characteristics but providing limited insights into strategic planning processes. Although ADB (2015), Sapkota (2014), and Timsina (2019) acknowledge the involvement of Nepali HEIs in strategic planning, comprehensive research on the implementation and effectiveness of these strategies is lacking. Empirical studies are needed to explore gaps in strategic planning, leadership skills, and environmental analysis specific to the Nepali context, including the impact of external factors, financial constraints, and the role of institutional autonomy and training in ensuring strategic outcomes. Similarly, there is a little agreement between the strategic planning and management, and their associated benefits and components. Hence, this research seeks to minimize this gap.

The literature reveals three main research gaps in strategic management for Nepali HEIs: theoretical, methodological, and knowledge-based. Theoretical frameworks currently offer limited insights into balancing stability and adoption in HEIs, an area that needs further exploration.

Methodologically, there is a predominance of theoretical research designs, with few mixed-method approaches being utilized. Knowledge-based gaps are particularly pronounced, as there is a noticeable void in literature concerning strategic management practices specific to Nepal. While global research highlights the benefits of strategic management in diverse contexts (Hayward, 2008; Kaplan & Norton, 2006), there is a pressing need for studies that address the unique challenges faced by Nepali HEIs. This study aims to help address these gaps by investigating the strategic management practices adopted by Nepali HEIs, with a focus on improving theoretical understanding, methodological rigor, and practical knowledge in this field.

Implications of the Review for the Research

The literature review provided critical evaluation of relevant literature pertaining to the study. It has encompassed concepts, phases, analytical frameworks, models, typologies, and strategic levels. The review then progressed to synthesize strategic management theories and dimensions. A comprehensive examination of the key areas of higher education management follows, including the decision-making system, strategic management practices, critical factors, tools, strategic management and performance, and issues in strategic management.

The first implication of the review is that it helped me to identify the research gap. Second, the review helped me to develop a theoretical basis for my research. The third implication is related to my efforts to keep the research on track, while the next implication is that it opened up further research to the exploration of potential areas for future research.

Summary of the Chapter

The review of related literature reveals a strong consensus on the critical role of strategic management in enhancing the performance and effectiveness of HEIs. Effective strategic management involves aligning organizational culture and structure with strategic goals, engaging

stakeholders, and leveraging both internal and external factors for making the HEIs work efficiently. Key findings from the research emphasize the importance of comprehensive planning processes, leadership, and stakeholder participation. Studies such as those by Hilman and Siam (2014) and Palladon (2018) highlighted the need for understanding organizational dynamics and fostering a culture of innovation and adoptability. Similarly, the work of Issac (2002) and Miller, Wilson, and Hickson (2004) underscored the significance of results management, strategic decision-making, and structural facilitation in achieving institutional goals. Furthermore, recent research confirms that strategic planning positively impacts various performance dimensions, including financial sustainability and stakeholder engagement, as demonstrated by the research works of George, Walker, and Monster (2019) and Mohammed Ayedh and Mohammed Omar (2020).

The literature on strategic management in higher education broadly covered key areas such as strategic direction, environmental changes, SWOT analysis, and the impact of strategic management on organizational performance. Key findings highlight that effective strategic management practices can significantly enhance HEIs' performance by overcoming obstacles, leveraging organizational dynamics, engaging stakeholders, and fostering effective leadership. These practices are crucial for institutional resilience, agility, and long-term success. Despite the established benefits, results vary across different contexts, particularly between developed and developing countries. Therefore, adopting strategies to specific settings, such as those in Nepal, is essential. Research in this area should focus on understanding context-specific challenges and advancing strategic management practices to improve the value and impact of higher education in developing regions.

Chapter Three

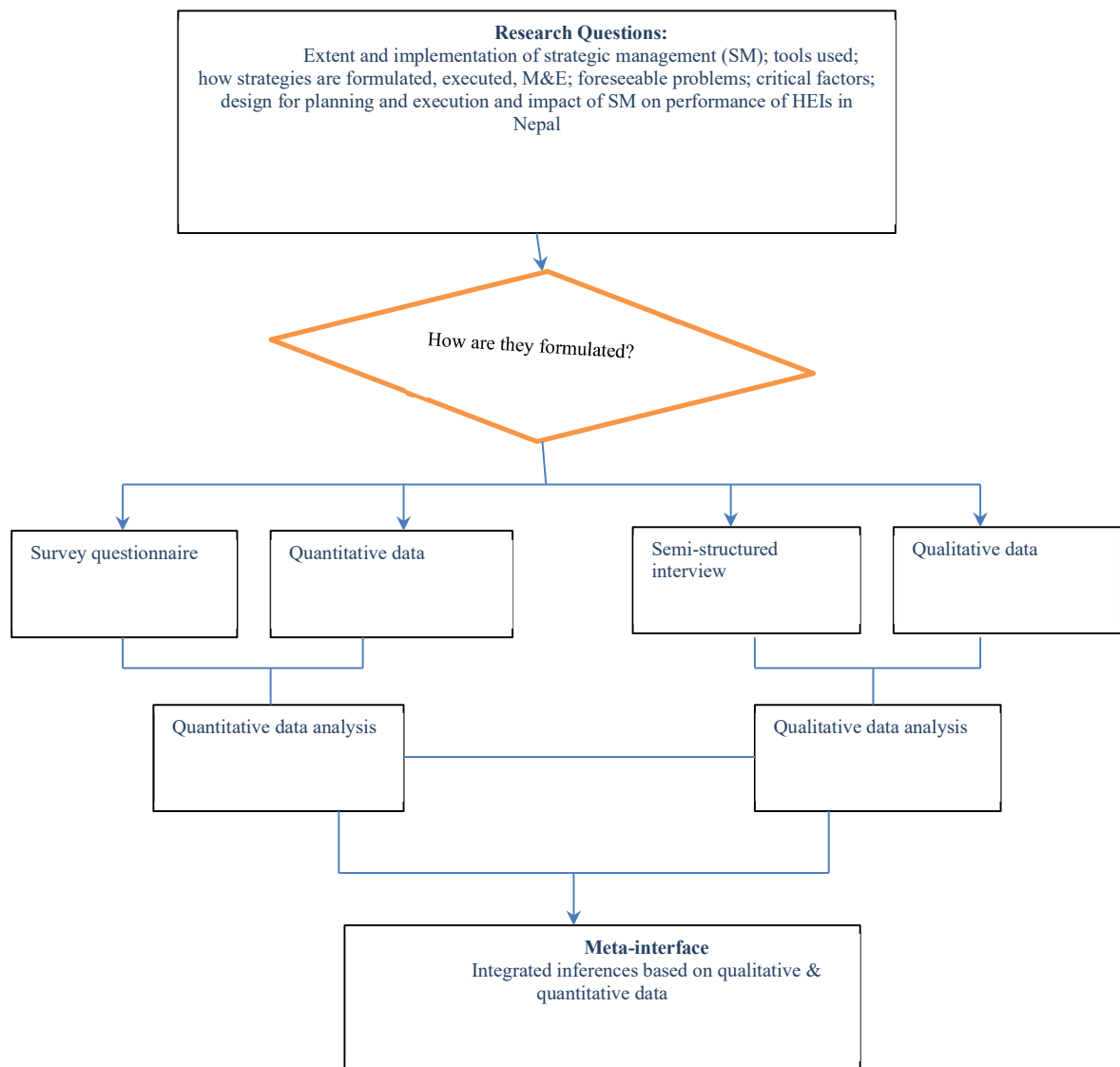
Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research methodology adopted to seek answers to research questions and objectives as well as various research paradigms with their underlying ontological, epistemological, axiological, and logical underpinnings. These philosophical approaches provided the basis for addressing the research questions, the objectives, and the research issue of the study. The researcher has adopted a mixed-method research design, informed by interpretive ontology and epistemology, as the appropriate methodology for addressing the objectives of this study. Therefore, this chapter explains in detail the research methodology used in the study by outlining the procedures that responded to questions like what was done, how it was done, and why it was done.

Research methodology is a systematic activity in the investigation of nature and matter that deals specifically with how data is collected, analyzed, and interpreted. It deals with how knowledge is discovered and analyzed in a systematic way. It refers to the philosophy that guides how knowledge should be gathered. It further defines the research purposes, activities, procedures, measurements, and applications (Hernández, Pérez, & Rangel, 2016). More specifically, it calls for issues such as what research method(s) to use, what strategies to use as part of the research process, and how to locate, organize, manage, transform, create, and communicate research tools, data, and other relevant information on research (2016).

This study aimed to explore how strategies are formulated, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and controlled in the HEIs in Nepal in terms of strategic management practice. The mixed method of research on the nature of the inquiry, i.e., qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, data analysis, and presentation of the findings, is presented in Figure 15.

Figure 15

Research Design**Philosophical Underpinnings of the Study**

The study has the following philosophical references.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) affirm that "a set of fundamental beliefs that guide action" is a worldview. Lincoln, Guba, and Martens (1998) called it a paradigm; Crotty (1998) called it

epistemologies and ontologies; Proctor (1998) called it research philosophy; and Neuman (2000) called it broadly conceived research methodology. Research philosophy is understood in terms of the interrelationship between ontological (what is the nature of reality?), epistemological (what can be known?), and methodological (how can a researcher discover what she or he believes can be known?) levels of inquiry (Proctor, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) and Creswell (2003) mention four categories of research philosophy or worldview: post-positivist, constructivist, participatory or advocacy, and pragmatic. Dudovskiy (2018) mentions four types of research philosophy: pragmatism, positivism, realism, and interpretivism. Pragmatism is characterized by the consequences of action, problem-centeredness, and pluralism, as well as real-world problem orientation.

Most of the authors mention positivism, constructivism, and pragmatism as research paradigms. The constructivist paradigm claims that reality is mind-dependent and socially constructed through the relationships, psychological activities, and shared understandings that we take part in (Plowright, 2011). The social constructivist perspective emphasizes the importance of communication, interpretation, and perceptual frames for making sense of organizational life, whereas the postmodern perspective suggests that theory can help organizational members better understand and alleviate conditions of oppression and alienation. Ontology dictates epistemology, epistemology dictates methodology, methodology dictates methods, and methods dictate paradigms. Despite all this, the research question lies at the forefront, and the research question dictates everything (Table 5).

Ontological Assumptions

Ontology is best known as the theory of nature, the science or study of being (Blaikie, 2010a; Blaikie, 2010b), whereas the ontology of social entities is related to the theory of social

entities. It is "reality" that researchers investigate. Ontology deals with the nature of reality, or the question of what is real. First, realism believes that there is only one truth or single reality. The positivist perspective suggests that theory can be used to explain, predict, and control organizational activity. The world we inhabit has an ontological reality, an existence that is not dependent on our perception, understanding, or description of that reality or world (Plowright, 2011). Realism believes that truth can be measured objectively by staying back. It is also known as the "etic view" or "objective way of measuring the truth."

In the present study, I believe in multiple subjective realities, and hence it is my ontological standpoint, where several views of reality are identified through triangulation based on differing perspectives and data sources. As such, my ontological position has implications for my choice of epistemology, research approach, and research strategy, as well as the type of data and their collection methods.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemology is best known as the theory of knowledge. It is about how we get knowledge. How can I know reality? It is a relationship between reality and the researchers. More specifically, epistemology is interested in the possibilities, nature, sources, and limits of knowledge in the field of study.

In the present study, constructivism has been taken as my epistemological standpoint, where several views of reality are identified through triangulation based on differing perspectives and data sources. Reality needs to be interpreted subjectively. Interaction is needed, as it is the creation of truth by the researcher. An empirical approach is prevalent to dig out the truth. Reality should be examined using the best tools. Neither an objective nor a subjective manner is absolutely suitable to gain knowledge; it is the situation or context that governs reality. The

present study also collects subjective data and interprets it, linking the study objectives and interpretive position by adopting both objective and subjective points of view while interpreting the data on HEIs.

Axiological Assumptions

Axiology is about the valuation of judgmental theoretical notions of good and bad, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, and real and apparent (Hart, 1971). More specifically, axiology is engaged in evaluating the role of the investigator's own worth at all stages of the research process. Axiology is best known as the theory of value. In my research, I have identified the types of things that are accepted by our university society and the types of activities that are not accepted by our society as having values. What value or outcomes did my research produce? Can research be neutral, or do our personal values shape how we do research? Are some of the concerns that the researcher is aware of. HE Is overall culture, political inclination, and their own benefits valued more than quality teaching-learning, research, and innovation?

The aim of the researcher is to seek opportunities to help reform the higher education landscape for the better. My opinion is that the present functioning of HEIs should be changed through better planning and management. From my standpoint, strategy management competency is weak, as there is a lack of awareness among top team leaders as well as academic leaders, with a few exceptions. To some extent, this research is not value-free but value-laden, as the participants have made meaning of what they say and how, as a researcher, I perceive their value.

Rhetoric

Language is the basis for communicating with the wider scientific community. It is a shared understanding of the language of research (Creswell, 2009; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba,

2011). The rhetoric used by the research participants is what we understand as their language of presentation to make meaning of their perspective towards HEIs' strategic management.

Logic

As a researcher, student, and individual, my aim is to seek opportunities to positively impact the higher education sector. I believe in thoroughly analyzing each situation, considering its premises, arguments both for and against, drawing inferences, and ultimately arriving at conclusions based on the reality uncovered through research. This involves understanding the perspectives of research participants and interpreting their perspective as a text to gain insights into the landscape of higher education management.

Table 5

Research Design

Topic	Options	Choice made by the researcher
Research Philosophy/paradigms	Pragmatism, Positivism, Realism, and Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Ontology	Single reality Multiple reality Reality is constantly negotiated, developed, and interpreted. Knowledge can be measured.	Reality is constantly negotiated, developed, and interpreted.
Epistemology	Reality needs to be interpreted. Reality should be examined using the best tools.	Reality should be examined using the best tools.
Axiology (theory of value)	Value free Value laden Value bound	Value laden to some extent, the scenario should be changed for the wider benefit.
Logic	Inductive and deductive	Prepositions or statements, premises, arguments, inferences, and conclusions
Rhetoric	Language of research	Make the language of research very effective within the strategic management context
Research design	Quantitative Qualitative Mixed	Mixed methods design Concurrent triangulation design Concurrent nested design Concurrent transformative design
Methods	Survey Interview Observation Focus group discussion	Survey questionnaire Semi-structured interview Observation Focus group discussion Archival/Document Analysis

Methodology

The methodology is a set of techniques used by the researcher to investigate reality. Considering the nature of the inquiry, the appropriate research method for me has been a mixed-methods research design that integrates both the subjective and objective nature of the data into a single research design.

Guiding Theories for the Study

Strategic management problems cannot be easily framed within a fixed paradigm; instead, a multi-pragmatic discipline requiring variation in theoretical and methodological basis is required (Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, & Manikuttu, 2012). Education theories and models draw applications from theories in economics, sociology, humanity, anthropology, political science, psychology, and several other disciplines, as asserted by Toutkoushian and Paulsen (2016). HEIs are considered social systems that follow the input, processes, output, outcomes, and impact loop with a feedback mechanism subject to environmental impact producing synergistic effects (Bertalanffy, 1969; Weinberg, 1975). Similarly, industry-based theories (Porter, 1980) and resource-based theories (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991; Teece, 2009) are also prominent when understanding HEIs in a complex and changing environment of striving to meet the market needs. In addition to this, the resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2015) helps us understand how state and private funding shape the institution and influence the strategy process at large. The theories helped the researcher explain, predict, and interpret the strategic management phenomenon as well as unexplored research areas. It helps establish the relationship among attributes, variables, and data. Theories operate at the conceptual level, whereas data, facts, and findings operate at the observational or empirical level.

Strategies of Inquiry or Methods Used

An appropriate research design is crucial for understanding the SMP of HEIs, with both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. The strategies of inquiry are also called "approaches to inquiry" (Creswell, 2007) or "research methodologies" (Martens, 1998). The methodological choice (qualitative or quantitative) has been subject to controversy (Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999). The research questions and context should guide the choice of an appropriate research method. Moreover, the integration of quantitative and qualitative methodological tools is likely to be fruitful (Hoskisson et al., 1999). Creswell (2007) mentions that a research design can be selected based on the nature of the research problem or issues being addressed, the personal experiences of the researcher, and the reasons for the study.

Mixed methods are also called multi-methods, convergent, integrated, and combined methods (Cresswell & Planto Clark, 2007). Using mixed methods of research provides various benefits, as mentioned by Hanson, Plano Clark, Petska, and Creswell (2005). Researchers use mixed research methods for five specific reasons, as mentioned by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989). First, mixed methods of research help triangulate the same dimension of the research problem by using more than one method. Next, complementary research can be conducted, which allows for a fuller understanding of the research problem or research results. Results from one method are used to help develop or inform other methods. Additionally, a study's findings may raise questions or contradictions that require clarification, leading to new inquiries and expanding the breadth and range of inquiry. Given the benefits, I have used mixed method design for the study. The quantitative data format is amenable to statistical analyses and standardized tests of reliability and validity, whereas qualitative data adds an in-depth understanding of research results and allows the researcher to explore anomalies or subgroups

within the data. Qualitative data illuminates the meaning of results from quantitative data, augmenting a narrative understanding of findings from quantitative research (Nagy & Biber, 2010). Employing both qualitative and quantitative methods helps address the complexity of the interdisciplinary nature of research (Creswell, 2009). In sum, mixed methods provide a balanced and holistic analysis. A mixed-method approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative methods, allowing triangulation, complementarity, and expansion.

Creswell, Plano Clark, Gattmann, and Hanson (2003) mention two major types of mixed-method designs: concurrent mixed-method design and sequential mixed-method design. Different variants within mixed methods are found (Cresswell, 2007), and among them are sequential, concurrent, and transformative design.

Sequential Mixed Design

In a sequential mixed methods design, data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted in a sequential way (Cresswell, 2009). Either qualitative data are gathered, analyzed, and interpreted first, and afterwards quantitative data are gathered, analyzed, and interpreted, or vice versa. Time-consuming data collection is the major drawback of sequential design. It also has three variants: sequential explanatory design, sequential exploratory design, and sequential transformative design. I did not use this sequential mixed design because it was costly, I had to visit the HEIs twice, and it would be more time-consuming.

Concurrent or Parallel Design

In a parallel or concurrent mixed-methods design, data are gathered, analyzed, and interpolated in a concurrent side-by-side or parallel manner. It has three variants: concurrent triangulation, concurrent nested, and concurrent transformative designs. Concurrent design is an approach of mixed methods research that requires data to be collected at the same time or in

parallel within the same study; one method (qualitative or quantitative) dominates while the other is embedded.

Concurrent triangulation is a research design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected simultaneously, with priority given to either method during the interpretation or analysis stages (Creswell et al., 2003). According to Kroll and Neri (2009), the primary purpose of concurrent triangulation is to validate the findings from each method using evidence generated by the other (p. 43).

The concurrent method is best known as time efficient, provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of research problems, and allows for direct comparison between qualitative and quantitative findings. The concurrent research method is justified, as it focuses on efficiency through simultaneous data collection, comprehensive insights, and flexibility in data integration by merging survey results with interviews, FGDs, and documentary analysis to identify patterns and contradictions.

This study is appropriate for the use of concurrent design based on the nature of the inquiry. The reason behind choosing the use of concurrent design in this study was that qualitative data have dominated the quantitative data, and qualitative and quantitative data were integrated with each other during data collection, analysis, and interpretation whenever suitable.

Target Population of the Study

The overall population of this study consists of HEIs in Nepal. According to the UGC report (2024), 17 universities, 164 constituent campuses or schools, 545 CBACs, and 723 private affiliated campuses in Nepal.

Sampling Process and Sample Size

The purpose of the sampling frame is to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods; this research uses a concurrent mixed-methods design. The sampling frame ensures that data are collected from diverse and representative participants across HEIs, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of SMP.

Quantitative Sampling Frame

The population for quantitative data was faculty members, department heads, administrative staff, and senior heads from HEIs in Nepal. The sampling method was stratified random sampling to ensure representation across public and community-based HEIs spanning the geographic regions of urban, semi-urban, and rural. The roles of participants include academic and administrative positions. The sampling size of 300 is based on power analysis and feasibility, whereas data were collected through online and paper-based surveys.

Qualitative Data

The population for qualitative data were key stakeholders involved in SMP at HEIs, including administrators, faculty leaders, and policy experts. The purposive sampling method was used to capture in-depth insights and perspectives to ensure representation across public and community-based HEIs spanning the geographic regions of urban, semi-urban, and rural. The roles of participants include academic and administrative positions, and the sample size consists of 53 participants for interviews and two FGDs with 5-7 members in each group, whereas data were collected through semi-structured interviews with FGDs.

As per the nature of the study, two-stage sampling is a prerequisite. First-stage sampling is purposive, i.e., universities and HEIs were selected on a purposive basis that have prepared and practiced strategic plans. Thus, the HEIs that have prepared and practiced strategic planning were

considered the first-stage sample. After selecting the universities, constituent and affiliated campuses were selected from those that had prepared and practiced strategic plans as the second stage.

Purposive sampling was used to select the target participants: VCs, registrars, deans, planning heads, department heads, and campus chiefs. The reason behind going through purposive sampling was to gain their knowledge and perceived understanding of HEIs' policies, strategies, financial position, and performance, as mentioned by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007). Besides, they hold positions that are responsible for strategic plan preparation, execution, monitoring, and control in one way or another. Thus, the primary goal of choosing the participants purposefully was to select information-rich cases. Accordingly, based on the size and complexity of the university and geographical considerations, the sample was selected.

The sample consisted of six universities (TU, KU, PokU, PU, MWU, and AFU), twenty CBACs, six TU constituent campuses, and one TU central department. These universities were selected based on their institutional strategic plans. The constituent campuses and one central department of TU were chosen because they had developed strategic plans for campus autonomy and/or for the QAA process. Similarly, the first twenty QAA-certified CBACs were purposefully chosen from among the affiliated CBACs. Among the HEIs selected, interviews were conducted with VCs (5) and registrars (5); deans (6); planning chiefs (3); department heads (2); campus chiefs (five TU constituent campuses; 20 affiliated CBACs); UGC authorities (2); educationalists (2); council officials (3); and MOEST and NPC authorities (2). Similarly, two focus group discussions were organized to interact on the status of strategic planning, execution, and M&E with campus chiefs and campus management committee (CMC) authorities.

Document selection: Strategic plans were chosen from six universities and their associated constituent and affiliated campuses. In addition to this, annual progress reports of related HEIs were also part of the study.

With regard to quantitative data collection, the cluster sampling technique was used, where survey questionnaires were distributed through campus chiefs, who were instructed to reach faculty and faculty members. Following this, random sampling was adopted, and the 302 responses represent participants' faculties, academic managers, and officers other than the participants in the interview who were willing and able to complete the survey within the given time. Out of the questionnaires distributed, 203 (60.4%) were filled out and presented in usable form.

With regard to sample size justification, the qualitative sample of 53 interviews and two FGDs provided rich, detailed insights, consistent with best practices in purposive sampling. Additionally, the quantitative sample size (302 responses) is sufficiently large for statistical analysis, with a response rate of 60.4% (302 out of 500).

Nature and Sources of Data

The study comprised both primary and secondary data, as well as qualitative and quantitative information. A structured survey questionnaire seeking data on student pass percentage, graduation rate, and financial performance from the selected HEIs was used as primary data for the quantitative study. Semi-structured interviews with top-level management at HEIs were used to collect qualitative data. The blending of qualitative and quantitative data was done appropriately in an intervening order, considering the nature of the inquiry.

Participants in the Study

The present study aims to explore strategic management and the actors involved in it, such as the chief executive officers known as vice chancellors, rectors, registrars, deans, central department heads, and executive directors. Members of the Senate, the Academic Council, the Executive Council, the Planning Council, and campus chiefs are also the actors in strategic management at different levels. Regarding affiliated campuses, the chairperson of the management committee, members of the management committee, the campus chief and assistant campus chief, and manager-cum-academic staff responsible for different types of tasks within the higher education institution are also considered the actors of strategic management practice. The administrative staff designated to look after the functional responsibilities of the universities and campuses is another category. Additionally, the study included participants from various groups, such as faculty members associated with HEIs, administrative staff, students, and authorities from regulatory and funding agencies (e.g., UGC, professional councils, and ministries of education, health, agriculture, etc.). Interviewees were purposely selected from individuals in leadership positions and those involved in the strategic planning process at HEIs and other relevant organizations.

Instruments Used for the Study

An academic inquiry should ensure consistent quality and outcome, and standardized procedures and techniques are used to ensure this. Firstly, I developed a survey questionnaire (Appendix A), an interview questionnaire (Appendix B and C), a checklist for field observation, and a checklist for documents to be collected. The survey questionnaire was basically derived from a theoretical review of books, policy documents, and research studies focused on strategic management practices (e.g., Shrestha, 2011). These instruments were reviewed and refined with

suggestions and guidance from the professors and the supervisor. As per this process, I used a survey questionnaire, structured and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and field observation as instruments of the study. Below are the details of the instruments used for the study.

Survey Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire was designed with questions related to general information about the participants and strategic planning, its execution practices, M&E, and control practices. In addition to these, questions related to autonomy and its implications for strategic management, as well as the performance of HEIs in terms of teaching and learning, research and innovation, financial health, market position and growth, and institutional sustainability, were added. All these questionnaires are based on the multi-item 5-point Likert scale: 1 as "not at all or least, 2 as "little, 3 as "moderate, 4 as "much, and 5 as "very much. Similarly, three open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire about perceived problems, solutions to these problems, and the suggestions the participants wanted to provide as relevant to the present study. The survey participants are campus chiefs of selected campuses, university academic managers, faculties, and officers (Table 6).

Table 6

Sample Frame for Survey Participants

Nature of HEIs	Population Size	Sample Size	Proportion	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Affiliated Campuses	275	119	58.6	58.6	58.6
Constituent Campuses	150	56	27.6	27.6	86.2
Universities	75	28	13.8	13.8	100.0
Total	500	203	100.0	100.0	

Among the individuals participating in the research, there were 117 faculty members, 62 faculty members who also held administrative responsibilities, and 24 administrators. Within the

faculty members group, 76 belonged to the CBACs, while 41 were affiliated with universities or constituent bodies. Among the 62 individuals serving both academic and administrative roles, 35 were associated with CBACs, and the remaining 27 were linked with universities or constituent bodies. As for the administrators, eight were from CBACs and 16 from universities or constituent bodies. In terms of gender distribution, there were 190 male participants and 13 female participants in the survey, as shown in table 6.

Interviews

Between 2020 and 2022, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key figures in leadership, including vice-chancellors, registrars, deans, assistant deans, campus chiefs, and chairpersons of management committees. Additionally, interviews were conducted with academics and other authorities as well. Nine interviews were conducted face-to-face; the rest were done via telephone, supplemented by written responses to predetermined questions in a blended approach. The criteria for selection of interview participants were strategic decision-makers, heads of department, faculty involved in planning, and individuals familiar with HEI governance and policy.

Table 7

Sample Frame for Interview Participants

Category	Participating HEI	Participants	Number
VCs	AFU (2), KU (1), PokU (1), TU (1), MWU (1)	38, 42,49, 51,56, 46	6
Registrars	TU (1), AFU (2), PokU (2), PU (1), MWU (1)	39,40,45, 48,50,52	6
Deans	TU (3), KU (4), MWU (1)	30,31,32,33,34,36, 47, 55,56	9
Campus Chiefs	Constituent Campuses (6)	24,25, 26,27,28, 29	6
Department Head	TU (1)	1	1
Project Head	TU (1)	35	1
Campus Chiefs	CBAC (20)	2,3,4,6,7,8,10,11,12,13,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23	20
Planning Chiefs	AFU, TU, MWU (3)	37,54,44	3
Funding Agency	UGC (1)	53	1
Educationalists	UGC/University (1)	43	1
Total			54

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges for face-to-face interviews, prompting a shift to virtual platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Team Meetings. In cases where virtual or face-to-face interviews were not feasible, questions were sent via email, and responses were supplemented by telephonic interviews. A total of 54 participants, including policymakers and administrators, were interviewed, comprising 6 vice-chancellors, 6 registrars, 7 campus chiefs or department heads of TU, 3 planning chiefs, 9 deans or assistant deans, 20 campus chiefs, an educationalist, and a council representative, as shown in table 7.

Focus Group Discussion

Two focus group discussions (FGD) were organized to obtain information from the campus chiefs and faculties. The first FGD was conducted at the TU autonomous campus outside Kathmandu Valley, and another one was conducted in Kathmandu Valley, comprising campus chiefs of the constituent campuses and CBACs. The criteria for selecting FGD participants were faculty and administrators from HEIs.

Field Observation

Field observation of all six universities was performed. Similarly, ten CBACs have been visited to acquaint the researcher with the research-related aspects. For the same reason, universities and campuses (constituent and affiliated) were selected from within the selected HEIs to record their details through documents and other sources of information.

Document Analysis

According to sociologists such as Creswell (2009), Silverman (2013), and Yin (2003), the adoption of rigorous data-gathering processes is a distinguishing element of a high-quality study. They advise researchers to acquire data from a range of sources. According to Shang and Seddon (2002), the researchers choose documents and reports as data sources because they provide a rich

amount of carefully collected, accessible, and up-to-date information regarding the issue/theme under study. The researcher used the following sources of data: a) policy documents provided by GoN (plans, policies, educational commission reports, guidelines); b) strategic plans of HEIs, annual reports, and PRT reports.

More specifically, periodic plans of GoN, educational commission reports, and GoN policies related to higher education were reviewed. Next, different cycles of strategic plans of universities (TU, KU, PU, PokU, AFU, and MWU; six TU constituent campuses; one central department of TU; and twenty CBACs) were reviewed for the sake of content analysis. In addition, the strategic plans of TU faculties and institutes covering management, law, humanities and social sciences, engineering, science and technology, medicine, agriculture, and animal sciences, as well as the school-wide strategic plans of KU (except medicine), were reviewed and analyzed.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were gathered from relevant publications, research papers, and seminar papers. The annual reports of HEIs and EMIS reports were the other secondary sources of data for the study. Data gathered through the study of the strategic plans (published or unpublished), annual budgets, and programs, as well as other documents relevant to the study, were analyzed through the documentary analysis method.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was an organization, i.e., the HEIs in Nepal. For the same university, the constituent campuses were considered a unit of analysis. For affiliated campuses, HEI was considered the unit of analysis.

Data Analysis Instruments and Techniques

This study adhered to the QUAL-Quan (parallel design) approach for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data, as recommended by Bryman (2012). I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from primary and secondary sources, following several steps for data analysis from the literature and the field. For interviews and FGD data, I initially transcribed and processed the interviews for clarity, then coded and re-coded them based on different categories. Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts, FGD transcripts, and documents, focusing on the research questions. Similarly, documentary data underwent coding, categorization, and thematization. I organized and analyzed qualitative data using MaxQDA and QDA software. Both qualitative and quantitative data were transcribed, coded, analyzed, integrated, and corroborated to reach the depth of the research findings. Thematic analysis predominantly guided qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data from survey questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS 24 to summarize numerical data by mean, standard deviation, and regression analysis. I integrated and inferred findings from both datasets to address the research questions, ensuring proper triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data from various sources to validate the information.

Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

Every piece of scientific research should have qualities of reliability and validity (i.e., Bryman, 2012; Denizen & Lincoln, 2005). Aspects of reliability and validity are subject to the philosophical underpinnings of the research, types of data, instruments used to collect data, data analysis, interpretation, and methodological choices (quantitative and qualitative). The following are the approaches adopted to validate the instruments and the data obtained from different sources.

Validity and Reliability of Quantitative Tools and Data

Validity. Validity is the accuracy or correctness of the findings. It is the best available approximation to the truth of a given proposition, inference, or conclusion (Trochim, 2009). Do the instruments measure the phenomenon that they are supposed to? Technically, only propositions, measures, and analyses can be said to be valid. As mentioned by Trochim (2009), a measure, a sample, a design, or an analysis enables valid propositions, inferences, and conclusions. He asserts that external validity is linked to sampling, construct validity to measurement, internal validity to design, and conclusion validity to analysis (p. 20). In quantitative research, the question of internal and external validity is of major concern, and the researcher has to make efforts to ensure that correct findings are there.

For Winter (2000), validity in quantitative research might be addressed through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation, and appropriate statistical treatments of the data. Four types of validity (internal, content, construct, and external) have been addressed in the present research.

Internal Validity. The Spearman's correlation showed the results and P-values of the correlations of strategy formulation, execution, monitoring, and evaluation to be less than 0.05, so the correlation coefficient is significant at $\alpha = 0.05$, thus indicating that these scales are consistent and valid to measure what they were set for. Comparing the calculated value ($N = 203 - 2$) with the tabulated value at 5% degree of freedom, the calculated value was greater than the tabulated value, and it is significant and a valid question.

Content Validity: To maintain the validity of the content, I included important aspects of strategic management in the survey questionnaires. The aspects included in the survey questionnaire are the concept of strategic management, mission/objectives/strategies,

stakeholders' expectations, external and internal environmental analysis, strategic choice, alignment, strategy implementation (short-term objectives), organizational structure, resource planning, general management, financial management, change management, strategic control, corrective action, and higher educational performance.

Similarly, major aspects are incorporated in interview questions and the checklist for FGD to invite expert opinion.

Construct Validity: While maintaining construct validity, I checked convergent validity by conducting exploratory factor analysis on the survey questionnaire. Composite reliability should be greater than 0.70, AVE greater than 0.5, and composite reliability greater than average variation extracted (AVE). The obtained value must be greater than the critical value.

External Validity. External validity is the degree to which the results can be generalized to wider populations, cases, and situations (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007).

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency with which the research produces the same results if repeated. Did the researcher obtain the same results by using the same measurement time and again on the same population shortly thereafter? In quantitative research, the questions of reliability and objectivity are major concerns, and researchers have to make assertive efforts to ensure a reliable finding. In qualitative research, the term "dependability" is used to refer to reliability and conformability for objectivity (Bryman, 2012).

Research should be valid as well as reliable. There are four ways to increase the reliability of measures. As Newman (2006) mentions, 1) clear conceptualization of constructs, 2) use of a precise level of measurement, 3) use of multiple indicators, and 4) use of a pre-test of the measurement instrument. To this end, these measures were employed: First, the objectives of the

research were clearly formulated and established within a clear conceptual framework for the research. Secondly, a five-point Likert scale covering study variables was developed with a few open-ended questions. Third, multiple indicators were used to uncover the strategic management practices of HEIs, followed by a pretesting survey questionnaire. In corroboration of the above-mentioned measures, the following measures were also adopted:

In order to gauge the reliability of quantitative survey data, I conducted a reliability test. The internal consistency alpha coefficient was measured, and it ranged from 0.88 to 0.90, which was greater than 0.7, meaning that the test result was reliable. The result of the alpha coefficient was satisfactory and fitted with the threshold value of 0.70 of Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). As the number of items and average inter-item correlation increase, the value of Cronbach's alpha also increases (Cronbach, 1951).

Table 8

Criteria for Establishing Research Quality

Criteria for quantitative research (Trochim, 2009)	Criteria for qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 2000)
Internal validity	Credibility
External validity	Transferability
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Conformability

Source: Trochim, 2009; Guba and Lincoln, 2000

Establishing Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

Guba and Lincoln (2000) mentioned that trustworthiness criteria must be maintained by qualitative researchers, and they created four stringent criteria for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

In relation to qualitative research, the term "credibility" is used to refer to internal validity and "transferability" to external validity.

For Winter (2000), validity in qualitative research might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness, and scope of the data achieved; the participants approached; the extent of triangulation; and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher.

Credibility

For Trochim (2009), "credibility is to establish that the results of the qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participants" (P 162). The credibility of the research was established by the richness of the data gathered rather than the quantity of data. The research participants can say that the findings are credible and accurate. To this end, triangulation has been done to confirm that the data were analyzed from multiple perspectives. The purpose of triangulation is to enrich, refute, confirm, and explain the research results under investigation (Carvalho & White, 1997), as well as to minimize bias in measurement, sampling, and procedural terms.

The current study used data triangulation (i.e., the use of different sources of data) as the data from different ecological areas and participants were used, meaning triangulation of the data was materialized. In addition to data triangulation, theory triangulation has been done. While interpreting the data, the system's theoretical view, industry-based theory, and resource-based theory were used for theoretical triangulation.

Lastly, the methodological triangulation (i.e., the use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative methods for investigation to uncover the truth to a greater extent and establish the validity of the study) established that data was collected through a survey questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussions, and published and unpublished materials like strategic plans and annual reports were also reviewed. Additionally, different aspects of HEI-related data were gathered from multiple sources. Through document analysis, field observations, and data

from one method, they were cross-verified and validated, and a high degree of coherence was found.

The survey and interview questionnaires were developed after an extensive review of the literature and finalized only after pretesting, modification, and review done by academicians and experts in the field. After collecting the data through a survey questionnaire, they were edited for accuracy, legibility, and consistency.

Transferability

The study was carried out in the Nepali context (time, setting, participants, and places). It is the researcher's duty to explain the context and assumptions of the research that were central to it. This calls for special consideration to validate the research in different contexts. In order to mitigate such a crisis of external validity, a detailed description of the context and the assumptions of the research was supplied. By doing so, researchers in similar settings can transform the same findings, including other aspects of the research.

Dependability

Dependability is mostly concerned with the replication or repetition of research in a similar setting. Mainly dominated by qualitative data (interview, focus group discussion), the timing, setting, mood, etc. did not permit the same setting for replicating the research. By keeping these constraints in mind, appropriate measures were applied to mitigate the issue of dependability. To ensure reliable data from the research tools and the findings, the tools were validated in consultation with the experts, and data from one source was cross-verified to ensure reliability.

Conformability

To ensure conformability, the researcher documented the procedures for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. Appropriate reference mechanisms were used. In relation to interviews data, firstly interviews were transcribed. While transcribing interview data into English, due attention was given to meaning instead of simply translating words into literal form. Following this, the researcher rechecked the transcribed data and read and reread it with due attention. The research findings of other researchers were taken as a reference point, and findings from one method were corroborated by another.

Ethical Consideration

As the present study focuses on the strategic management practices, their function depends on the performance of the practitioners. I have obtained verbal consent from all interview participants and survey participants. Similarly, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained during data collection, storage, and analysis. High ethical considerations have been maintained in all phases of the research process, including the presentation of the findings.

Summary

This mixed-methods study was designed to address the extent of adoption and implementation of strategic management practices in HEIs in Nepal. A convergent parallel/concurrent mixed methods design has been used, and it is a type of design in which qualitative and quantitative data are collected in a concurrent way, analyzed separately, and then merged. Data gathered through a survey questionnaire has been used to gauge the extent of adoptability of strategic management practices in HEIs through the lens of industrial organization (IO) theory and a system perspective on the performance of HEIs. The interview data, FGD data, archival data, and field observations explored how strategic plans were developed and

implemented in HEIs in Nepal. The reason for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data was to aid triangulation, initiation, and complementarity.

Lastly, it is important to note that the selected universities out of thirteen and the selected HEIs out of 1432 affiliated institutions represented a significantly small number. Hence, it is essential to enhance not only the professional skills of top-level managers but also their forward-thinking behavior if strategic management practices are to be studied from a larger perspective

Chapter Four

Analysis of the Themes of Strategic Management

In the preceding chapters, I introduced the study, provided an overview of the Nepali higher education system, conducted a literature review on strategic planning and management in HEIs, and outlined the research methodology. Building on the theoretical and methodological foundations established earlier, this chapter analyzes the key themes of strategic management derived from the research objectives and questions outlined in Chapter 1.

The first research question explores the extent to which strategic management is adopted and applied in HEIs, which is discussed under the theme of adoption and application of strategic management. This question further examines the three main components of strategic management: strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation, as well as control.

The second research question investigates the processes and tools involved in the formulation, implementation, evaluation, and control of strategy in HEIs. The third research question examines how institutional factors—such as leadership, autonomy, internal governance and control, organizational communication, culture, and structure—affect the degree of adoption of strategic management in HEIs.

The fourth research question addresses the obstacles or challenges faced by HEIs in Nepal during the phases of strategic planning, implementation, evaluation, and control. The fifth research question assesses the impact of strategic management on the performance of HEIs, which is discussed under a separate theme.

Finally, the response to the sixth research question is a proposed framework for strategic management specifically for HEIs in Nepal. To address these research questions, this chapter is organized into five themes, each corresponding to a research question. The last research question is addressed in Chapter 6.

Adoption of Strategic Management in HEIs in Nepal

One of the themes in this chapter addresses the first research question: the extent of adoption and application of strategic management in Nepali HEIs. This theme explores the historical roots of strategic management in Nepal's HEIs, followed by an examination of different levels of strategic planning. It covers the purposes, mechanisms, and approaches to strategic planning, as well as the awareness of strategic management, including the goals.

Strategic Planning of HEIs in Nepal

According to Lockwood (1984), educational planning is a continuous, collaborative, and forward-looking process, involving foresight and informed decisions that shape the future. Universities must adhere to this process to ensure informed decision-making. The primary purpose of educational planning is to reduce unpredictability and build a sustainable, long-term future in a constantly changing environment (TU, 2000).

In Nepal, universities are required to develop long-term plans, which must be approved by the Senate. University acts empower the Senate to approve these plans. In developing countries like Nepal, long-term development planning and strategic planning are often regarded as the same. Despite the provision for long-term planning in higher education acts, initiatives toward this approach began only in the early 1980s. The first strategic plan, the 1983 Ten-Year Development Plan of the Institute of Engineering (IOE), was developed by the IOE (as cited by The WB, 2000, p. 30). Similarly, on December 20, 1997, the TU Planning Council approved a

document based on Nepal's Ninth Plan (1997–2002) titled "TU: Basic Policies of the Ninth Plan, 1997/98–2002/03," which laid out a framework for TU's long-term policies (WB, 2000, p. i).

External influences played a role in shaping Nepal's educational planning system from the beginning. The WB is considered a major actor in influencing educational policies in developing and least developed countries, including Nepal. The WB's support for client countries is guided by factors that are 1) appropriate to the country's specific circumstances, 2) based on strategic planning at both national and institutional levels, 3) focused on promoting autonomy and accountability, and 4) aimed at enhancing institutional capacity and facilitating the exchange of relevant regional experiences (WB, 2002).

The development of a strategic plan for higher education in Nepal can be traced back to the IDA Midterm Review Mission in March 1999, which reviewed the implementation of the Nepal Higher Education Project (1994–2000) (TU, 2000). During this review, it was revealed that TU had begun to develop its strategic plan in collaboration with IDA. As a result, TU drafted a strategic plan titled "TU: The Strategic Vision for Twenty Years" in 2000, with financial support from the WB.

At KU, the founding team established the university's VMGO and strategies during its founding in 1992. However, these elements were not formally documented at the time and were presented informally by the founding vice-chancellor in the Senate (Thapa, 2019). Formal documentation of the VMGO began in 2000, when KU leadership recognized the need for a comprehensive strategy. The university management engaged foreign experts to review programs and develop the VMGO. A significant stakeholder discussion followed, resulting in the formal adoption of KU's VMGO in early 2000. The vision, mission, and goals were officially endorsed during three workshops held that year (Registrar, KU, 2020).

In a similar vein, Pokhara University (PokU) leadership recognized the importance of a strategic plan in 2003. The rationale for developing this plan, as outlined by the university, was as follows:

The university has introduced a number of innovative programs, and in many areas, it has been able to create a niche for itself. In order to pursue a sustained path of growth, meet community expectations, and launch effective programs in an efficient manner, there is a need for a strategic plan. The purposeful plan is an outcome of this much-felt need" (PokU, 2003, p. 1).

As a result, PokU developed its first strategic plan for the five-year period of 2003–2007, which was approved by the university Senate the same year.

In 2007, the WB-funded SHEP provided reform grants to HEIs, requiring selected institutions to develop strategic plans for future reforms. SHEP made it mandatory for HEIs to have a strategic plan in place to qualify for project funding from the UGC. This prompted Nepali HEIs to intensify their strategic planning efforts to meet UGC requirements. All selected HEIs, including CBACs, developed strategic plans based on guidelines provided by the UGC. Some institutions received technical and expert support through the UGC to prepare these plans. As a result, TU's constituent campuses (PU, PokU), KU's schools, and other universities initiated or revised their strategic planning processes. During the SHEP period, PU and three TU constituent campuses, along with over 120 CBACs, developed strategic plans.

As part of SHEP, the UGC also introduced the QAA system in Nepal, establishing six criteria and benchmarks (initially eight), including policies and procedures that required an institutional strategy for maintaining quality standards (UGC, 2008). HEIs that did not previously have a strategic plan began developing or updating one in response to the requirements for QAA certification.

After the SHEP ended, the WB-funded Higher Education Reform Project (HERP) implemented a similar provision for project support. HEIs seeking project funding were required to prepare and submit a new or revised strategic plan to the UGC. This led to a further increase in the number of HEIs preparing strategic plans, while those with expiring planning cycles developed new plans for the next cycle. In 2014, with HERP funding, TU developed its second strategic plan (2014–2018).

According to the vice-chancellor, the founding vice-chancellor of KU presented a consolidated ten-year plan (2013–2022) to the Senate, which was approved in 2012 before his tenure ended (Appendix D). The document was officially signed by the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor (KU, 2069 B.S.). In 2017, on the occasion of its silver jubilee, KU launched its Vision 2030, which outlined six strategic pillars: quality, impact, equity, global engagement, identity, and innovation (KU, 2017).

Following a leadership change in 2022, KU undertook research to examine past trends and develop a future-oriented plan. KU's White Paper (2021) identified key academic and non-academic trends, forming the basis for its future strategy. This led to the development and approval of the strategic plan, "Reimagining KU (2022–2027)."

A year after the establishment of the Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU), a team of experts developed a ten-year strategic plan and accompanying action plan. Similarly, since its founding in 2010, Midwestern University (MWU) crafted its Five-Year Strategic Plan (2012–2017), titled *Unveiling a Lightweight Future for Midwestern University*. It had initially developed a consolidated twenty-year strategic plan (2016–2035) alongside its five-year plan.

At TU, a team of internal experts developed the university's second strategic plan (2014–2018), and in 2018, TU launched TU Vision 2030: Action Steps as its third strategic plan. TU's

central strategic plan encompassed faculties, institutes, campuses, and research centers, functioning as the university's corporate strategy to guide its leadership. Figure 8 illustrates the strategic planning cycle of HEIs in Nepal, which began in 2000 with the first cycle and is now in its third. Additionally, TU has prepared action steps to implement the goals outlined in its strategic plan for 2030 (TU Vision 2030).

Figure 16

Strategic Planning Cycle of HEIs in Nepal

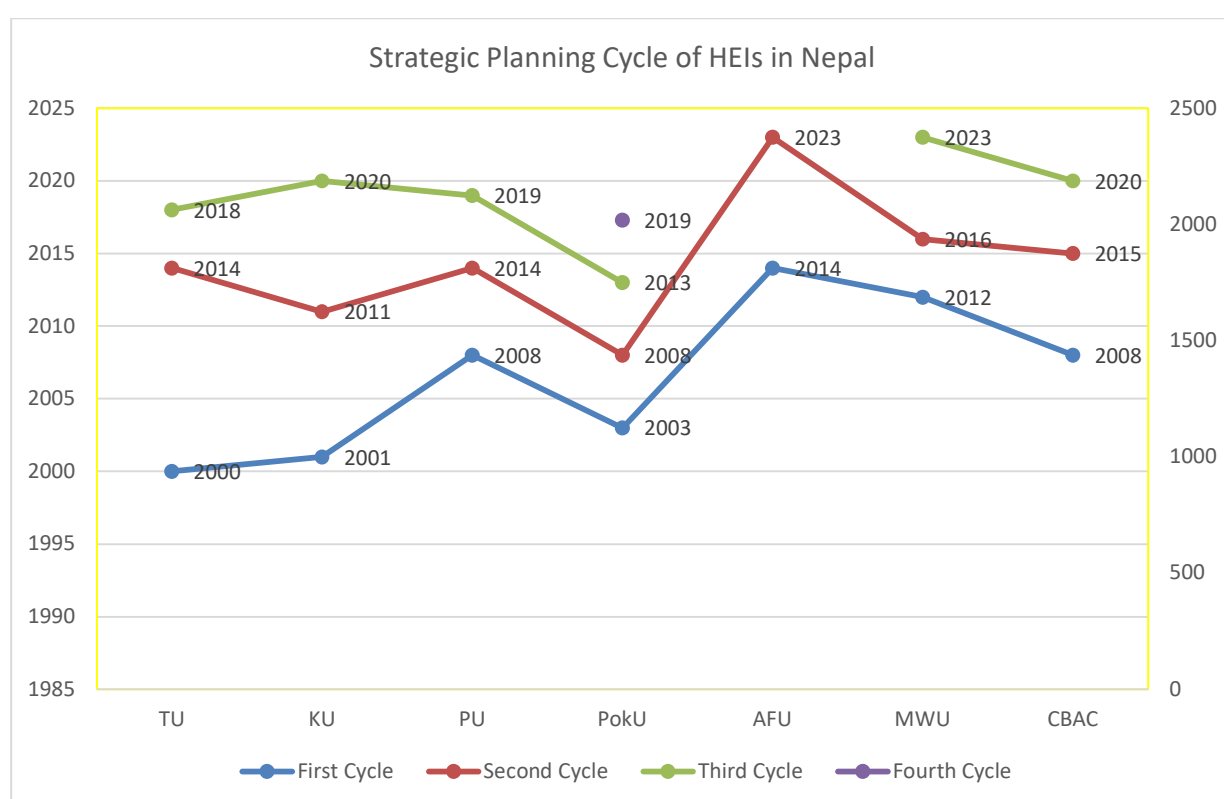


Figure 16 depicts the strategic planning of Nepali universities and HEIs, which began in 2000 and is now in its fourth cycle. In this backdrop, TU was the first university to develop a strategic or long-term plan in Nepal, followed by KU and PokU, respectively.

The introduction of university-specific strategic planning in Nepalese higher education was largely driven by the SHEP mandate, which required institutions to develop strategic plans to

qualify for project funding. Financial support was provided to facilitate discussions with stakeholders and the preparation of strategic plans for individual campuses. As a result, TU's constituent campuses and KU's schools (Science, Engineering, Arts, Education, and Management) developed their own strategic plans in addition to the overarching university-wide plans. Other universities opted for a single, university-wide strategic plan. Under SHEP's guidance, four TU constituent campuses, four faculties, five institutes, and four research centers crafted their own strategic plans.

Table 9

Strategic Plan of Nepali HEIs

University	Title of the Strategic Plan	Time Frame
TU	TU: The Strategic Vision for Twenty Years (2000) TU Five-Year Strategic Plan 2014-2019 (2014) TU Vision 2030 (2018) TU Vision 2030: Action Steps and Implementation Plan, 019	2000-2019 2014-2018 2020-2030 2019
KU	KU Long-term Strategy 1993- Vision, Mission, and Goals of KU KU Ten-Year Action Plan KU Silver Jubilee Initiative, KU Vision 2030 Re-Imagining KU: Strategic Plan 2022-2027	1993- 2000 2012-2022 2017 2022-2027
PokU	PokU Strategic Plan 2003-2007 PokU Strategic Plan 2008 (Revised) PokU Strategic Plan 2013-2017 PokU Strategic Plan 2018-2023	2003-2007 2008-2013 2013-2017 2018-2023
PU	PU Strategic Plan 2008-2014 PU Five Year Strategic Plan (FYSP) 2015-2019 PU Strategic Plan (in process)	2008-2014 2015-2019 --
AFU	Strategy 2013-2023 and Operational Plan 2015-2020	2013-2023
MWU	Five Year Strategic Plan: Unveiling a Luminous future for Mid-Western University Twenty-Year Strategic Plan 2016-2035 and Five-Year Strategic Plan 2016-2021 Three-Year Strategic Plan	2012-2017 2016-2035 2016-2021 2022-2024

Source: TU, 2000; TU, 2014; TU, 2019; TUa, 2019b; PokU, 2003; PokU, 2013; PokU, 2018; PU, 2008; PU, 2015; AFU, 2013; AFU, 2014; MWU, 2012; MWU, 2016; MWU, 2022; KU, 2000; KU, 2012; KU, 2017, KU, 2022

In this context, the Vice-Chancellor of KU stated:

The development of KU's strategy, along with those of its schools, formally began around 2007/2008, as required by UGC and SHEP. KU leadership requested that each school should prepare its own strategy, which was then consolidated into KU's overall strategy. Each school's strategy was developed with contributions from its respective stakeholders" (P 42).

Similarly, the CMC Chairperson and the then-campus chief of a TU constituent campus expressed:

Under SHEP, there was a provision of WB support for TU constituent campuses that opted for campus autonomy. We organized stakeholder discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of campus autonomy. Our campus decided to opt for autonomy, and we prepared a strategic plan to meet both SHEP requirements and the autonomy framework (Participant, FGD).

Under HERP, HEIs were again required to prepare and implement strategic plans. This provision led many institutions to either develop new strategic plans or update the existing ones. TU's majority constituent campuses, institutes, faculties, and research centers had prepared their strategic plans. Out of TU's 62 constituent campuses and 42 central departments, the majority have completed their strategic plans. Universities like PU, PokU, MWU, and AFU also developed university-wide strategic plans for their entire institutions.

However, affiliated campuses have historically operated outside the long-term planning and annual budgeting frameworks used by the universities. In 1981, the practice of forming CMC at affiliated campuses under the chairpersonship of the Zonal Commissioner was introduced, and these campuses followed GoN's planning and budgeting system.

SHEP made it mandatory for affiliated campuses to develop strategic plans and adopt an annual planning and budgeting system to receive financial assistance from UGC under the SHEP window (WB, 2007). This applied to nine initially selected affiliated campuses. A campus chief

of a CBAC stated that, for the first time in their history, they had developed a strategic plan with technical assistance from the UGC and expert support (P 2).

Strategic planning in the Nepalese higher education system has a history of about twenty-three years, with institutions operating on planning cycles of five years (TU, AFU, MWU, PU, PokU), ten years (TU, AFU), and twenty years (TU, MWU). The practice of strategic planning among campuses began in 2007, and prior to that, no documented evidence of strategic planning was found in affiliated campuses.

Levels of Strategic Planning

A university is a complex entity composed of various organs spread across its organizational boundary. Academic and administrative hierarchies have evolved along distinct paths, yet the overarching hierarchy typically follows a structure from the central office to the dean's office and then to the campuses. Reporting generally moves upward from the campuses through the dean's office to the central office.

Strategic planning can occur at multiple levels within an organization, as is evident in Nepal. The strategic plan of the central office serves as the university-wide strategic plan, covering the entire institution. As noted by Shirley (1983), this represents the institutional level (Level 1) of strategic planning among four levels. The second level includes plans developed at the dean's office and at research centers (in the case of TU). The third level encompasses campus-level plans, while the fourth level pertains to program-level plans, which are directly related to specific programs at HEIs in Nepal.

University-Level Strategic Planning. Nepalese universities clearly demonstrate the first level of strategic planning, also known as corporate-level strategic planning. This level of planning addresses the university as an integrated whole. Approximately 82% of universities in

Nepal have developed university-wide strategic plans, with the exceptions being NSU, LBU, and newly established universities.

Institute/Faculty-Level Strategic Planning. Second-level planning, also known as institute- or faculty-level planning, acts as a bridge between the university's corporate strategic plan and the campus- or program-level plans. This form of planning has been crucial for securing HERP and SHEP funding through the UGC/TUPIO. It was found that all institutes and faculties of TU, as well as all schools of KU (except the School of Medical Sciences), have developed their own strategic plans.

Campus-Level Strategic Planning. Campus-wide functional planning—encompassing finance, human resources, enrollment, and facilities—is designed to implement the strategies defined at Level 1. In Nepal, campuses can be either constituent or affiliated, and both types engage in strategic planning. Academic matters generally align with the university's strategic plan. Some of the constituent campuses of TU's 61 have prepared strategic plans to pursue autonomy, while others did so to secure SHEP/HERP funding to become 'decentralized' campuses. For example, one FGD participant and campus chief noted that they prepared and submitted a campus strategic plan to the PIU of TU to become a 'decentralized' TU campus and obtain project funding. Similarly, CBACs also have developed strategic plans at the campus level. University strategies guide the strategic intentions of campuses, schools, and various university organs. As Taylor and Miroiu (2002) highlight, strategic planning and implementation can impact any part of the organization, a trend observable in Nepal as well.

In some cases, campus strategies may be in conflict with university strategies. However, there is a general consensus among participants that strategies at constituent campuses, schools,

and other university units should complement rather than replace the university's overall strategies.

Program-Level Strategic Planning. Program-level planning is also practiced in Nepali HEIs, which involves departmental planning developed in response to the strategies defined at Levels 1 and 2. For instance, planning for TU's central departments exemplifies program-level planning in Nepal. This type of planning typically addresses functional aspects such as admissions, curriculum, staffing, and budget, which are integral to program-level strategies.

Purpose of Developing a Strategic Plan

The key question is, why engage in the strategic planning process? Analysis of HEI strategic plans and interview data reveals that strategic planning serves two main objectives. First, from a practical perspective, it ensures that an organization operates efficiently and effectively. Second, it addresses political needs, such as satisfying stakeholders and meeting external requirements. While some other HEIs are also found to have developed strategic plans due to external pressures, others did so out of practical necessity.

Practical Objectives. HEIs are consciously engaged in bettering the lives of people by attracting bright students, attracting and retaining talented faculty, mobilizing resources, enhancing physical, technological, and other facilities, and producing good-quality human resources to attain the predefined goals and objectives. In connection to this, the founder of AFU alluded to the development of the strategic plan of AFU entirely for practical purposes, i.e., to develop the university based on his vision. Research participants believed that they were engaged in strategic planning exercises to help HEIs develop and excel in their performance as compared to other competing institutions. Their reflection is voiced as

Institutions engaged in strategic planning are to ensure that they function efficiently and effectively, aligning their actions with their vision and goals.

Strategic planning helps institutions to develop and grow based on a clear vision, enabling them to address practical needs and challenges.

Political Objectives. In addition to practical objectives, HEIs are also engaged in strategic planning exercises for political purposes. The majority of respondents held the view that they were engaged in strategic planning to meet the SHEP/HERP and QAA/UGC requirements.

A TU constituent campus' strategic plan states:

It takes into account the TU's Rules for Autonomy 2062 (Revised in 2068) as a guiding document and purpose of the plan for obtaining extra grants for its development including the block grants (p. 5).

This indicates that TU's constituent campuses prepared their strategic plans to obtain SHEP or HERP funding by converting the campus into an autonomous campus as mandated to submit a strategic plan.

A campus chief of a CBAC said that a strategic plan has been prepared to satisfy the UGC requirements. When it came to the annual plan and budget, we followed the traditional annual budgeting systems that we had practiced even before UGC was established (P 8).

Similarly, another campus chief of a CBAC mentioned:

After UGC selected us for Scheme B under SHEP, it provided two days of training regarding HERP and its requirements, as well as the structure of a strategic plan to be prepared and submitted to get project funding. Based on the structure provided by UGC, we developed a campus strategic plan and submitted it to UGC (P 20).

The above participants expressed their move for strategic plan preparation to receive SHEP funding, and as per UGC requirements, they prepared the plan. This shows that the strategic plan was prepared for political rather than practical purposes.

In a similar vein, another participant implied that the strategic plan was created as part of the requirements for the QAA's certification to be accredited by the UGC. He narrated:

In our case, strategies were formulated as part of the requirements for the QAA process to get our institution accredited by the UGC, Nepal. As our campus entered the QAA process in January 2018, the five-year strategic plan was a prerequisite for the process; as a result, our institution was accredited in January 2019. Similarly, a five-year strategic plan is also required when applying to the TU Higher Education Reform Project or UGC, Nepal, for various grants (P 28).

The participant's view can be interpreted as having an understanding that the motto of developing a strategic plan is to meet the QAA requirement on one hand and to get HERP funding through TUPIO on the other, both of which are prepared for political purposes.

In addition, another campus chief at the CBAC said,

We have prepared three cycles of the strategic plan so far. Now the third strategic plan is under implementation. The first cycle, 2009–2013, was prepared under the SHEP B scheme; the second was 2014–2018 for the QAA process; and the third, or HERP and reaccreditation while, 2019–2023 plan, is under way. We adopted the strategic plan as the campus's primary guiding document (P 22).

Participant's (P 22) views indicated that the strategic plan was the campus's primary document. The SHEP/HERP funding provided impetus for QAA accreditation and re-accreditation requirements, as reported. Similarly, a participant in the FGD representing the Public Campus Association mentioned:

Quite a significant number of CBACs have been submitting strategic plans to UGC only to satisfy UGC's requirements and for documentation purposes. No one in UGC has ever looked at them and provided feedback on the same (Participant, FGD).

Almost all HEIs that make a move for QAA must have VMGO clearly defined. Here is an excerpt from a PRT report of a campus:

The college strategic plan, working manual, and other related documents carry the VMGO of the institution. The institution may need to periodically revisit its strategic plan to ensure compliance with its VMGO, highlighting specific linkages among them.

A similar excerpt of the PRT report from another campus reads like this:

VMGO is defined. The strategic plan is in operation, followed by an action plan, but it needs approval from the university authority.

In line with this, participants expressed the view that, as regulators and controllers, professional councils require HEIs to outline a clear institutional vision, mission, goals, objectives, and strategies for their institution. Similarly, the professional council's participants confirmed the view held by the participants:

Institutions are often engaged in strategic planning to meet external requirements and satisfy stakeholders, such as regulatory bodies like the UGC or professional councils. Compliance with regulatory requirements, such as those related to accreditation or funding, is a significant driver for strategic planning in many HEIs. External funding opportunities, such as those provided through schemes like the HERP and NEHEP, can also motivate institutions to engage in strategic planning.

Data from the field survey, interviews, and document analysis revealed that UGC requirements for SHEP funding, HERP funding, and QAA certification; professional councils' requirements; exogenous influence; new leadership; and good governance of the HEIs all work as the influencing factors for the formulation of strategic planning these days. The need to respond to increased competition, determine priorities, and provide better service to students and faculties were the main reasons behind the development of strategic plans by HEIs in Nepal.

In this backdrop, Nepali HEIs have been preparing strategic plans for both practical and political purposes. Based on the above facts and discussion, it can be said that the purpose of developing a strategic plan by HEIs in Nepal was for both practical and political maneuvering.

Mechanism for Preparing a Strategic Plan

What is the best approach and institutional arrangement for preparing a strategic plan for the university, or HEI? It is a question to be answered before creating a strategic plan. The university's acts and rules mention the functions, rights, and duties of university organs and officials responsible for crafting long-term university planning and approving it, along with the annual budget and program and the annual progress report as well. In every university, there has

been an institutional arrangement for university planning. In most cases, a separate division or directorate has been established under the direct supervision of the VC to this effect.

In the universities, there is a planning directorate, division, or section that looks after the planning function as well as preparing the annual progress report of the university under the direct control of the VC. In principle, the planning division, directorate, or section has to be charged with the responsibility of preparing the strategic planning of the university. It was found that two trends were evident in the strategic planning process at HEIs in Nepal. The first was that strategic planning has been entrusted to a group of consultants or experts, and the consultants or experts prepare and submit the strategic plan after discussions with the stakeholders. The second tendency was to form a strategic planning team within HEI's internal stakeholders. It was noted that stakeholders should be given appropriate consideration when entrusted with the responsibility of planning tasks and selecting committee members. One of the planning chiefs in this regard mentioned:

I am heading the Planning Directorate. University strategic planning tasks had been entrusted to a team of university professors. The team was competent, and they took my input once or twice. However, excluding the planning chief from developing a university plan is, in my opinion, unsuitable for smooth institutional functioning (P 54).

The participants' view is that appropriate representation in strategic planning is necessary in order to own the strategic plan and to make the plan a vital document and instrument of the HEI. Likewise, the planning chief's authority and responsibility cannot be replaced by any other members or experts; instead, they are expected to contribute to the whole plan synergistically.

It was revealed that the strategic plan drafting committee has been formed in most of the cases (MWU-6, TU-5, PU, PokU-3, and KU-5). According to the former vice-chancellor of AFU, a consultant was engaged to develop a strategic plan for the university, and a series of discussions had taken place for its finalization. Mechanisms for the strategic plan preparation and source of

financing have been presented in Appendix E. In some cases, the services of consultants or experts have been utilized, and the crafted strategic documents have been discussed with internal and external stakeholders to get feedback from them. Similarly, people in positions of authority were responsible for oversight, direction, and planning. A campus chief of a CBAC narrated the process as follows:

We have formed a strategic plan preparation committee, and the committee discussed the plan within the committee, with internal stakeholders (teachers, students, staff, and management committee members), and outside stakeholders as well. Based on a series of discussions, we crafted the campus VMGO, as well as strategies, and put them back up for discussion with stakeholders. With their feedback and comments, the strategic plan development committee submitted the plan to the CMC, and the campus endorsed the strategic plan (FGD, Campus Chief of CBAC).

The strategic planning committee is at the center of the planning process. Its approach, processes, and activities have a significant impact not only on plan preparation but also on its implementation. One of the participant campus chiefs mentioned,

While developing a strategic plan, we have the practice of formulating a seven-member strategic planning committee under the chairmanship of the campus chief with an expert, an engineer from the municipality, and other stakeholders through the decision of the CMC. Campus administration provides campus-related data to the strategic planning drafting committee. The data include the number of students, the number of faculty, the number of employees, the income and expenditure of the campus, the student pass percentage, the number of graduates, physical facilities, and other aspects of the entire campus. We have nearly 4000 general members in the campus assembly. The strategic planning drafting committee consulted the assembly members, breaking them into four groups consisting of nearly 1000 members, and sought suggestions from them. Similarly, the planning committee conducted seminars seeking suggestions for the campus strategic plan by inviting stakeholders. In addition to this, the strategic planning committee and other members learned from the exposure visits to educational institutions within and outside the country. (P 2)

The campus chief further added:

The VMGO of the campus were revisited during the planning cycle. The strategic planning committee conducted a SWOT analysis and based on it, the committee developed strategies, which we call "strategic initiatives," and these initiatives included policy and procedures, curricular aspects, teaching, learning, and evaluation, research, consultancy, and extension, student support and guidance, information systems, and

public information. These seven initiatives were carried out based on the criteria of QAA of the UGC (P 2).

One of the participants mentioned that the strategic plan drafting committee stood at the center of the planning process, and all the ideas and input were collected and incorporated into the plan document through the planning committee. Rigorous tasks to collect the information from secondary sources and also a series of discussions were carried out with its stakeholders to capture their critical views, opinions, and experiences for developing an implementable, practical, and comprehensive strategic plan (road map) for HEIs for the next five years.

Another participating campus chief of a CBAC shared his perspective with a representative from the Public Campus Association in the following words:

For the first time on our campus since its establishment, we crafted a campus strategic plan as part of the UGC-funded SHEP requirement. We formed a strategic plan preparation committee, and the committee consulted with teachers, administrative staff, management committee members, and societal stakeholders. With their input, we crafted the campus VMGO and prepared a draft campus strategic plan. We again put it up for consultation with a select group of representatives, and with their feedback, we finalized the strategic plan. This could make the vision a shared vision. The strategic plan has been approved by the CMC, and we have been implementing it gradually (P 57).

There are two basic outlooks in relation to planning for the future. The first approach is the outside-in approach, popularly known as SWOT (Porter, 1960), and the second approach is the inside-out approach, which became popular in 1980. Hamel and Prahalad (1994) built on and exploited the core competencies of the organization, building on its strengths and growing from within. In the Nepali context, it was found that both inside-out and outside-in approaches have been used.

Approaches to Strategic Planning

HEIs in Nepal employ both top-down and bottom-up approaches for developing their strategic plans. In a bottom-up approach, strategy acceptance involves the active participation of

lower levels, with top-level roles being more reactive. Conversely, the top-down approach involves directive strategy formulation initiated from the top management levels.

Charismatic leaders often play a key role in identifying and addressing organizational issues directly, rather than relying solely on existing structures. These leaders create an environment of two-way communication, mutual trust, and confidence between corporate headquarters and operational units. They foster a culture where individuals skilled in creating, acquiring, and adapting knowledge contribute to addressing new insights.

In this connection, one campus chief noted:

The campus forms a committee to draft strategies for the institution; this committee includes experts from various fields such as management, education, economics, and administration. The draft is initially discussed and approved by the campus executive committee, then revised and endorsed by the CMC. Once endorsed by the management committee, the strategic plan is put into effect" (P 28).

Meetings of the strategic planning committee, guidance from the university's high authority, and discussions with stakeholders within the university are common approaches for developing strategic plans. The specific methods employed for plan preparation in HEIs in Nepal are detailed in Appendix F.

Strategic plans are developed through discussions with faculty, academic managers, and other stakeholders. For CBACs, the preparation involves meetings, input from CMC, consultations with experts, and stakeholder discussions within the campus. Vision, mission, and goals are established through collective efforts of these stakeholders. Additionally, seminars, discussion programs, and organized meetings are used in the strategic planning process. In most cases, stakeholder consultation is a major approach for plan development at various levels.

Strategic planning should be cost-effective, timely, and participatory, and the process must be managed transparently and confidently (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002). Nepali HEIs have

partially adopted these principles in their strategic planning processes, as highlighted by Taylor and Miroiu (2002).

Strategic Management and Goal Awareness

The extent of strategic management practices in Nepalese HEIs is assessed through their evolutionary roots. Key aspects of strategic planning include awareness of strategic management and strategic goals.

Table 10

Extent of Adoption of Strategic Management

Dimension of Management	Mean and SD		Correlations		
	Mean	SD	SM Awareness	Goal Awareness	SM Initiation
Strategic management awareness	3.49	.58	1		
Strategic goals awareness	3.58	.57	.626**	1	
Strategic management initiation	3.53	.52	.903**	.900**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2020-2022

Table 10 shows that the mean values for strategic management awareness, strategic goal awareness, and overall strategic management are 3.49, 3.58, and 3.53, with standard deviations of 0.58, 0.57, and 0.52, respectively. This indicates that higher education leaders, academic managers, and faculty members are generally aware of strategic management and the goals of their respective HEIs. However, this awareness needs to be effectively translated into performance during the implementation of the strategic management plan.

Similarly, there was a positive correlation between strategic management awareness and strategic goal awareness ($r = 0.626$) and between strategic management awareness and strategic management initiation ($r = 0.903$), whereas the relationship between strategic goal awareness and strategic management initiation was 0.900. It means that strategic management awareness and

strategic goal awareness play a positive role. This indicates that higher education leaders, academic managers, and faculty members are generally aware of strategic management and the goals of their respective HEIs. However, it is crucial to effectively translate this awareness into performance during the strategic management plan's implementation.

Degree of Application of Strategic Management

Table 11 presents the mean of strategic management practice variables used by the HEIs. The mean value of strategic management initiation is 3.53 with an SD of 0.52. Similarly, the mean value of overall strategic planning (external environmental analysis, internal environmental analysis, strategic choice, and strategic planning alignment) is 3.36 and SD is 0.53. The mean value of strategic execution (short-term objectives, communication, organizational leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, resource planning, internal governance, general management, functional strategies, change management, and execution alignment) had an SD of 0.55. Lastly, M&E and control (strategic M&E and control, corrective actions) had a mean value of 3.25 with SD 0.67, whereas the overall mean value stood at 3.41 with SD 0.51. This result shows that strategic management practices have been adopted at moderate-to-high levels.

Table 11

Mean and Correlation among SMP Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Initiation	Planning	Execution	M&E Control	SMP
Initiation	3.5331	.51509	1				
Planning	3.3558	.52846	.747**	1			
Execution	3.4123	.55238	.716**	.844**	1		
M&E Control	3.2481	.67213	.631**	.747**	.782**	1	
SMP	3.4132	.51396	.797**	.917**	.984**	.799**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There existed a positive correlation between strategic management initiation and strategic planning ($r=0.747$), execution ($r=0.716$), M&E and control ($r=0.631$), and SMP ($r=0.797$). Similarly, a significant correlation was found between strategic planning and strategy execution ($r = .844$) and SMP ($r = 0.797$). Importantly, there was a strongly positive correlation of SMP with strategic initiation, strategic planning, strategic execution, and strategic M&E and control aspects.

Strategic Management Processes at Nepali HEIs

How are strategies formulated, executed, monitored, evaluated, and controlled in HEIs in Nepal? The response to this query provides a detailed overview of the processes involved in strategy formulation, execution, evaluation, and control at the university, institute/faculty, and campus levels within HEIs in Nepal.

Strategy Planning Processes in HEIs in Nepal

Strategic management is the process of achieving corporate goals. Uniformity in the strategic planning process for HEIs in Nepal has been somewhat questionable. One interview participant, a department head, described the process as follows:

Analysis of the current situation, national scenario, and international updates in the respective field is the responsibility of the leader assuming a position in any particular institution. The leader will develop a vision based on their experience, exposure, and nature. This vision is then refined through diverse discussions with team members and authorities in the upper hierarchy of the institution, following the usual process adopted in strategic planning" (P 1).

This participant highlights the importance of leaders using their experience and knowledge to craft a vision while also emphasizing the need for collaborative decision-making involving discussions with both team members and higher authorities for effective leadership.

Another participant, Campus Chief (P11), mentioned a four-step process applied in developing the strategic plan for their campus: committee formation, preliminary consultation,

planning workshop, and finalization and approval of the plan. Most participants agreed that the key steps in the process include steering for the strategic plan, forming the strategic planning team, plan preparation by the committee, and plan approval. Some also emphasized the importance of activities such as internal and external environment analysis, as well as setting vision, mission, goals, objectives, and strategies.

What was observed in the strategic management process included a) setting goals, b) conducting initial assessments, c) performing situation analysis, d) carrying out SWOT analysis, e) formulating strategy, f) implementing strategy, and g) monitoring strategy. Authorities typically clarify their vision, gather and analyze information, formulate and implement strategies, and then evaluate and control their practices.

Steering for Strategic Planning

As previously mentioned, strategic planning begins with steering, which can originate either internally or externally. In Nepal, two primary steering mechanisms have emerged: one driven by political reasons and the other by practical needs. Both approaches are evident in the Nepali context.

Most participants from CBACs reported that the preparation of strategic plans was guided by the UGC, particularly through support from SHEP or HERP, and that these plans were often aimed at meeting QAA certification requirements. Thus, exogenous factors, driven by resource dependency on UGC, played a significant role in steering plan preparation, as outlined by resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2015).

Forming a Strategic Planning Team.

Following the steering phase for strategic plan development, the next step identified was the formation of a strategic plan preparation committee. The initial task was to select and entrust

this committee with the responsibility of developing a strategic plan for the HEI. There were no uniform mechanisms for this process, making the composition and role of the planning committee crucial. Typically, the strategic planning committee included faculty members and internal experts, with support from external experts and consultants.

Strategy Analysis

The strategic planning committee is responsible for conducting a thorough strategic analysis, encompassing both internal and external assessments.

Evaluating Current Institutional Performance: The development of a strategic plan begins with identifying gaps in current institutional performance, including opportunities, threats, challenges, or other stimuli. This assessment of the present situation is crucial as it informs future planning. Universities and other HEIs evaluated their current performance, considering aspects such as student enrollment, program offerings, human resources, pass rates, graduation rates, and physical and financial conditions (Appendix G). As one participant noted, their assessment covered various dimensions, revealing areas needing improvement.

Environmental Analysis: Rigorous analysis of both external and internal environments is essential for crafting a strategy. Rather than merely imitating other HEIs, a detailed assessment of an HEI's position and resources is more beneficial. Strategic analysis serves as the foundation for strategic planning and focuses on the environment, culture, stakeholder expectations, resources, and strategic capabilities through tools like SWOT or SWOC analysis. External environmental analysis is vital for identifying opportunities and threats. It aims to "provide a picture of the environment and highlight the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that the university needs to address over the next few years" (KU, 2000). Internal environmental

analysis is equally important for understanding strengths and weaknesses. Common tools used in Nepal include SWOT, SWOC, PESTEL analysis, and internal assessments.

Internal Environmental Analysis: This analysis involves diagnosing an HEI's internal factors that contribute to strengths and weaknesses. Core competencies should be leveraged for value-added activities while minimizing non-value-added ones. Regular internal analysis helps HEIs identify their strengths and weaknesses, laying the groundwork for strategic actions to enhance strengths and address weaknesses. Major aspects of internal analysis include physical resources, human resources (faculty, administrative staff, and support staff), financial resources, academic programs, pass rates, graduation rates, teaching-learning environments, research, publication, and documentation.

External Environmental Analysis: The external environment profoundly impacts HEIs, shaping and reshaping organizational dynamics. Macro and task environmental analyses provide crucial insights for strategic management. HEIs must identify and understand external trends and forces to remain relevant and competitive. Those with robust environmental analysis practices are better positioned to leverage opportunities and mitigate threats compared to those lacking such practices.

SWOT/SWOC/PESTEL Analysis: HEIs use SWOT, SWOC, and PESTEL analyses to assess both internal and external factors. SWOT analysis provides a comprehensive overview by synthesizing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. While some HEIs in Nepal effectively use these tools to gauge their environment, others show gaps in internal and external analysis and conceptualization, as detailed in Annex H. Strategic issues emerge from these analyses, with some HEIs demonstrating more rigorous practices than others.

Strategic Definition/Direction Setting

Strategic definition, or direction setting, is crucial for any organization. In Nepal, universities operate under specific legislative frameworks outlined in the University Act. The preamble of the University Act clarifies the fundamental purpose of the university, while the act delineates the university's rights and duties. This statement of purpose underpins all institutional operations, programs, and activities.

Universities face pressures from government funding, student attraction, and competitive survival and growth. To navigate these pressures and focus on their niche markets, universities develop their vision, mission, core values, and philosophy, alongside goals, objectives, strategies, and strategic actions.

Vision. A vision, rooted in the experience, knowledge, hopes, and dreams of top management and personnel (Kuttunen, 2010), serves as a source of inspiration for the future. It represents the desired future state of a higher education institution. The strategy development team draws insights from the leadership's vision, understanding how it should be realized and identifying the potential challenges in achieving it. Thus, the vice chancellor's vision plays a pivotal role in this process, eventually evolving into a shared vision for the university.

However, visions about the project that define future requirements need adjustments over time as they are realized. This is true for HEIs as well. For instance, TU's initial vision (2000), which encompassed seven thematic areas for the year 2020, has evolved and been broadened in subsequent strategic plans. The TU strategic plan of 2014 articulated the university's goal to be recognized as a highly credible institution for equitable access, quality, and research rigor, with a focus on cultural enrichment and national prosperity.

The vision for TU in 2030 states:

TU, as a credible central (national) university with a higher rank in the global arena, will be recognized for quality education blended with research, innovation, knowledge creation, and transformative teaching and learning at an affordable cost, ensuring access and diversity through effective and efficient utilization of its human and physical resources (TU, 2018).

The vision of KU has remained consistent over the years. KU aims to "become a world-class university devoted to bringing knowledge and technology to the service of mankind."

Similarly, AFU envisions becoming a leading institution that contributes to making Nepal a food-secure, economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and socially equitable nation.

PokU included its vision statement in its first strategic plan but did not mention it in the second cycle. The current strategic plan features a broadly defined vision statement, which is as follows:

The university has fully understood that it has to partake in and contribute to raising the living standard and improving the quality of life of people to bring about permanent peace, prosperity, well-being, and sustainable development in the country by contributing to creating gainful employment opportunities, a rise in production and productivity, removing budgetary constraints on work with the promotion and use of indigenous, local, and appropriate technologies, and by promoting and using sustainable development goals (SDGs) and social justice (PokU, 2018).

The vision of MWU is to drive social and cultural transformation and economic prosperity to foster social harmony in the country. MWU has a five-year strategic plan distinct from its twenty-year vision plan. The twenty-year vision of MWU is to "provide quality higher education across various disciplines—including liberal arts, education, health sciences, law, science, management, agriculture, engineering, vocational, and other technical fields—to transform socio-economic systems by producing skilled and innovative human resources with a focus on character education for the betterment of mankind."

Typically, a vision is closely aligned with the strategic thinking of the university's top leader. The third vice-chancellor (VC) of MWU related his vision by mentioning that he

presented his vision paper to the prime minister, which contributed to his selection as VC of MWU. He further stated:

I presented my vision to the Senate, and the Senate approved my vision paper. The vice chancellor of MU has formulated strategies to translate into action his integrated vision plan based on 3S and GT theory. What 3S and GT are is explained in the vision paper exclusively. I formulated them based on the situational context and ground reality to convert MU into a vibrant academic institution (P 46).

From the in-depth analysis of the existing vision of Nepali HEIs, a common concern or issue seems to be to provide quality higher education, conduct research, and contribute to the development of the country, as shown in table 12.

Table 12

Major Focus of Vision of Universities

Universities	Major focus of vision
TU	TU's vision is comprehensive, covering aspects of global recognition, quality education, research, innovation, affordability, and inclusivity. It demonstrates a commitment to excellence across various domains while maintaining accessibility and diversity.
KU	KU's vision is broad and focused on global impact. It emphasizes the application of knowledge and technology for the benefit of humanity, indicating a commitment to practical and impactful contributions to society on a global scale.
PU	Vision of PU is multifaceted, covering job-oriented education, responding to changing educational needs, contributing to the creation and transmission of knowledge, and staying updated with emerging market needs. This reflects a commitment to practical education and relevance to industry demands.
PokU	PokU's vision focuses on holistic development and sustainable practices. It places importance on the well-being of people, sustainable energy, and societal attitudes towards development goals and social justice, indicating a broader societal impact beyond education.
MWU	Emphasis of MWU's vision is on quality education across a range of disciplines with a specific focus on character education. The goal is to contribute to the transformation of socioeconomic systems through the development of skilled and innovative human resources.
AFU	AFU's vision is specific and tied to the agricultural and environmental needs of Nepal. It highlights a commitment to addressing key challenges in the nation, such as food security, climate resilience, and social equity, emphasizing the university's role in sustainable development.

Source: TU, 2019; PokU, 2018; PU, 2015; AFU, 2013; MWU, 2016; KU, 2022

Mission. In Nepal, universities are established by specific university acts, with the purpose of each university articulated in the preamble of its respective act. Additionally, a

separate clause within the university act details out its functions, duties, and powers. In a globalized context, the articulated *raison d'être* is often not sufficient; HEIs need to clearly articulate their mission to motivate stakeholders and thrive in a competitive environment.

The mission statement is a crucial component of the strategic foundation—defining the core purpose to which the organization is committed. It should encapsulate the institution's essential philosophy and *raison d'être*, focusing on one or more of the following: (1) international, national, regional, or local scope; (2) teaching-based or research-based objectives; and (3) broadly defined subjects or more specialized fields.

An effective mission statement should be market-oriented, feasible, motivating, and specific (Kotler, 1980). Typically, mission statements are derived from institutional mandates as outlined in the university act. While the preamble of each act provides the foundational purpose, the mission statement often reflects the institution's uniqueness or market position. For constituent and affiliated campuses, the mission must align with the broader mission framework of the university, though it may vary based on the campus's specific nature, motives, and aspects.

For example, TU's first strategic plan (2000–2020) included six mission statements. The second strategic plan (2014–2019) revised it into five mission statements, while the latest strategic plan (2020–2030) includes eight mission statements. In contrast, KU's mission statement, established in 2000, remains unchanged: "to provide quality education for leadership." This mission aligns KU with the labor markets of Nepal, emphasizing its role in producing skilled professionals needed by Nepali businesses and nonprofits (Rosenbloom & KC, 2005).

MWU's mission is to "provide easy access to higher education, make education affordable to a large section of society, focus on technical, professional, or vocational education; maintain quality, and create a fair and result-oriented academic environment" (MWU, 2016).

Similarly, AFU's mission is "to improve the quality of life for the people of Nepal through education, research, and extension in agriculture, including livestock, fisheries, and forestry" (AFU, 2013).

PokU's current mission, which has remained consistent since the second strategic plan of 2008, was initially articulated in the first strategic plan. The approved mission statement of PokU is:

The mission of PokU is to develop as a center of excellence in higher education by excelling in teaching and learning, research and publication, and outreach; contributing to the national development process by producing job market-oriented, responsible, productive, service-oriented, and committed human resources; and linking the university system with community services (PokU, 2018).

It is evident that HEIs in Nepal present their mission statements in varied styles.

Literature indicates a lack of consensus on the presentation of mission statements. Ideally, a mission statement should articulate why an institution exists, or its "reason for existence." Lang and Lopers-Sweetman's (1991) three-way approach to mission statements—market-oriented, societal, and empirical—has been widely referenced. The market-oriented approach specifies clientele, geographic service area, programs, and competitive niche; the societal approach focuses on societal needs; and the empirical approach bases the mission on current activities and clientele. In Nepal, the market-oriented approach is often predominant as a mission. Overall, HEIs in Nepal emphasize quality teaching, research promotion, innovation, and market and community service in their mission statements.

From the study of mission statements, some commonalities were observed, such as commitment to national development (AFU, PokU, PU, TU), focus on quality higher education (KU, PokU, PU, TU), and community linkage (PokU, TU), along with meeting the market need. Additionally, there is a notable emphasis on adaptability and responsiveness (PokU, TU, and

PU). Differences include specialized vs. generalized focus (AFU is more specialized, while KU, TU, and PokU are more generalized), character education emphasis (MWU), and sustainable development and social justice (PokU). However, elements like environmental focus, innovative teaching methods, international collaborations, and measurable outcomes are less frequently prioritized in the mission statements.

Core Values. Core values are deeply held convictions, priorities, and underlying assumptions that shape the attitudes and behaviors of individuals within organizations. These values serve as the foundation for planning and underpin the values, ideas, and philosophies that guide strategic activities. They significantly influence the formulation, execution, and control of strategies.

In Nepal, feudalistic social values can pose challenges to management practices, often due to deep-rooted status, class, or caste structures, and patronizing habits. The examination of strategic plans from six universities and their affiliated and constituent campuses shows that four universities have explicitly stated core values in their plans, while two did not. Among schools and affiliated campuses, some have included core values in their strategic plans, while others have not.

The core values of HEIs typically include quality, accessibility, and professionalism, although not all values listed can be considered core values as outlined in Appendix I. These values are integral to guiding the strategic direction and operations of the institutions.

Goals. It is important to note that there is often ambiguity in how goals and objectives are defined when HEIs develop their strategic plans. Many institutions use the terms interchangeably, either deliberately or inadvertently. Goals are broad targets intended to be achieved through ongoing efforts and actions. They represent the primary outcomes the institution aims to achieve.

In the universities under study, each articulated a range of goals: TU (5), KU (8), PU (6), PokU (7), AFU (3), and MWU (3). These goals primarily address teaching-learning, research, and mission-related areas, as well as specific functional aspects, as detailed in Appendix J. Despite this, the terms "goals" and "objectives" are frequently used interchangeably.

For goals to be effective, they should be clearly defined and widely understood. In some cases, however, there remains a lack of clarity regarding these definitions.

Objectives. Objectives are specific, measurable, time-bound actions that serve as stepping stones toward achieving broader goals. They provide clear milestones and help track progress toward larger strategic aims.

In the context of Nepali HEIs, there is notable ambiguity surrounding the terms "goals" and "objectives." The traditional understanding of these terms, as outlined by Doute, Richardson, and Fenske (1985), presents a hierarchical continuum, starting with the mission and narrowing down to goals and then objectives. However, this hierarchical approach is not consistently applied in Nepalese institutions.

For instance, PokU and AFU distinguish between goals and objectives, whereas TU predominantly uses the term "objectives." In contrast, KU and some faculties within TU use "goals." Within TU, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) and the Faculty of Management (FOM) use "goals," while the Institute of Science and Technology (IOST) does not explicitly use either term in its strategic plan. Conversely, the TU Faculty of Law and the TU Institute of Agriculture and Animal Sciences use both "goals" and "objectives." Among TU's constituent campuses and departments, some use both terms, while others use only "goals."

Similarly, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) refers to both "goals of the strategic plan" and "strategic objectives." The KU School of Education (SoED) and the KU School of Engineering

(SoE) use both terms, while the School of Sciences (SoS) uses only "goals." The KU School of Management (KUSoM) employs "strategic goals," whereas the KU School of Arts (SoA) does not specify either term.

To ensure clarity, the VMGO should be explicitly articulated. Strategies should clearly outline how these elements will be achieved, with defined output and outcome indicators to measure progress and success.

Strategy Formulation

Stakeholders, including faculty, staff, academic managers, and others, were engaged through seminars, workshops, and meetings, as well as through discussions in the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC), to address key questions such as, What are the achievements, opportunities, weaknesses, and steps taken so far to address the weaknesses?

Identifying Strategic Issues: Following environmental analysis, the next step is to uncover strategic issues within HEIs. These issues are identified based on internal and external analyses, with tools such as SWOT, SWOC, and PESTEL analysis as commonly used tools.

Evaluating Strategic Options: Once strategic issues are identified, various strategic options should be considered. It is essential to assess these options for feasibility within the given context. Key questions include: a) what are the pros and cons of each option? b) What is the best course of action?

Choosing the Right Strategies: Strategic choice involves making decisions to address strategic issues. The process includes evaluating options based on consistency, feasibility, acceptability, and workability. Effective strategies should be practical, objective, visionary, and actionable. Important considerations include

What strategies could lead to achieving the goal?

What concrete steps should be taken?

Can the planned actions be realistically fulfilled?

The research participants emphasized that strategic planning should be purposeful and not merely a formality. "The strategic plan should not be done as a ritual exercise," noted one participant. Another added, "Rigor is essential in developing strategies; the plan should not be treated as a shopping list." A professor highlighted the need for academic rather than political leadership in strategy formulation, and another participant stressed the importance of conducting a needs analysis before formulating and implementing the strategic plan.

Developing Action Steps: Action steps are necessary for operationalizing strategies. These steps form the basis of an action plan, which details what actions to take, where and how to implement them, who is responsible, when they should be carried out, and the rationale behind each action.

The Contents of a Strategic Plan

Every HEI is unique due to its location, institutional setup, available resources, and goals. There is no global standard for the content of an organizational strategic plan, making the variations among HEIs a natural phenomenon. Typically, an HEI strategic plan includes the background, vision, mission, goals, objectives, norms, values, and strategies. Key components also involve strategic analysis of internal and external environments, assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This analysis forms the basis for identifying strategic issues, developing strategic options, and selecting the most suitable strategic actions.

A comprehensive strategic plan should detail action steps, implementation plans, and M&E strategies. It should also project required resources and include other relevant information, with a concluding section summarizing the plan. Among the HEIs studied, the content and structure of strategic plans varied. For example, TU's strategic plan is organized into eleven chapters, while KU's plan has nine chapters (Annex L). Despite these variations, the strategic plans generally include fundamental elements such as vision, mission, SWOT analysis, strategies,

and M&E frameworks. However, the quality of these plans varied, with some institutions developing their strategic plans more rigorously than others.

The strategies of KU include academic and non-academic aspects, as shown in Box No. 1.

Box No. 1: The strategies of KU
Survey the market for the operation of new topics or subjects Provision of land by the government and local bodies; Donors: buildings and physical infrastructure Buildings and infrastructure are drawn and designed by cutting-edge experts Yearly university running costs are to be deducted from students' fees; yearly expenses are borne by the student fee Fees will be determined based on the cost of providing quality education Make quality transparent and attractive by attracting and retaining the best faculty and students Collaborate with other universities to develop the qualifications of their staff Improve teachers' and staff's competencies by encouraging them to pursue higher-level degrees from highly ranked HEIs Utilize donor funding for development and capital expenditures Use donors as long as they have a long-term strategy that aligns with KU's strategy and objectives Free from outside political influences on university affairs Develop a full-time working culture at the university.

Source: Sharma, 2009; Thapa, 2019; and Adhikari, 2071 BS, KU, 2012.

Aspects of the Strategies of HEIs

Strategies are the means by which predetermined objectives, goals, and missions are achieved. It is well documented that HEIs encompass both academic and non-academic functions, with non-academic affairs supporting academic pursuits to fulfill the HEI's long-term objectives, goals, and mission. The study of strategic plans across universities revealed that HEIs' strategies cover both academic and non-academic areas (see Appendix M for universities' strategies, Appendix N for TU constituent campus/department strategies, and Appendix O for CBAC strategies).

Academic Strategies. Strategic management in HEIs is deeply rooted in academic management, which is crucial for their societal impact. Key strategies focus on developing and maintaining high-quality academic programs, ensuring academic excellence, and producing marketable human resources. The curriculum plays a vital role in these strategies, acting both as a driver for institutional growth and a measure of educational quality. In Nepal, HEIs have recognized the strategic importance of curriculum innovation and its relevance to market needs. Teaching and learning methods are also prioritized, with reforms aimed at enhancing student engagement through active and experiential learning, supported by advanced integrated ICT.

Table 13

Aspects of the Strategy of HEIs in Nepal

Aspects of strategy
Academic progress
New program development
Research
Enrollment expansion
Infrastructure capacities
Campus-community linkage
Access and Equity
Governance and management
HRD and inclusiveness
Quality enhancement
Information and communication technology
Institutional development (management)
Integrated modern technology with teaching, learning, research, and other activities.
International strategy
Lab, library, and online resources
Partnership
Quality assurance
Student-related activities
Sustainable financial development

Source: Strategic plans of HEIs of Nepal, 2020-2022

Research is another critical component of academic management, contributing to student learning and faculty development. HEIs implement research strategies to foster innovation and encourage participation in national and international projects. QAA processes are a key strategic

focus, driven by UGC initiatives to improve teaching and learning quality. Obtaining QAA certification has become a significant goal for HEIs in Nepal, reflecting its importance in strategic planning. These strategies are designed to align academic management with broader institutional objectives, ensuring HEIs remain competitive and responsive to societal needs.

Non-Academic Strategies: Non-academic strategies are essential for supporting academic goals and ensuring overall institutional success. These strategies cover areas such as student enrollment, infrastructure development, human resource management, financial resources, ICT integration, governance, and campus-community linkages. HEIs focus on attracting and retaining high-quality students, developing robust physical infrastructures, and enhancing faculty and staff capabilities through targeted human resource strategies. Financial sustainability is achieved through strategic resource management and cost recovery methods. ICT is leveraged to modernize teaching, learning, and administrative processes. Governance and management strategies aim to enhance institutional efficiency and effectiveness, while partnerships, both local and international, broaden collaboration opportunities. Additionally, HEIs emphasize student welfare, ensuring accessibility for marginalized groups, and the development of libraries and labs to support the development of academic excellence. Overall, these non-academic strategies are integral to the strategic planning and operational success of HEIs in Nepal, as shown in table 12.

Alignment of Strategies with Planning

Alignment is a crucial element in strategic management, as the effectiveness of strategic planning relies on its ability to guide decisions and behaviors within the organization. Without proper alignment, a strategy is unlikely to achieve its intended outcomes. Alignment is essential both in the formulation and execution of strategies, and it must be established early in the

strategic planning process. Effective strategic planning involves aligning the strategy with national higher education policies, the GoN's national plans, regulatory frameworks, professional councils, QAA standards, and the MOEST regulations.

National Higher Education Policy and HEI Strategies. Before 2015, Nepal lacked a comprehensive higher education policy. Existing guidance was dispersed across various documents, including the periodic plans of the NPC, reports from the (higher) education commission, annual policies and programs, budget speeches and allocations from the GoN, and ad hoc policy issues addressed by MOEST and the GoN. The Higher Education Policy 2015 was the first attempt made at a unified higher education policy in Nepal. In 2019, the GoN introduced a new education policy, which consolidated and replaced the previously fragmented policies.

National Higher Education Strategy and Higher Education Plan. The Fourteenth Plan (2072/073-2075/076 BS) and the Fifteenth Plan (2076/077-2080/81 BS) shared the vision of "human resource development for socio-economic transformation in the country." The goal of education under these plans is to cultivate creative, efficient, competitive, productive, and innovative human resources through quality education. The objectives for higher education in these plans include building a knowledge-based society and economy by making higher education scientific, innovative, research-oriented, technology-friendly, and employment-oriented, with an emphasis on increasing both access and quality. In connection to alignment, Mid-West University's Strategic Plan 2022-2024 states:

The Three-Year Plan 2022-2024 is prepared to contribute to the government's goals of producing qualified human capital, as outlined in the 15th Five-Year Plan 2019-2023 and Innovation Policies 2019, for the overall development of the country (p. 5).

This statement indicates that the strategic plan for 2022-2024 at MWU is designed to align with and support the government's objectives, specifically focusing on the production of qualified human resources.

Strategy Implementation Plan

Early-stage strategy implementation planning is critical for the successful execution of a strategic plan. A well-developed implementation plan significantly enhances the likelihood of success. Among the six universities, six TU constituent campuses, a TU central department, and twenty CBACs surveyed, most have included recommended activities for executing their strategies within their strategic plans. However, a few have not detailed out specific strategies for implementation.

Plan for Strategy Evaluation and Control

Strategic M&E is a retrospective process, while strategic planning is forward-looking; however, integration of both is essential. During the planning phase, it is crucial to establish how to ensure that planned activities achieve the desired results. The study of HEIs' strategic plans revealed that most included M&E components, though some did not. One campus chief acknowledged that M&E was initially overlooked in their strategic plan but noted that they plan to include it in future cycles now that they are aware of the gap.

The culmination of the strategic planning process is a strategic plan—a comprehensive document that outlines the vision, mission, goals, objectives, values, and strategies of an HEI. This plan serves as an operational guide for the institution, directing its leadership, academic managers, administrators, teachers, and staff. A summary of the strategic plan components is presented in Appendix P.

Strategic Planning Practices

Following strategic goal awareness and strategic management awareness, HEIs are engaged in strategic planning exercises to enhance their performance. The survey results have highlighted external environmental assessment, internal environment assessment, strategic choice, and planning alignment as the key components of the planning process. These components are detailed in Table 14.

There was correlation among strategic planning variables. The correlation between external environmental analysis and internal environmental analysis ($r = 0.735$), strategic choice ($r = 0.667$), strategic alignment ($r = 0.486$), and overall strategic planning ($r = 0.856$); internal environmental analysis with strategic choice ($r = 0.781$), strategic alignment ($r = 0.563$), and overall strategic planning ($r = 0.900$); strategic alignment with strategic choice ($r = 0.625$) and overall strategic planning ($r = 0.890$), while the correlation between strategic alignment and overall strategic planning was 0.776 .

Table 14

Strategic Planning Practices in Nepali HEIs

Dimension	Mean	SD	Extrl_env ironment	Inttrl_environ ment	Strategy_ch oice	SP_Align ment	Stra_Plann ing
Extrl_environ ment	3.25	.68	1				
Inttrl_environ ment	3.34	.62	.735**	1			
Strategy choice	3.34	.57	.667**	.781**	1		
SP_Alignment	3.56	.81	.486**	.563**	.625**	1	
Stra_Planning	3.37	.53	.856**	.900**	.890**	.776**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey, 2020-2022

Table 14 presents the mean and standard deviation for four elements associated with strategy planning or formulation. Among these elements, alignment in planning has the highest mean value of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.81, while external environmental assessment has the lowest mean value of 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.68. The mean value for strategic choice is 3.34, with a standard deviation of 0.57. Overall, strategy planning practices have a mean value of 3.37 and overall strategic planning a standard deviation of 0.53. These results suggest that strategy planning scores are consistently above the mean value of 2.50, indicating that strategy formulation is being performed at a satisfactory level across these elements.

Similarly, there was a significant correlation among the strategic planning variables. The correlation between external environmental analysis and internal environmental analysis was $r = 0.735$, with strategic choice $r = 0.667$, strategic alignment $r = 0.486$, and overall strategic planning $r = 0.856$. Internal environmental analysis correlated with strategic choice ($r = 0.781$), strategic alignment ($r = 0.563$), and overall strategic planning ($r = 0.900$). Strategic alignment showed a correlation with strategic choice $r = 0.625$ and overall strategic planning $r = 0.890$. Finally, the correlation between strategic alignment and overall strategic planning was $r = 0.776$.

In summary, strategic planning in Nepali HEIs encompasses a blend of strategic management awareness, strategic goal awareness, internal and external environmental analysis, and strategic choice. Participants' responses indicate that strategic planning is moderately practiced among these institutions. It is important to consider that the HEIs studied are top-tier institutions in Nepal, and thus the findings should be interpreted with caution. These HEIs are aware of the importance of strategic planning and are working towards developing comprehensive institution-wide plans for the future, but the efficiency and effectiveness of these plans need to be closely scrutinized.

Strategy Implementation in HEIs in Nepal

The final product of the strategic planning process is a strategic plan, which must be endorsed and approved by the appropriate authority. For HEIs, this typically involves approval from the university's Senate or, for affiliated campuses, the CMC. Once approved, the strategic plan moves to the execution phase. According to a vice-chancellor (VC), after the strategic plan is approved by the university council (Senate), the executive council is responsible for implementing it. This council issues directives to the relevant faculties and schools to carry out the plan's components (P 49).

A dean at TU described the implementation process, noting that strategies are executed by the leadership across different faculties, centers, and schools. He emphasized the importance of distinguishing between short-term and long-term strategies, assigning duties and rights, fostering coordination, and implementing organizational changes (P 53). Similarly, at KU, a dean explained that strategies are transparently implemented through a structured mechanism, including detailed work plans for execution, monitoring, and control, ensuring alignment with the university's strategic plan (P 30).

Most participants stressed the need for effective strategy implementation. One participant highlighted that genuine implementation requires a committed, positive attitude and openness to change. However, one VC noted that despite having a strategic plan, implementation remains poor. Another participant mentioned the lack of a systematic approach or effective method for implementing the strategic plan.

At TU, the VC reported initiatives such as a semester-based system, internationalization, fast-track faculty appointments, and the pursuit of world university rankings. The Times Higher

Education (THE) ranking has been a significant achievement, with hopes for further improvement in future rankings.

Strategic execution involves numerous activities, including resource allocation, leadership action, and communication, as well as developing functional and operational strategies, policies, programs, and budgets. Reviewing organizational structures is also part of the process. A department head outlined the departmental strategic implementation steps as follows: (1) performing routine responsibilities aligned with the VMGO, (2) identifying opportunities from institutional, national, and international sources based on VMGO, (3) mobilizing human resources effectively, (4) ensuring the leader's dedication, (5) fostering links with GOs, NGOs, and INGOs, and (6) motivating team members.

Developing a strategic plan is relatively straightforward compared to its execution. A former campus chief and CMC chairperson at a TU campus stated,

Preparing a strategic plan is comparatively easy, but its implementation is significantly more challenging. While the strategic plan may be developed with mathematical precision and academic rigor, implementation involves complexities beyond mere calculations. Various issues can arise during this process. For example, while the plan might include constructing five buildings and establishing internal roads, the actual outcome might only achieve part of the plan, such as constructing fewer buildings or adding fewer programs than initially intended. A research wing might be established and some departments activated, but not all planned initiatives may be completed (P 26).

The strategic plan of HEIs is designed to guide the achievement of goals systematically. However, it is often found that the plan is not fully executed as intended due to various challenges. While some tasks are completed successfully, others may remain unimplemented for different reasons, like the inadequacy of resources.

Short-term Objectives, Programs, and Policies

The core of strategy implementation at the university level revolves around the university's policies, programs, and budget. To ensure effective execution, universities must

develop long-term plans and programs, which then inform the preparation and implementation of annual plans and budgets. These annual plans and budgets require approval from the Senate. Universities adhere to this process because, without an approved budget and program, they cannot incur expenses, with a few exceptions.

Constituent campuses or departments with expenditure rights must prepare their budgets and programs and submit them to the central university office. The university then consolidates these into a single document for Senate approval. This process is detailed in the rules of each university. Additionally, the annual progress report is presented to the Senate, marking the formal start of execution based on the approved documents.

It is crucial to internalize the vision, mission, goals, objectives, and strategies and integrate them into the policies and programs that form the budget. For instance, TU (2001) outlined that its planning process involves the campus, faculty, and institute levels, with plans being approved by the Planning Council and subsequently by the TU Council. Despite these provisions, TU's planning efforts often remain limited to budget preparation. It further mentioned:

The TU system's planning process is severely constrained by the GoN's resource allocation based on negotiated arrangements and the government's allocation strategy. Almost total dependence on government resources makes the planning process a hazardous exercise (p. 35).

Resource Planning through the Annual Budget

Estimating resources, procurement, and allocation according to the chosen strategy requires thorough analysis. Following this, resource planning and deployment—encompassing human, physical, economic, and informational resources—becomes a crucial aspect of strategy execution. The results indicated that financial resources were managed and deployed based on the

annual budget, while other resources were planned through the budget as well. Emphasizing the importance of understanding the budget's essence, PU (2021) noted:

The budget should be objective, realistic, and practical, as it contains not only the details of the income and expenditure of the university for the year but also the document that guides the entire university and the basis for the implementation of the proposed plan.

Furthering this concern, one of the campus chiefs of a CBAC mentioned:

The CMC ensures the effective implementation of the strategic plan to achieve the goals envisioned. Based on the overall plan, the campus formulates an annual implementation plan and purchase plan at the beginning of each fiscal year. The CMC forms the necessary subcommittees to look after the sector plans. The activities of the strategic plan are addressed in the annual budget of the campus. Based on the budgetary provisions, the strategic plan is implemented (P 11).

The budget is a crucial tool for implementing the strategic plan. The Universities Act (e.g., TU, KU) envisions both long-range and annual planning for universities in Nepal. Planning involves designing the future in terms of what actions to take. TU's ex-dean and a senior UGC official (P 36) emphasized that while TU has a strategic plan document, the annual budget is even more critical. All activities, from the central level to the campus level, are guided by this budget. Similarly, the campus chief of a community campus noted that major strategies are incorporated into the budget draft, and the strategies outlined in the budget are implemented by the CMC (p. 21).

The adoption of a results-based resource allocation system is deemed essential during plan implementation. Another participant highlighted the need for a robust resource base to make the plan functional.

Most HEIs in Nepal are dependent on the GoN for resources, though institutions like KU, PokU, and PU also generate substantial internal resources for their operations. The planning chief pointed out that TU's strategic document lacks implementation scope due to inadequate budget and human resources.

The resource dependency theory suggests that external resources affect an organization's behavior, which aligns with the experience of HEIs in Nepal. In one of the notes of TU (2001), it is stated as:

The university plans and budgeting systems in Nepal are largely dependent on the government's annual budget because almost all universities in Nepal are resource-dependent on the government. The resource dependency tendency greatly affects their annual planning and budgeting systems as well as their long-term planning and budgeting systems, along with the strategic planning of the HEIs.

Coordination and Cooperation

Coordination is a key element of strategic management that integrates internal actors and external stakeholders to achieve the intended results. It involves the alignment of people to people, people to jobs, jobs to jobs, and methods to methods. Coordination is essential for effective management. As an example, a participant from AFU (the then Registrar) suggested that various programs for infrastructure development, research, and dissemination should be implemented on a cost-sharing basis with state and local governments. Another campus chief (P 27) stated, "Academic institutions operate through three components: faculties, students, and administrative staff. These components must work together in mutual cooperation and coordination."

The participants in this study emphasized that coordination and cooperation are crucial management functions. They noted lapses in coordination and cooperation across different organizational hierarchies, units, and external organizations. The need for improved coordination between TU and government bodies for resource allocation and policy alignment was particularly highlighted.

Motivation

Most of the participants highlighted the need for motivating people engaged in the HEIs in order to implement the plan successfully. One of the campus chiefs of CBAC (P 2) indicated

that motivation for human resources is critically important in order to implement the plan successfully. Research participants illustrated that various motivational approaches were used by the campuses to implement the plan. However, it was also noted by them that their efforts are insufficient to energize the people involved in the formulation as well as the implementation of the plan.

Human Resources

The participants frequently mentioned that human resources are critical resources for successful strategy implementation. They said that teaching human resources has a pivotal role in enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education. The teaching and learning, as well as research functions, all revolve around the quality and quantity of human resources. This indicated that there is an acute shortage of qualified human resources. A registrar (P 50), indicating TU's case, said they are facing a shortage of competent human resources, as it is a pity to say that more than 40 percent of the staff are not efficient. Indicating the existing inbreeding culture of human resources, one of the registrars mentioned,

To attract highly qualified scientists and scholars with good qualifications and working experience, boost the national and international level of the university service; a policy should therefore be adopted to fill the posts of associate professors and professors based on open competition (P 51).

Functional Strategies

To operationalize the chosen corporate strategy, a number of functional strategies, policies, and plans should be formulated and implemented. Commitment and motivation are connected, and this connection is desirable to achieve the corporate goals. The commonly used functional strategies in HEIs include financial management, ICT, human resource management, infrastructure development, and the EMIS.

Change Management

Implementation of a new strategy is ultimately called change management, and execution of strategies demands change management. Change can be incremental or transformational, as some changes are more complex and become difficult when significant strategic change is involved. The environment may not be congenial, and the motivation, commitment, and cooperation of stakeholders may positively or negatively affect such a change process. Recognizing the need for change, creating a shared vision, and institutionalizing the change are the steps and processes related to change management. Strategic management requires changes in the existing condition, teaching-learning, research, physical and information infrastructure, resources, organizational processes and procedures, and even strategies according to the context. One participant, Campus Chief, indicated the state of resistance to change. It was indicated that change was introduced in teaching and learning, but the challenges faced were enormous, and accomplishment became difficult. According to an FGD participant:

In teaching, learning much more has improved. However, we could still not do as expected. We replaced the blackboard with the whiteboard. We discussed with teachers and introduced pedagogy with the use of ICT. PowerPoint systems have replaced the old note system. We trained the faculty and gave them an 8 GB pen drive. We introduced multimedia and digital pedagogy in food technology and nutrition and dietetics but could not do so in B.Sc. because the old generational faculties became resistant to change. Thus students, however highly appreciated the change in the system (CMC Chairperson, FGD).

The participant indicated that old generational faculties tended to resist adopting modern technology, and this situation can be extended to other administrative cases as well.

General Management

The general management of HEIs in Nepal covers a wide range of activities, such as planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling, which are heavily influenced by the nature and type, goals and objectives, size, and context of the institutions. The general management practices of HEIs are related to wider management, as the implementation and

execution aspects and the planning aspects are related to strategy formulation. M&E, for instance, is related to the strategy of M&E, and the rest of the aspects of organizing, staffing, and leading are the main parts of the execution of the strategic plan under general management.

Organizing involves identifying tasks, grouping tasks, departmentalizing, allocating authority and responsibility, creating formal coordination, communication, and reporting mechanisms, and creating an accountability framework. HEIs are designed as "loose couplings" instead of "tied couplings." Human resource management is a continuous function of HEIs that shapes and reshapes the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization, involving acquisition, development, utilization, and maintenance functions.

Leadership in HEIs is traditionally led by academic managers with divergent interests, expertise, and orientations. It is difficult to manage an "anarchic organization," a professional bureaucratic organization, a political organization, a networked organization, and a synergistic organization. Leadership in HEIs is identified at different levels, with the VC at the top, the campus chief, the assistant campus chief, and department heads, as well as functional leaders beyond academia as managers working at the mid-level management. In strategic management, all of them and their roles are equally important.

Alignment: the key to Strategy Implementation

Alignment at the stage of execution is equally important while implementing strategies. In this phase, organizational structure, resource allocation, and human resources are critical. In addition to this, both affiliated and constituent campuses' strategies have to be aligned with the university's strategy. One of the participants (the dean) mentioned that a clear alignment of the various levels of the strategic planning system will support the successful implementation of a university strategic plan with the greatest chance of success.

Appropriate alignment is necessary, as in our context, linking and aligning strategies in the annual budget and program are little done. Thus, the functional strategies must be included in the annual program and budget.

National Budget and HEIs' Budget and Programs. According to clause 119 of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, GoN has to submit the budget and program to the joint meeting of the federal parliament (National Assembly and federal legislature) at the end of May (Jestha 15) of each year. Following this, the provincial governments have to present the budget and program before a joint meeting of the provincial parliament on the first of Ashadh (the third week of June). The local-level governments have to present the budget and program before the local legislature on Ashadh 10 (June 25) of each year. Once the budget and program are passed, they go into implementation.

The GoN (federal, provincial, and local levels) has been preparing the budget by adhering to the constitutional provisions of Nepal, the periodic plan of the government, existing law, the government's agreement with international communities, and the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) approved by the NPC. The HEIs' main source of funds is the government, which has direct ties to their programs and budgets. Universities are getting federal government grants through UGC, and they are also entitled to get grants from provincial and local governments. The HEIs, which are heavily dependent on government funding, have to adjust their programs and budgets accordingly and get them approved by the Senate and GoN via UGC.

HEIs' Strategic Plan and Annual Policies, Plans, Programs, and Budget. Universities and HEIs have to prepare annual plans and budgets, along with their annual report to the university's supreme organ, the "Senate." The Senate approves the annual budget and program and endorses the annual progress report of the university. It is a vital and critical aspect of

university operations, as all university activities run within the defined budget and program. Despite having an annual budget and programs, the university fails to integrate its goals, policies, and programs into a comprehensive budget that encompasses the entire institution and its constituent bodies. One registrar mentioned that TU is gigantic and a challenge to manage with the current structure. So, we have picked one or two points from the strategic plan to implement them into the university's annual policy, programs, and budget accordingly (p. 52).

Institutions of higher education can plan and manage strategically. Strategic planning and management can take place at various levels within an institution: the whole institution, the faculty, the department or school, the subject group or research group, and the individual (Taylor & Miroiu, 2002), which is true in the case of Nepal. TU, also a giant university in terms of the number of students, has prepared a strategic plan at the central level, and its five institutes and four faculties, four research centers, most of the constituent campuses, and most of the central departments have prepared their strategic plans and managed the implementation accordingly. Similarly, KU has prepared their strategic plan centrally, and all schools have been preparing strategic plans and implementing them accordingly.

The strategic plan should be linked with academic, financial, and physical planning. There is poor integration between the university's annual planning and budgeting system and the strategic plan. There is poor integration and alignment between government plans, policies, budgets, and programs and HEIs' plans, policies, budgets, and programs, not only in their formulation but also in the implementation of the strategic plan.

The vice-chancellor of TU asserted that significant reforms were implemented during his tenure, leading to notable achievements in academic and institutional advancements. These accomplishments, as documented by TU (2017) and affirmed in the interview, included the

establishment of a QAA system, introduction of the semester system at the master's level, creation of new academic programs like Bachelor of Mountaineering Studies and M.Sc. in Wildlife and Protected Area Management, initiation of the Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, relocation and resumption of academic activities, provision of academic autonomy to affiliated campuses, recruitment of faculty adhering to international standards, introduction of the post of Professor Emeritus and Adjunct Professor, establishment of a research cell, enhancement of examination processes through software upgrades, formation of credit transfer agreements with international universities, infrastructure development, determination of age limits for student unions, provision of free Wi-Fi in central areas, and establishment of an Alumni Association. However, despite these achievements, challenges persist, particularly concerning the internal audit mechanism and schedule.

Intended, Deliberate, and Realized Strategies

New campuses and knowledge centers were opened in various locations around the country without the AFU's plan. It seems that the political interests of the people in the government are stronger than the plans of the university. Similarly, the strategic plan of TU mentions that TU does not open additional campuses, but the size of the TU could not be managed because new campuses in agriculture and engineering were established by the TU on political grounds. These instances show that the expansion strategies of universities have not been the intended strategies.

TU's first strategic plan articulated twelve strategy areas, and a few of them have been realized in due course of time, but most of them were neither put into action nor realized as intended. The phasing out of proficiency certificate level (PCL) from TU was evidenced in a delayed fashion, and it was possible due to the Higher Secondary Education Board's and GoN's

initiatives rather than TU's efforts. The TU's internal income, which was generated through student fees, has decreased drastically, and the TU's inability to manage its human resources engaged in teaching at PCL has resulted in most of them drawing a salary without working. TU has been worrying about and managing resources to provide after-retirement benefits and pensions for them.

In this regard, the then-VC of HSEB and the VC of TU stated:

TU and GoN policies were defined to phase out the PCL at TU, and there was resistance from the students. But HSEB proactively managed the class 11 and 12 educational programs—admission, teaching and learning, examination, and result publication—in time. As a result, the PCL phase-out was possible despite the reluctant students and TU officials (P 51).

One of the participants, VC (P 51), narrated that despite resistance from students and TU officials, the phasing out of the PCL at TU was aligned with the government's policies. However, proactive management by the Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) ensured the smooth continuation of class 11 and 12 educational programs, including admission, teaching, examinations, and result publication, ultimately facilitating the successful implementation of the PCL phase-out.

The second strategy is to expand the resource base and improve cost recovery methods, which became feasible through the introduction of new programs and the increase of fees for students and affiliations.

Infrastructure development was one of the major aspects of the strategy for HEIs in Nepal. The majority of HEIs were found to be able to develop infrastructure, and the rest were grossly unable to do so as planned due to problems with internal governance, a lack of budget for infrastructure development, and some due to a lack of appropriate project management competencies. Despite high aspirations, hopes, promises, and enthusiasm, entangled as they were

by numerous problems, the strategic plans of HEIs could not be beneficial enough to bring about a visible change in the higher education landscape in Nepal.

Results of Strategy Implementation

Components of strategy implementation were analyzed, i.e., short-term objectives, programs and policies, resource planning, functional strategies, change management, corporate management, organizational structure, leadership, communication, organizational culture, internal governance and control, and alignment. In terms of the implementation of the strategies, the overall result indicates an average value of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.55. Thus, it can be said that HEIs in Nepal are practicing strategy execution at a satisfactory level, as shown in table 15.

Table 15

Strategic Implementation of HEIs in Nepal

Dimension	Mean	SD
Short term objectives	3.3547	.77081
Communication	3.3744	.81647
Organizational structure	3.4298	.67188
Resource planning	3.4963	.60089
Leadership	3.4680	.82032
Organizational culture	3.4795	.71599
Governance	3.3498	.83449
General management	3.4089	.82373
Functional strategies	3.4381	.56141
Change management	3.2934	.55670
Execution alignment	3.4557	.65287
Strategy execution	3.4135	.55502

Source: Field Survey, 2020-2022

Table 15 illustrates that the mean and standard deviation of strategy execution cover eleven elements associated with strategy implementation. Among these elements, organizational culture has the highest mean value (3.48) with a standard deviation of 0.72, while change management has the lowest mean value (3.29) with a standard deviation of 0.56. The overall mean value of 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.57 indicates that strategy execution is above

the mid-value of 2.5 in all eleven elements, suggesting that strategies are being implemented at a satisfactory level despite issues related to resource constraints. Also, the level of satisfaction is to be raised if management of HEIs is to be done effectively.

Table 16 explains the correlation among strategic implementation variables (i.e., short-term objectives, communication, organizational structure, resource planning, leadership, organizational culture, internal governance, functional strategies, and change management and execution alignment). It showed a significant correlation among strategic execution variables, and a strong correlation existed among all the variables for their level of overall strategic execution.

SM execution correlates strongly with communication ($r = 0.839$), functional strategy ($r = 0.862$), and organizational structure ($r = 0.800$), highlighting the significant influence of these factors on the successful execution of strategic management. Functional strategy shows high correlations with SM execution ($r=0.862$), change management ($r=0.770$), and organizational structure ($r=0.660$). Communication correlates strongly with SM Execution ($r = 0.839$) and Functional Strategy ($r = 0.682$).

Change management exhibits significant correlations with functional strategy ($r = 0.770$) and SM execution ($r = 0.814$). A moderate correlation exists between organizational culture, and change management ($r = 0.628$), leadership ($r = 0.501$), and strategic execution ($r = 0.764$). Resource planning is moderately correlated with organizational structure ($r = 0.713$) and functional strategy ($r = 0.669$). Leadership has the weakest correlation with execution alignment ($r=0.427$).

Table 16*Correlation of Strategy Implementation*

	Short_term_ objtve	Communi cation	Sstruc ture	Re.plan ning	Leader ship	Cult ure	Govern ance	Gen eral Mg mt.	Functiona l_stra	Change_ mgmt	Execution_ali gnment	Sm_exec ution
Short_term_o bjtve	1											
Communicati on	.685**	1										
Organizatin_st ructure	.574**	.643**	1									
Resource_plan ning	.562**	.572**	.713**	1								
Leadership	.506**	.535**	.539**	.509**	1							
Orgn_culture	.602**	.599**	.535**	.523**	.501**	1						
Governance	.537**	.600**	.554**	.463**	.535**	.595**	1					
General Management	.472**	.588**	.528**	.471**	.547**	.489**	.511**	1				
Functional_str a	.655**	.682**	.660**	.669**	.617**	.612**	.600**		1			
Change_mgmt	.607**	.622**	.626**	.599**	.560**	.628**	.610**		.770**	1		
Execution_ali gnment	.581**	.645**	.569**	.558**	.427**	.490**	.459**		.618**	.500**	1	
Sm_execution	.790**	.839**	.800**	.757**	.738**	.764**	.762**		.862**	.814**	.735**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Although HEIs in Nepal are engaged in strategy implementation, the level of implementation varies significantly. It can be concluded that while strategic implementation is practiced, the extent of these practices differs across HEIs with a range of effectiveness. Specifically, activities and performance related to TU's strategic plan contributed to the

implementation of strategies, yet the implementation of TU's strategic plans did not fully align with the initial plans developed over different periods of time.

M&E Strategy in Nepali HEIs

The M&E function is the concluding phase in the strategic management process, reflecting strategic planning and its execution. Strategy evaluation involves scrutinizing the means and ends before, during, and after the implementation of a strategy. Even a well-designed and effectively implemented strategic plan may fail to achieve the desired results without a robust monitoring and control system. Effective M&E requires the analysis and measurement of progress against activity indicators, timeframes, and financial aspects, all aligned with the strategic objectives.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including outcomes, outputs, and assumptions, are crucial for evaluating strategy implementation. In HEIs, controlling aspects are divided into academic and non-academic categories. Academically, control focuses on teaching-learning, research, and community services. Non-academic control encompasses human resources, finance, real estate, library and laboratory facilities, and other operational areas.

Institutional Arrangement

M&E and control are integral components of strategic management. The participants confirmed that the higher authority of an organization is primarily responsible for M&E and control. However, there were two contrasting views regarding the institutional arrangements, authorities, and responsibilities for M&E and control.

A minority of participants, including VCs, registrars, deans, and campus chiefs, expressed concerns about the lack of institutional mechanisms for M&E. As one participant noted:

There is a lack of an institutional mechanism that regularly monitors the implementation of the plans. The school's leadership itself is primarily responsible for monitoring. The central office also monitors the activities regularly (Dean, KU, Interview).

In contrast, the majority of participants believed that institutional arrangements for M&E were in place. They indicated that monitoring and control occur at multiple levels: the top level (central authority of the university), the middle level (dean's office), and the execution level (campus, central department, or departmental level). The central office is responsible for M&E and control across all university organs, including affiliated campuses. The dean's office oversees M&E within its jurisdiction, which includes programs and campuses under its purview. Campus leadership, whether from constituent or affiliated campuses, handles M&E tasks at the campus level. In this connection, one VC stated, "School and university leadership are responsible for M&E and control" (p. 42). Similarly, a registrar mentioned:

M&E are generally conducted by higher authorities; for example, deans have the responsibility for the academic monitoring of various constituent schools and affiliated colleges. However, in my observation and experience, an effective M&E mechanism has not yet been systematized in Nepali universities" (P).

Institutionalization of M&E

Although an institutional structure for M&E and control exists, it has not functioned as a cohesive, organic system within HEIs in Nepal. The majority of participants (campus chiefs and deans) noted that a culture of monitoring and control has not been fully institutionalized in Nepali HEIs, despite legal mandates for such systems. Some participants also observed that M&E is implemented in a fragmented manner. According to the law, monitoring should cover university-wide activities through established institutional arrangements. However, it is noted by TU (2018) that:

At present, TU does not monitor programs effectively, as monitoring has not been emphasized within the TU system. Even when there is a monitoring committee, it lacks the necessary budgetary and human resources. Most dean's offices have monitoring cells, but monitoring has not been institutionalized. Periodic M&E of campuses, programs,

faculties, and institutes is rarely conducted, and feed-forward, feedback, and back-dropping systems are nonexistent. Reward and punishment measures have not been effectively implemented (p. 35).

A senior official from the University Grants Commission (UGC) commented:

TU has a separate structural arrangement to monitor academic and administrative activities at the central level. However, this system is not very effective or integrated with performance measurements. Evaluations are conducted on a need-based rather than a routine basis, with minimal linkage between evaluation and decision-making. The primary controlling mechanisms are guiding rules, regulations, and budgets (p. 53).

Supporting this perspective, a dean noted:

The annual progress report of the university is presented to the Senate, which then approves it. However, these reports often serve merely as formalities to meet legal requirements rather than providing actionable feedback (p. 42).

Weak M&E System

Most participants indicated that there is a poor M&E culture in HEIs in Nepal. Despite having institutional arrangements, monitoring and control practices remain weak and are not fully institutionalized. One VC said that "there is a poor monitoring and feedback system," while another added that "monitoring and control are very far from reality in Nepali HEIs" (p. 49).

The university is responsible for monitoring and evaluating both constituent and affiliated campuses. However, it has been observed that effective monitoring and evaluation of these campuses are not being carried out. One campus chief suggested that M&E should be integrated into regular monitoring and public hearings. This includes describing outcomes, setting outcome indicators, planning to measure soft outcomes, testing knowledge and awareness, reviewing and prioritizing outcome indicators, and planning process monitoring.

Institutional Culture for M&E.

It was found that the university center seldom monitors or evaluates the CBACs. The CMC and campus administration handle M&E of various management aspects, including plan execution. One campus chief noted that there is no substantial M&E at the central university level

concerning the campus strategies and their implementation. Although university center officials conduct monitoring visits, these are often seen as merely formalities. TU has struggled to effectively monitor its constituent campuses.

A campus chief of a community-based affiliated campus noted:

The CMC and the campus administration have been actively monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategic plan as required. Occasionally, the University Grants Commission (UGC) also provides support through an expert team on the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) process (interview, campus chief, community-based affiliated campus).

Another campus chief mentioned that progress is reviewed every six months. The campus administration oversees overall M&E, while the QAA research cell handles QAA-related aspects.

One dean added:

We regularly obtain feedback from students, industry, alumni, and other stakeholders. Additionally, the department and school conduct regular meetings to discuss progress and address issues, with the center also taking action on any problems" (P 31).

The QAA/Reform Unit Director and Associate Professor of a TU constituent campus stated:

Strategies are monitored, evaluated, and controlled by the campus executive committee on an annual basis. The campus chief, who chairs both the executive committee and the management committee, is responsible for maintaining and monitoring the plan for short, medium, and long terms (P 28).

One registrar mentioned that office heads, including deans, campus chiefs, and directors, conduct M&E on the progress. Additionally, the VC's office has a separate M&E wing for the planned programs. Overall monitoring is carried out by the VC for academic affairs, while the registrar and rector oversee the administrative and financial sectors.

Strategy evaluation can occur in three stages: ex-ante, concurrent, and ex-post. Ex-ante evaluation is a formative assessment of both strategic and tactical aspects, while ex-post

evaluation refers to summative assessment at these levels. The majority of participants believed that M&E practices were weak and not well institutionalized in Nepal.

Compliance Oriented M&E

It was revealed that external monitoring and control by supervisory organizations, including Parliament, the MOEST, the UGC, professional councils, internal and external auditors, and other agencies, are prevalent in HEIs in Nepal. These external agencies are primarily compliance-oriented, focusing on ensuring adherence to established standards.

The VC of TU indicated that the government's responses to various issues tend to be patchy rather than offering long-term solutions.

Regarding the monitoring and control by professional councils, a participant from the Engineering Council stated:

While we have not practiced academic auditing, we are monitored periodically by our professional council, the Nepal Engineering Council. They have norms and standards concerning space, laboratory quality, equipment, and human resources. We were accredited by the QAA through the UGC based on fulfilling the criteria and benchmarks for the period 2013–2018 (P 31).

Audits serve not only as a means of presenting financial transactions accurately but also as a powerful tool for M&E. Both internal and external auditors are involved in M&E tasks. One vice-chancellor mentioned that "occasionally, auditors inquire about compliance with the VMGO and strategy."

M&E practices have significant implications for the implementation of university plans. For example, Kathmandu University (KU) describes its M&E practices as follows:

The university continuously monitors its schools every six months and submits reports. The Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate focuses on enhancing the research and academic capacity of the university. It provides timely suggestions and feedback to schools on areas needing improvement. The directorate also collects feedback from deans and department heads to bolster the university's academic strength. Every school regularly

gathers academic information from student feedback forms, prioritizing students' suggestions for academic quality improvements" (extracts from university letter, 2023).

The UGC, a major funding agency, oversees grants for HEIs in Nepal and performs M&E functions. A participant officer of the UGC mentioned:

UGC conducts quarterly review meetings covering the development grants provided to HEIs. We aim to implement a result-based monitoring system. However, this has often turned into a ritual, failing to produce the expected outcomes. UGC's involvement in strategic planning, execution, monitoring, and control has not effectively established monitoring as an improvement tool but rather as a procedural formality (field note).

Professional programs fall under the council's M&E purview. One council participant noted that campuses are monitored and evaluated annually against minimum criteria, including the VMGO of the HEI.

The QAA mechanisms in Nepal involve an eight-step process to assess the quality of HEIs. The QAA process evaluates institutional strategies for quality and standards, as well as internal organizational systems for quality assurance. This system clarifies VMGO and strategies, along with institutional mechanisms for QAA. The external agencies involved in M&E and controlling HEIs are listed in Annex Q.

Strategic Control and Feedback

Strategic implementation can be effective only when supported by timely and accurate feedback, along with strategic, preventive, and post-action control systems. To achieve this, a robust strategic information system that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative control criteria is essential. The foundation of an effective feedback system lies in managing strategic information systems to provide timely and accurate feedback and to implement preventive and post-action controls using a mix of qualitative and quantitative measures.

Corrective control and feedback systems represent the initial steps in the control process, with corrective action being the final stage. Table 17 presents the means and standard deviations for the research variables related to strategic control, feedback systems, and corrective actions.

The analysis of the mean and standard deviation from survey questionnaires on strategic control, feedback systems, and corrective action revealed the following results: The mean value for strategic control and feedback systems is 3.19, with a standard deviation of 0.70. For corrective action, the mean is 3.34, and the standard deviation is 0.83. Overall, the mean value for strategic M&E and control is 3.26, with a standard deviation of 0.69. Likewise, strategic control and feedback systems had positive correlations with corrective action ($r=0.746$) and strategic control ($r=0.930$), whereas corrective action had a correlation with strategic control ($r=0.938$). It implies that both strategic control and feedback systems and corrective action are highly correlated with strategic control.

Table 17

Correlation of Strategic Control and Corrective Action

Dimensions	Mean	SD	Feedback	Corrective Action	M&E Control
Strategic control and feedback system	3.19	.70	1		
Corrective action	3.34	.83	.746**	1	
Overall strategic M&E and control	3.26	.69	.930**	.938**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Survey 2020–2022.

The quantitative data indicates that strategic control, feedback systems, and corrective actions are practiced at a moderate level.

Understanding the Integrated Picture of M&E

Analysis of quantitative data revealed that monitoring and control practices in HEIs in Nepal were at a moderate level. However, these findings should be interpreted in conjunction

with the interview data. The majority of VCs, deans, and campus chiefs agreed on the need for a more systematic approach to M&E and control. The level of M&E and control practices varied across HEIs, with a general lack of an institutionalized culture for setting monitoring and control focus, establishing performance standards, measuring performance, comparing it to standards, and taking corrective actions to address deviations.

Strategic monitoring and control are integral functions of strategic management. They involve identifying and addressing gaps between the intended and realized strategies. HEI leaders must determine the focus of control by aligning internal operations with the external environment, recognizing that HEIs cannot control external factors. Standards and benchmarks for control should be established and be quantitatively defined. Through information systems and data, both published and unpublished, actual performance should be measured and compared with standards. Deviations from these standards must be identified along with their causes, and appropriate corrective actions should be implemented.

Effective monitoring and control mechanisms are essential for achieving intended results. Evidence shows that a monitoring and control mechanism exists within the HEI system, involving bodies such as the University Senate, Executive Council, Academic Council, and Planning and Monitoring Division at the central level. At the functional level, deans, campus chiefs, and department heads are responsible for M&E tasks. Additionally, informal control through organizational structures is also significant. For example, in TU autonomous and community-based affiliated campuses, the CMC and the campus chief play crucial roles in M&E, with higher university authorities and external agencies also participating in the process from a distance.

Monitoring and control as a fundamental aspect of strategic management for academic managers was found to be inadequate in HEIs, with corrective actions being inconsistently applied across institutions. It is concluded that while strategic control measures are practiced in Nepalese HEIs, the level of practice varies significantly, and very few institutions are involved in comprehensive strategic evaluation as an established institutional practice.

Comparing Strategic Management Practices of HEIs

The average mean value of strategic management awareness was 3.48, with university D recording the highest and university B the lowest score. For strategic goal awareness, the average mean was 3.58, where University E had the highest mean and University B the lowest.

CBACs had the highest mean values in external environmental analysis and strategic choice. University E had the highest mean values in internal environmental analysis, planning alignment, and strategic planning, whereas University C had the lowest mean values in external environmental analysis, internal environmental analysis, strategic choice, and strategic planning. University A had the lowest mean value in strategic planning alignment.

University E had the highest mean scores in short-term objectives, information and communication systems, organizational structure, resource planning, leadership, organizational culture, governance, general management, functional strategy, change management, execution alignment, and overall strategy execution. In the same way, university C had the lowest mean values in short-term objectives, information and communication systems, governance, general management, execution alignment, and overall execution. University B also has the lowest mean value in resource planning, leadership, functional strategy, and change management and organizational culture. Further, university F has the lowest mean value in organizational structure.

The mean value of different aspects of strategic management practices of universities and CBACs are given in table 18.

Table 18

Mean Values of SMP of Universities and CBACs

Aspects of SMP/Universities	A	B	C	D	E	F	CBACs	Total
Strategic mgmt. awareness	3.2476	2.9000	3.0857	3.6222	3.6000	3.2833	3.6208	3.4837
Strategic goal awareness	3.4070	3.1667	3.0816	3.6032	4.1429	3.2619	3.7097	3.5825
Strategy initiation	3.3273	3.0333	3.0837	3.6127	3.8714	3.2726	3.6653	3.5331
External environment analysis	2.8095	2.7000	2.4857	3.0222	3.3000	3.1167	3.4848	3.2433
Internal environment analysis	3.0238	3.0000	2.5357	3.3194	3.6875	3.0625	3.5334	3.3420
Strategic choice	3.0804	3.0000	2.6429	3.4028	3.4375	3.1146	3.4980	3.3399
Strategic planning alignment	3.3286	3.4667	3.4000	3.7778	4.2000	3.4333	3.6400	3.5616
Strategic planning	3.0606	3.0417	2.7661	3.3806	3.6563	3.1818	3.5391	3.3717
Short-term objectives	2.9365	3.1111	2.8571	3.4074	3.8333	3.2222	3.5360	3.3547
Communication	2.8889	3.0556	2.5238	3.1111	3.6667	3.0833	3.6427	3.3744
Organization structure	3.1012	3.2917	3.1429	3.3611	4.2500	3.0625	3.59	3.4298
Resource planning	3.1845	3.0000	3.4286	3.2778	3.8750	3.2292	3.6640	3.4963
Leadership	3.0794	2.7500	3.3333	3.3704	3.3333	3.1667	3.6787	3.4680
Organizational culture	3.1905	2.6111	3.0476	3.3704	3.6667	3.2222	3.6720	3.4795
Governance	2.9524	2.8333	2.7857	3.1111	3.5000	2.9167	3.5960	3.3498
General management	3.0476	3.3333	2.5714	3.2222	4.0000	3.1667	3.6080	3.4089
Functional strategy	3.1806	3.0278	3.0833	3.3148	3.6667	3.1458	3.5975	3.4381
Change management	3.0106	2.6667	2.8730	3.1728	3.5000	3.1852	3.4578	3.2934
Execution alignment	3.2024	3.5000	2.7857	3.5833	4.1250	3.0833	3.5920	3.4557
Strategy execution	3.0704	3.0164	2.9484	3.3002	3.7652	3.1349	3.6031	3.4135
Strategic control and feedback system	2.7698	2.7222	2.5714	2.9074	3.3333	3.0417	3.4187	3.1888
Corrective action	2.9952	2.3667	3.5429	3.1778	3.3000	3.1333	3.5168	3.3360
Strategic M&E and control	2.8825	2.5444	3.0571	3.0426	3.3167	3.0875	3.4677	3.2624
Overall SMP	3.0852	2.9090	2.9638	3.3340	3.6524	3.1692	3.5688	3.3952

In terms of control mechanism, CBACs had the highest mean values for strategic control and feedback systems as well as strategic monitoring evaluation and control, whereas University C had the highest mean value for corrective action. On the lower side, the lowest mean values were observed at university C (strategy control and feedback), university B (corrective action), and university B (strategy M&E and control).

Based on mean values, CBACs and University E were in a better position in terms of critical factors, and University B is on the bottom line. The results indicate that HEIs with lower mean values need to enhance their performance in critical factors. HEIs that exceed a mean value of three should focus on maintaining their strengths while continuing to improve in the future.

To measure the mean differences of SMP across six universities, including CBACs, and assess whether the differences are statistically significant, I used a one-way ANOVA as given in table 19.

Table 19

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SM Initiation	Between Groups	7.974	6	1.329	5.710	.000
	Within Groups	45.620	196	.233		
	Total	53.595	202			
Strategic Planning	Between Groups	11.383	6	1.897	8.057	.000
	Within Groups	46.154	196	.235		
	Total	57.537	202			
Strategy execution	Between Groups	13.194	6	2.199	8.790	.000
	Within Groups	49.032	196	.250		
	Total	62.226	202			
Strategy Control	Between Groups	15.526	6	2.588	6.290	.000
	Within Groups	80.629	196	.411		
	Total	96.155	202			
SMP	Between Groups	11.303	6	1.884	9.090	.000
	Within Groups	40.620	196	.207		
	Total	51.923	202			

ANOVA Table 19 summarises the differences in responses across various groups concerning different components of SMP in HEIs. A P-value of less than 0.05 indicates significant differences among universities and CBACs. A larger F-statistic suggests a greater disparity between group means. Most variables demonstrate statistically significant differences among the groups, indicating that perceptual responses vary considerably across groups for these aspects. This variation may be attributed to differences in institution type, participant role, or experience.

Given the significant ANOVA results, I proceeded with a post-hoc test. The Games-Howell post-hoc analysis revealed that the mean value of the dependent variable—i.e., strategic management practices in university E was significantly different from that in university B ($P=0.013$), indicating that the strategic management practices of these institutions vary notably.

Instruments of Strategic Management

The study found that various strategic management instruments are employed by HEIs in Nepal for environmental analysis and strategic decision-making (Appendix H). Among these tools, SWOT analysis emerged as the most commonly used, with many institutions also developing action plans. SWOC and PESTEL analyses were utilized as well, often in conjunction with SWOT to enhance their effectiveness. Specifically, three universities (TU, KU, and MWU) utilized SWOT analysis, while two universities (AFU and PU) employed SWOC analysis. One university (PokU) did not specify any tools used.

For CBACs, the majority employed SWOT analysis, with one using a combination of SWOT and PESTEL. About 25 percent of campuses did not mention the use of any specific tools. Similarly, constituent campuses of TU predominantly conducted SWOT analyses, with only one campus using internal analyses.

Despite the literature suggesting a broader range of strategic tools, such as the balanced scorecard, portfolio analysis, and Porter's five forces model, these were found to be underutilized in Nepali HEIs.

Critical Factors for Strategic Management of HEIs in Nepal

The key factors impacting strategic management in HEIs in Nepal as a theme are presented as quantitative findings and supplemented by qualitative insights. The critical factors include internal governance, institutional autonomy, leadership, organizational structure, culture, and communication. Additionally, political influence has emerged as a pivotal factor that significantly affects the strategy formulation and implementation processes within HEIs in Nepal.

Correlation between SMP and Critical Factors

The mean values of SMP, communication, organizational leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, internal governance, and autonomy were found to be 3.42, 3.37, 3.44, 3.50, 3.43, 3.35, and 3.30, with standard deviations of 0.51, 0.82, 0.68, 0.67, 0.67, and 0.85, respectively. Similarly, the correlation between SMP and critical factors identified and relationships within critical factors, i.e., communication, organizational structure, leadership, organizational culture, governance, and autonomy, was significant. Relationships between strategic management and critical factors are significant and high compared to interrelationships within factors.

There exists a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.643$, $P < 0.01$) between organizational communication and well-defined organizational structures. Similarly, a moderate correlation ($r = 0.535$, $P < 0.01$) exists between communication and leadership.

Table 20*Interrelationship between SMP and Critical Factors*

	SMP	Communication	Organizational Structure	Leadership	Organizational Culture	Governance	Autonomy
SMP	1.000						
Communication	.826	1.00					
Organizational Structure	.758	.643	1.00				
Leadership	.700	.535	.530	1.00			
Organizational Culture	.724	.599	.531	.50	1.00		
Governance	.736	.600	.554	.535	.595	1.00	
Autonomy	.665	.511	.492	.433	.475	.550	1.00

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N= 203

Likewise, organizational culture and governance have a moderate-to-strong correlation ($r = 0.595$), suggesting that governance structures align with organizational culture in supporting strategic objectives. This correlation ($r = 0.551$) between autonomy and governance has moderate implications for SMP's betterment. Additional variables show a moderate correlation ($r=0.443$ to 0.599 , $P<0.01$) reflecting interconnection among variables.

The relationship between SMP and communication exhibited a very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.826$). This suggests that effective communication is highly associated with robust SMP, which indicates that HEIs with clear and effective communication systems tend to have better SMP. Similarly, organizational structure and SMP have a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.758$). It reflects that a well-structured organization supports effective SMP. Similarly, there exists a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.700$) between SMP and leadership, highlighting effective leadership. Similarly, organizational culture and SMP have a strong positive correlation

($r = 0.724$), suggesting that a supportive organizational culture positively impacts SMP. Internal governance and SMP also have a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.736$, $P < 0.01$), showing that good governance plays a key role, whereas autonomy and SMP have a moderate-to-strong positive correlation ($r = 0.665$, $P < 0.01$), indicating that organizational autonomy is moderately linked to effective SMP.

Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of HEIs in Nepal, particularly universities, is governed by the university acts that define roles, responsibilities, and the overall framework for institutional management. These acts grant universities a significant degree of autonomy, allowing them to modify their internal structures to better align with their strategic objectives. This flexibility in adapting both structure and strategy ensures that institutions remain aligned with their goals and operate efficiently.

Governing Bodies and Strategic Management. The main governing bodies of universities include the Senate, the Academic Council, and the Executive Council. The Senate, the highest authority, oversees essential functions such as academic programs, budgeting, and staffing decisions. The Academic Council manages academic matters, including setting standards, curricula, and policies, while the Executive Council is responsible for executing decisions made by the Senate and managing day-to-day university operations. Strategic planning and monitoring are typically handled by specialized entities, such as planning councils or directorates, with both long-term and annual plans shaped under the leadership of the vice chancellor and carried out by the institute/faculty.

Structural Diversity and Role Variation. The implementation of academic programs varies significantly across universities, with deans and other academic leaders playing pivotal

roles in overseeing these processes. The structure and responsibilities of constituent and affiliated campuses also differ. Some campuses follow a community-based management model, while others are operated as for-profit entities. The effective execution of strategic initiatives frequently necessitates structural adjustments within the university to align resources, governance, and management with institutional goals.

Ambiguity and Lack of Standardization. A significant issue within the organizational structures of HEIs, particularly in TU's affiliated campuses, is the ambiguity and lack of standardization in roles and responsibilities. Specifically, the roles of the campus chief and various committees—such as those responsible for procurement and quality assurance—are often unclear and tend to overlap. This ambiguity leads to governance and decision-making challenges. Additionally, the inconsistent naming conventions and varying composition of these committees across different campuses further exacerbate the governance issues, making it difficult to establish a coherent and streamlined organizational structure.

Strategic Decisions and Structural Impact. Strategic decisions within HEIs have had a profound impact on their organizational structures. For example, TU's mid-1990s strategy of decentralizing authority led to the creation of new governance bodies such as the Campus Development and Management Council and the Execution Committee. These structural changes were a direct response to the decentralization strategy, highlighting how strategic goals often necessitate adjustments to existing frameworks to accommodate new governance mechanisms and responsibilities. Several respondents (P 12, P 30, P 34) highlighted the benefits of decentralization and autonomy, emphasizing that "institutions have adapted decentralized structures to enhance decision-making and operational efficiency." This demonstrates the positive impact of decentralization in improving operational effectiveness and governance within HEIs.

Challenges of Expansion and Duplication. As HEIs in Nepal, particularly TU, expanded their reach and the number of affiliated campuses increased, academic programs expanded to constituent campuses, and the existing organizational structure struggled to keep pace with the growing demand. This rapid expansion has resulted in the duplication of academic programs across central departments and affiliated campuses, contributing to inefficiencies and redundancy. Despite the growing number of campuses offering similar programs, the central departments' structure has remained largely unchanged, underscoring the urgent need for a more dynamic and adaptable organizational framework. Such a structure would enable HEIs to better respond to the evolving demands and complexities of modern higher education, ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

Role of Quality Assurance in Structural Evolution. The introduction of the QAA program by the UGC has driven significant structural changes within Nepali HEIs. To meet the UGC's stringent requirements, TU has established a QAA Directorate, and community-based affiliated campuses have established internal quality assurance mechanisms. These include new structures such as the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) and the Research Management Cell (RMC), which have become critical for maintaining and enhancing educational standards. The establishment of these bodies underscores the influential role of external strategic pressures, such as the UGC's QAA program, in shaping the internal organizational structures of HEIs and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in academic quality and research capabilities.

Organizational Structure as Strategic Management Factor. Evidence from Nepalese HEIs demonstrates that organizational structure is a critical component of effective strategic management. The alignment between structure and strategy is essential for the successful implementation of strategic plans. Key initiatives such as decentralization, the introduction of

new academic programs, and the establishment of quality assurance mechanisms highlight the importance of a well-defined and adaptable organizational structure. A failure to align the structure with strategic objectives can hinder institutional progress, as exemplified by the challenges encountered by TU's research centers and the redundancy in academic programs. Consequently, organizational structure not only reflects an institution's strategic priorities but also plays a significant role in determining its success in achieving those objectives.

Similarly, universities like KU, PokU, and MWU have experienced structural changes driven by their strategic plans. These changes include the establishment of new schools, international centers, and additional campuses, further illustrating how strategic initiatives can shape organizational frameworks and contribute to institutional growth and innovation.

Strategic Alignment. Organizational structure plays a pivotal role in an institution's ability to implement its strategy effectively. Leaders within HEIs must recognize the structural implications of their strategies and remain adaptable as both internal strategies and external conditions evolve. One dean emphasized this by stating, "A well-designed organizational structure supports the implementation of strategic objectives" (P 56). In response to this need, many HEIs have initiated efforts to restructure their organizational frameworks to ensure strategic alignment. Several respondents (P 37, P 40, P 13) expressed similar sentiments, emphasizing that "clear communication and accountability within the structure" are vital for meeting institutional goals and adapting to future challenges. Thus, effective structural adaptation is critical for fostering the success and sustainability of HEIs in an ever-changing educational landscape.

Organizational Structure in Strategic Management. The organizational structure of HEIs plays a crucial role in aligning strategy with operational frameworks. Leaders within HEIs

must ensure that their strategy is well-integrated with the organizational design, balancing elements such as centralization, decentralization, and the span of control. A well-designed structure supports the effective implementation of strategic objectives by facilitating efficient resource allocation and alignment with institutional goals. There is a reciprocal relationship between organizational structure and strategic management: while structure influences the implementation of strategy, strategic objectives also shape the design and functioning of the organizational structure (p. 39, p. 25).

Challenges in Centralized Structures. Participants noted that centralized structures may lead to inefficiencies and a lack of accountability. As described, "Challenges such as lack of accountability and inefficiencies may arise, particularly in centralized structures" (P 35, P 51). To address these issues, continuous review and adaptation of the organizational structure are necessary, allowing institutions to respond to emerging challenges and capitalize on new opportunities. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the structure to align with strategy, promoting accountability, and fostering a culture of innovation and collaboration.

Flexibility and Adaptability. Flexibility and adaptability in organizational structures are crucial for enabling HEIs to respond effectively to dynamic environments and changing needs. Stakeholder involvement, including input from faculty, administrators, and external representatives, is essential in shaping the structure, ensuring that diverse perspectives are incorporated into decision-making processes. One of the deans emphasized the importance of organizational structures being adaptable and flexible to meet changing needs and contexts (P 30). Additionally, a well-designed structure facilitates efficient resource allocation, allowing departments to collaborate toward common goals. Supporting this view, participants noted that an effective organizational structure enhances both resource allocation and utilization (P 38, P 47).

Governance and Decentralization. HEIs typically include various governance components within their organizational structures. Many institutions have adopted decentralization and autonomy to enhance decision-making and operational efficiency, allowing for flexibility in adapting to evolving requirements. Participants highlighted the reciprocal relationship between organizational structure and strategic management, noting that while structure influences strategy implementation, strategic objectives also shape the design and functioning of the organizational structure. Specifically, participants observed that institutions have adapted decentralized structures to improve decision-making and operational efficiency (P 12, P 30, P 34).

These findings underscore the critical role of organizational structure in strategic management within HEIs. A well-aligned structure supports strategic objectives, while flexibility, effective leadership, and stakeholder involvement are essential for addressing challenges and enhancing efficiency. The ongoing need for restructuring and adaptation reflects the dynamic nature of the higher education landscape and the necessity for institutions to remain responsive to changes.

Internal Governance and Control

Higher education governance encompasses the structures, processes, and activities involved in the planning and direction of institutions and their personnel. Both external and internal governance play crucial roles in setting the course for HEIs. External governance refers to the relationship between individual HEIs and their supervisory authorities, while internal governance involves the line authority within HEIs. Effective governance ensures that HEIs are properly directed and held accountable.

In Nepal, several actors and aspects contribute to the external governance of HEIs, including the GoN, the MOEST, the UGC, the MEC, professional councils, education policies, auditors, and market forces.

Internal Locus of Governance and Control. Interview data highlighted the significance of internal governance and control in strategic management within educational institutions. It was noted that the unit responsible for governance and control has a considerable impact on strategic decision-making and overall efficiency. Participants also indicated that an internal locus of control, where individuals believe they can influence outcomes through their efforts, is associated with better motivation, resource mobilization, and organizational commitment (P 37, P 39). This suggests that institutions with a strong internal governance structure are likely to achieve better strategic management outcomes.

Both formal and informal governance are significant for HEIs, as formal governance includes official and explicit mechanisms, while informal governance pertains to unwritten rules governing interpersonal relations in higher education, such as the respect accorded to professors and administrators, academic freedom, and student behavior traditions.

Good governance is essential, but it alone is not sufficient. Faculty participation in various decision-making bodies fosters shared governance, but excessive collegial authority can lead to sluggish decision-making. Faculties, schools, and departments may become separate entities with individual privileges, transforming the university into a federation where major and minor parts are only loosely connected (Clark, 1998). This trend is also observed in Nepal.

Internal Governance of the University. The internal governance and management of HEIs are tailored to their core mission of providing quality education through teaching, research, and community service. In Nepal, universities are governed by the Senate or Assembly, chaired

by the Prime Minister, with the exception of the National Open University. The Senate, comprising internal, ex-officio, and nominated external members, is the supreme governing body of universities. Additionally, the Executive Council and Academic Council serve as the primary decision-making bodies responsible for directing and managing the university.

Under the leadership of the dean, the Education Committee and Faculty Board are major decision-making organs. Key actors in the internal governance structure include the VC, chairperson of the service commission, and members of the service commission, Rector (at TU and NSU), Registrar, Dean, Department Head, Campus Chief, and other similar heads of HEIs.

Regarding the internal governance of universities, one VC stated:

The head cannot decide solely for himself/herself. The Executive Council is the main decision-making body. In principle, the VC's decision-making should be final, though s/he is assisted by the Rector and Registrar in a tripartite relationship. Team leadership is practiced, but not as an executive prime minister. Conflicts often arise due to party-line approaches among the Rector and Registrar, which do not align with the VC's spirit. As a result, there is often compromise; otherwise, the ultimate result is a 'deadlock' (P 51).

Internal Governance of TU Organs: For a significant period, TU was synonymous with higher education in Nepal and operated with centralized administration. However, it became apparent that centralizing authority in the TU central office impeded progress. Consequently, reforms were introduced to decentralize TU.

Since 2055 B.S., under TU's decentralization rules, decentralized institutes, faculties, and research centers have come into existence and are governed by the Management and Development Council. This council, composed of internal stakeholders of the university, exercises the academic and financial rights outlined in the rules. The Management and Development Council includes a five-member Execution Committee chaired by the Dean, while the CMC serves as the primary decision-making body for campuses.

Internal Governance of Autonomous Campuses. At the campus level, the CMC includes participants from both external members—such as parents, donors, social workers, educationalists, industrialists, employers, and intellectuals—and internal members. Internal members consist of ex-officio representatives from MOEST, the UGC, the Dean's Office, the VC Office, and the Ward Chief, as well as student, teacher, and employee representatives. The CMC serves as the main decision-making body for the autonomous TU campus. The campus chief, who acts as the member secretary of the CMC, is responsible for overseeing academic, financial, and administrative tasks, with the assistance of support staff.

The strong presence and active participation of external members in the CMC decision-making process help to mitigate internal inbreeding mechanisms and promote an "outward" perspective over an "inward" focus in campus management.

However, political inclinations among teachers, staff, and CMC members are pervasive, often hindering the committee's effectiveness and weakening its governance role. A member who has served on the CMCs of two TU autonomous constituent campuses for about four years stated, "I have observed that party-line politics takes precedence over other considerations. Everyone on the campus seems to be involved in political line exercises, making it difficult to find a 'neutral person.' Politics permeates every aspect of campus life, leading to conflicts among political and interest groups and weakening internal governance."

Internal Governance of Affiliated Campuses. For-profit affiliated campuses are governed by investors or their appointees. In contrast, not-for-profit affiliated campuses have academic matters governed by the university with which they are affiliated, while financial, human resources, and other institutional matters are managed by the Campus Assembly (the term may vary) and the CMC. The CMC typically comprises members from the academic community,

social workers, directors, businesspeople, and representatives from various community groups and organizations.

Campuses utilize various mechanisms to manage governance and control, including Campus Assemblies, CMC, and administrative bodies such as Campus Chiefs and Assistant Campus Chiefs.

The CMC is responsible for overall campus management, while the campus chief acts as the campus leader. Two notable trends are observed in the internal governance of campus-based institutions: first, the CMC is becoming more proactive and assumes an overarching role in campus management; second, the campus chief maintains a dominant role in managing day-to-day academic and administrative operations in other campuses. Data also highlighted the importance of committees and subcommittees in the decision-making processes (CBAC responses).

Internal Governance and Strategic Management. Governance must fulfill three key functions related to strategic management, which are also evident in Nepal: influencing and forming the corporate mission, contributing to the strategy process and improving performance, and ensuring corporate performance aligns with the stated mission and strategy. Granting autonomy to campuses while transferring academic autonomy related to medical education from universities to the MEC has altered the governance mechanisms of HEIs in Nepal. These changes have had a direct impact on strategy formulation, execution, and M&E.

Technological Integration and Innovation. The research participants highlighted the use of ICT to enhance governance and management of HEIs, as there is a growing emphasis on leveraging technology to improve governance practices, including the implementation of IT systems for data management, enhancing fiscal governance, and streamlining administrative

processes. Cloud-based technologies and electronic management information systems (EMIS) are considered promising solutions for modernizing governance practices (P 52, TU Registrar).

Challenges and Areas for Improvement. Several challenges to good internal governance have been identified, including bureaucratic hurdles, lack of coordination, and resistance to change. Issues such as inadequate resource allocation, insufficient staff capacity, and political interference also impede effective governance and control within institutions (P. 52, CBAC responses).

Ensuring transparency, accountability, and adherence to policies is crucial for successful governance and strategic management (CBAC responses, KU responses). Internal governance and control form the foundation for effective strategic management in educational institutions. It is essential for institutions to foster a culture of responsibility, transparency, and innovation while addressing challenges and leveraging technological advancements to enhance governance practices. Strong leadership, supported by robust internal structures and mechanisms, is vital for navigating complexities and achieving institutional objectives. Growing concerns about the deterioration of higher education governance, exacerbated by increasing external involvement, highlight the need for greater external accountability.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a crucial element in the HEIs. Culture encompasses a comprehensive VMGO, as well as beliefs, values, norms, and operational practices that define the organization. The nature of HEIs differs from that of business organizations, and each HEI has a unique and distinct culture.

Universities often rely on government grants through the UGC, with constituent campuses or central departments receiving public funding via their central office. This substantial funding

provides an opportunity to cultivate a strong institutional culture. Historical traditions also play a role in shaping the culture of universities. CBACs primarily depend on student fees, community donations, and UGC grants.

Culture can either hinder or support strategic management and is a key factor to consider in any organization. HEIs have various strategies to address this, such as aligning culture with strategy, understanding cultural dimensions to adjust strategy, or balancing culture and strategy simultaneously.

The research participants, including seven VCs, seven registrars, twenty-six campus chiefs (twenty CBACs and six TU constituents), one TU central department head, eight deans, three planning chiefs, and two professors, agreed that organizational culture significantly impacts strategic management. One participant noted, "Organizational culture influences strategic management significantly." Another mentioned, "Culture is the glue that holds people in the organization together, and it must be made favorable and compatible with the strategy." A registrar (P. 40) emphasized that organizational culture is critical social capital, with participatory decision-making, trust, a sense of belonging, and shared values that positively impact management.

Hard and Soft Cultures of HEIs. Both hard and soft aspects of culture impact strategic management. One participant emphasized that while both soft and hard cultures are essential, understanding soft cultures is often more crucial than hard cultures. According to a top team leader at the university:

A strong organizational culture stems from the cumulative contributions of various actors within the organization: the regulations (governance framework, state regulations affecting risk appetite and tolerance, risk management, and internal control functions), internal and external audits (assessing and providing assurance over risks and offering independent opinions about existing and desired culture), the board (responsible for the ethical framework and setting the tone from the top), senior management (implementing

and overseeing the culture), human resources (shaping and enhancing cultural changes through training, recruitment, compensation and benefits, and performance management), and risk management (supervising and mitigating risks and monitoring risk appetite). There is a strong link between organizational culture and strategic management. A university should be managed to make strategic decisions based on the same values, beliefs, and principles established through its organizational culture (P. 39).

Positive and Negative Cultures. A positive organizational culture significantly benefits an organization. One participant noted that a strong organizational culture is crucial for effective strategic management (P. 45). Similarly, an educationalist at the UGC highlighted that organizational culture supports the implementation of plans and controls them effectively (P. 43). A positive culture is essential for successful management. In this context, a department head commented:

We have an organizational culture where all team members are enthusiastic about the institution's development, and responsibilities for work done are shared by the institution. This makes it easy to handle any situation—whether it's a way forward or a hurdle (P. 1).

A campus chief (P. 16) stated:

Our planning and implementation processes depend on teamwork and group division. This fosters a culture of togetherness and mutual understanding, providing inspiration and motivation to the campus community. It demonstrates how, together, we can achieve success.

According to a former CBAC member now serving as a campus chief, while professors and teachers are generally supportive despite differing ideologies, they unite for the campus agenda. Students are also cooperative, and problems are resolved swiftly. However, the university is currently experiencing a transition crisis, with authorities struggling to address it. This has slowed down the progress and could potentially harm the institution's spirit and culture (P. 22).

Positive work cultures greatly impact strategic management. A dean from KU (P. 33) noted that a positive organizational culture leads to favorable outcomes, while a negative one results in adverse effects. Establishing a good culture within the organization is essential for

influencing strategic management. Another participant (P. 31) mentioned that their institution has a work culture where they typically work from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, conducting research and lab work. This culture contributes to the quality of education and various aspects of university management and operations.

Conversely, a negative culture can adversely affect strategic management. In one participant's organization, there is a lack of responsibility, coordination, or accountability among students (P. 52), as noted by one campus chief. A VC described the existing culture of his university as lethargic and resistant to workflow systems, with prevalent issues of punctuality and sincerity among teachers, administrative staff, and students, and red tape being commonplace. A new mindset and paradigm shift are needed to improve the organizational culture and achieve timely outcomes (P. 46).

The politicization of HEIs has also negatively impacted the higher education system in Nepal. In this connection, the QAA coordinator of a constituent campus of TU (P. 28) succinctly stated that political turmoil and interference within HEIs have created conflicts among various political groups within the institution, undermining organizational culture and posing a serious threat to the institution's growth.

Significance of Organizational Culture in Strategic Management. Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in shaping the strategic management process within Nepalese HEIs. The research participants have emphasized that the working culture among employees significantly influences strategic decision-making (P. 37). This view is supported by another participant who highlighted the strong link between organizational culture and strategic management, suggesting that decisions should align with the values and principles established by the institution's culture (P. 39).

The organizational culture within Nepali HEIs influences various management processes, including decision-making, recruitment, performance management, and risk mitigation (P. 39; CBAC, 2024). A participative culture fosters cooperation among stakeholders and reduces conflicts (P. 40), while a focus on community service and accountability enhances the institution's overall performance (P. 11).

Components of Organizational Culture. Various actors contribute to the formation and maintenance of organizational culture within HEIs. These include governance frameworks, regulatory bodies, internal and external audit functions, selection of board members, senior management, human resources, and risk management teams (P. 39). Additionally, participatory decision-making, trust, a sense of belonging, and adherence to values and norms are identified as essential components of organizational culture (P. 40).

Challenges and Opportunities. Despite the recognition of the importance of organizational culture, the research participants also highlighted challenges such as political interference, resistance to change, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (P. 22; P. 56). These challenges hinder the establishment of a cohesive organizational culture and may impede strategic initiatives. However, there is optimism that effective leadership can foster positive cultural changes within HEIs (P. 55).

To foster a conducive organizational culture, suggestions included promoting participative decision-making, embracing innovation and creativity, and aligning actions with institutional values (P. 13; P. 48). Additionally, there is a call for greater accountability, transparency, and adherence to ethical principles (P. 11; P. 43).

Institutional Leadership

Leadership is a pivotal component of institutional governance that can significantly impact the success of an institution. Visionary leadership, coupled with political support from the government, plays a crucial role in the successful development of a university. Leadership is essential for maintaining the integrity of the university system, managing relationships with stakeholders and cooperating agencies, and handling academic matters effectively and swiftly (Khaniya, 2007).

A leader is responsible for guiding the organization towards its goals, as leadership involves the ability to navigate change, establish a new direction, and motivate both institutions and individuals to move in that direction. In an organizational setting, leadership encompasses a range of roles and responsibilities, including acting as a figurehead, managing interpersonal relations, disseminating information, making decisions, resolving conflicts, and negotiating. Thus, both transactional and transformational leadership are central to the practice of strategic management.

Tracing HEI leaders. Universities' acts and rules define various university officials as leaders, with their roles and responsibilities varying according to their positions in the university hierarchy. The responsibility for providing direction, momentum, and leadership primarily rests with the VC and the top leadership team. All participants affirmed the VC's role as the university's top leader while also recognizing the importance of other top leaders at different hierarchical levels.

The VC serves as the university's chief academic and administrative officer, acting full-time and exercising overall control over university activities. The VC directs and supervises

university operations and implements the decisions and directives of the assembly. Both the Academic Council and Executive Council are chaired by the VC.

Below the VC are the rector (at TU and NSU) and the registrar. The registrar, working full-time as a paid senior official, handles various administrative and academic functions, including general and financial administration. The dean, as an academic leader and administrator, manages the faculty, institute, or school (in the case of KU). Similarly, the campus chief leads at the campus level, while central department heads lead at the departmental level. Leaders in these roles should be adept administrators and committed academics.

Importance of Leadership. Leadership plays a central role in strategic planning, navigating challenges, and executing strategic vision. According to one registrar and one planning chief, leadership is a critical factor influencing the strategic management of universities and is recognized as a key determinant of success or failure in achieving strategic goals (P. 37, P. 39). Effective leadership is essential for addressing challenges posed by socio-political changes, technological advancements, and economic instability. The registrar further emphasized that leaders are pivotal in crafting the strategic vision, mission, and objectives and in developing strategies to achieve them. Additionally, leadership is crucial for translating strategic plans into actionable steps, monitoring progress, and evaluating outcomes (P. 40).

Roles of leaders. The role of top team leaders in strategic management is crucial for several reasons. Leaders are responsible for creating a vision and mission, aligning the vision with conflicting agendas and objectives, translating the vision into tangible results, balancing tasks among stakeholders, and overseeing monitoring and evaluation. One of the deans in this context expressed that "Leadership has a direct cause-and-effect relationship with organizations and their success" (P. 56).

Leaders influence organizational values, culture, change tolerance, and employee motivation. They shape institutional strategies, including their execution and effectiveness. In Nepal, there are numerous case studies illustrating both successful and unsuccessful leadership transitions.

Another educationalist from the UGC commented:

Strategic management concerning leadership involves focusing on guiding principles, persistently mobilizing the institutional team and stakeholders, embracing innovation to overcome challenges, and enduring difficulties with persistence and perseverance (P. 43).

Leadership Styles and Practices. The research participants highlighted the importance of leaders' adaptability to context, leadership style, and authority. One campus chief noted that leadership styles vary according to the situation, with both democratic and autocratic approaches being employed as needed (P. 8). Another campus chief at CBAC emphasized community-centric leadership, stating that community-based campuses place significant importance on leadership for community engagement and societal transformation (P. 3). In this context, the campus chief is seen as having decisive authority over the campus's direction. Similarly, another campus chief asserted that the campus chief possesses substantial decision-making power, supported by the CMC (P. 4).

Leadership Deficit and Challenges. The research participants have also identified a leadership deficit as a significant issue, as one of the participants specifically highlighted "old mindsets of leaders and educational leaders" as a major problem in strategic management. Another participant noted that "fragile leadership and bureaucracy" present substantial hurdles for HEIs. A registrar pointed out the issue of leadership capabilities, mentioning a lack of competent and honest leaders at higher university levels, compounded by increased political influence, which has further deteriorated leadership effectiveness and performance. Similarly, another

registrar observed that a leader's success or survival is often not correlated with the institution's performance.

The research participants identified several challenges of HEIs in leaders, the first challenge being continuity and transition. Frequent changes in leadership positions create instability within HEIs. According to a registrar, leadership transitions pose difficulties in maintaining institutional memory and continuity in strategic initiatives (P 52).

Decision-making dynamics are also unique in universities, influenced by political affiliations. University leaders are often appointed based on political connections, which can lead to compromises and conflicts affecting strategic implementation, as noted by a VC (P 51). Political influence presents challenges to effective leadership and strategic planning, with political alignment sometimes hindering leadership functions, as indicated by a dean (P 31).

The research participants further expressed concerns about the politicization of leadership positions. They observed that many leadership roles in HEIs are filled as fixed-term positions, often based on political rather than academic criteria. This practice, they noted, undermines the effectiveness of leadership and strategic management. Political interference in appointments leads to problems, as highlighted by Mathema (2007), who stated:

Appointments to senior leadership or management posts, and sometimes even to academic positions, are highly politicized. It might not be wholly untrue to say that political beliefs weigh heavier in choosing a candidate than his or her competence, leadership qualities, academic credentials, and past track record (p.57).

Politically appointed leaders, driven more by political motives than institutional interests, can undermine the strategic management process. A professor noted that such leaders often lack clear goals and may seek higher positions, which disrupts strategic management. Another campus chief said that:

Leaders (campus chief, assistant campus chief, and other key positions) are appointed based on political affiliation and influence, which will never compel them to act in the best interests of the stakeholders. In this scenario, formulating and adhering to a strategic plan will never be a priority for top-level management (interview, campus chief).

However, some participants offered different perspectives on appointment practices. One dean argued that:

University leaders are appointed according to the law of the land. Officials appointed by political leaders are often university professors. Finding academics not affiliated with political parties is a challenging job in Nepal. The most important aspect is that they must be dedicated to leading, developing, and achieving the HEIs' goals and objectives (P 31).

Universities are intrinsically linked to government policy through professional councils, MOEST, UGC, and leadership appointments. This connection often results in administrative and management challenges that affect strategic planning and implementation. A registrar highlighted that if a strategic plan developed under one leader is continued by another, differing mindsets between outgoing and incoming leaders create implementation issues.

One dean noted that:

There is a lack of autonomy in universities and campuses. Most leaders are chosen based on political alignment rather than work quality or other accepted criteria. This is a major problem. Another issue is the government's control over all public institutions in Nepal, with political parties using universities as training grounds for their cadres through student organizations or teacher associations. This situation hampers the ability to design and implement strategic plans effectively (P 33).

Dynamism Matters. Three participant campus chiefs emphasized that dynamic leadership is essential for the successful implementation of any plan. It provides direction and drives the institution forward. One VC noted that dynamic leadership can effectively implement plans with the support of the relevant faculties and schools (P 49). Dynamic leadership is crucial for the transformation and development of an institution or strategy. It is an integral part of management, guiding and advancing the institution. According to a senior official at UGC:

An academic leader needs to stay closely engaged with teaching, learning, research, and scholarship to bring out the best in academics (Interview, UGC; P 35).

Vision of the Leader. Eight research participants highlighted the necessity of a visionary leader for effective strategic management. The leader's vision significantly influences the

formulation of strategic plans for the institution. A campus chief (P 11) noted that a visionary leader, equipped with relevant knowledge and skills, can effectively manage and transform the organization in a relatively short period. A dean emphasized that leadership's influence is critical throughout the strategic management process, from the central level to the campus level, though in the case of TU, most influence comes from the central level (P 36).

Another dean stated that leadership can profoundly impact strategic plans, as a leader with a clear vision and strong commitment is better equipped to develop and implement effective strategic plans (P 55). Similarly, it was noted that visionary leaders with solid academic competence should be appointed based on quality rather than power or influence.

Most participants, including VCs, registrars, deans, and campus chiefs, agreed that leadership is central to strategic management. KU VC highlighted in the following way:

KU's founder, VC, served the university for about twenty-one years, demonstrating exceptional leadership through strategic thinking, vision, and mission, and driving activities with team spirit. His successor introduced a new operational model and strategic initiative, continuing the legacy of effective leadership. The founder exemplified qualities such as kindness, vision, transformative ability, networking skills, trustworthiness, collaboration, team building, strategic insight, hard work, honesty, commitment, and balance (Thapa, 2019, P. 52).

Leadership involves creating a vision and effecting positive change in HEIs for the betterment of society. It is the leader's responsibility to craft a vision and translate it into action. Nearly all participants agreed that effective leadership is crucial for strategic thinking, visioning, and translating vision into reality.

A dean from MWU stated:

MWU's VC aims to complete the university's physical infrastructure, emphasize production, implement a student-earning policy, radically improve the curriculum, make the university world-class, and develop education that addresses the resources of the ten districts of Karnali Province (Interview, Dean of MWU).

Leadership Commitment and Styles Matter. Two participants emphasized that a leader's commitment to the chosen strategy is crucial for achieving goals. The greater the commitment from leaders at various levels, the higher the likelihood of successful results.

Appropriate leadership styles should be adapted to the situation. Two campus chiefs argued that HEIs should employ a range of leadership styles, including democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire. One campus chief in this regard noted:

Leadership is critical for strategic management. The style used on our campus depends on the situation. We primarily practice democratic leadership, but in certain situations, autocratic leadership is also applied (P 8).

A VC highlighted the necessity of transformative leadership with strong willpower and determination for achieving sustained outcomes. He stated:

Leadership is a major factor influencing the overall implementation of strategic management. Transformative leadership with strong willpower and determination is essential to carry out strategies effectively and produce sustained outcomes within the stipulated period" (interview, VC, P. 46).

Strong and committed leadership is essential for effective strategic planning and implementation. Leaders have to simplify complexity to avoid confusion and inconsistency. The success or failure of an organization largely depends on its leadership, as leaders' decision-making and leadership styles directly impact the organization's strategic direction. Engagement, strong commitment, and suitable leadership styles are crucial for progress in HEIs, with a focus on teaching, learning, research, and scholarship as well as publication.

Overall, these aspects underscore the importance of leadership in HEIs and highlight the need for leaders to possess specific qualities and competencies to effectively conduct strategic planning and management. Leadership is central to strategic management, and the vision of the leader is a crucial starting point for vision programming.

Promotion of Leadership. Most participants emphasized the importance of different leadership styles in HEIs, particularly visionary, dynamic, and transformative leadership. One campus chief highlighted that universities benefit significantly from visionary leadership, which is equipped with the relevant knowledge and skills to drive institutional transformation (P 13). The research participants also stressed the need for dynamic and transformative leadership, noting that such leadership, characterized by strong determination, is crucial for overcoming challenges and achieving strategic objectives (P 56; P 43).

Organizational leadership is central to strategic management. The tasks of creating a vision, setting directions, forming goals and objectives, crafting strategies, executing plans, and monitoring and evaluating all hinge on effective leadership. In Nepal, as elsewhere, the qualities and styles of leadership make a significant difference in organizational success.

It is evident that leadership crises are prevalent in Nepalese HEIs, as effective leadership is crucial for ensuring clear institutional direction, efficient resource allocation, and successful management of change. Leaders should foster innovation, promote collaboration, and align their strategies with institutional goals. Overall, leadership is a cornerstone of strategic management, influencing every aspect from vision formulation to implementation. The adaptability of leadership styles, continuity in transitions, and alignment with institutional objectives are essential for navigating challenges and achieving strategic goals effectively.

Information and Communication System

Communication within HEIs is a critical factor influencing their functioning, efficiency, and success. Interviews with various stakeholders, including administrators, faculty members, and campus leaders, have highlighted several key themes related to organizational communication.

Importance of Frequent Communication. Communication is a fundamental function within an organization, encompassing the processes of sending and receiving messages to both internal and external stakeholders. Effective communication is crucial across all parts of an organization, and improving communication abilities is essential for achieving success. It occurs through various forms, including oral, written, and electronic methods. Both formal and informal communication play roles in internal, external, and personal interactions. For communication to be effective, it must be clear, concise, concrete, correct, coherent, complete, and courteous. Information and communication are vital components of strategic management and serve as the lifeblood of the organization. The research participants emphasized the importance of frequent communication among different personnel and units within the university. One participant (P 37) noted that enhanced communication can lead to better management outcomes.

Positive Impact of Formal and Informal Communication. One of the registrars (P 40) emphasized the positive impact of both formal and informal communication on employees and staff. He highlighted the importance of a sustainable and reciprocal communication system, which fosters synergy and accelerates task accomplishment.

Effective communication is crucial for HEIs to facilitate problem-solving, decision-making, productivity, and business relationships. It plays a vital role in strategic management, encompassing formulation, execution, monitoring, and control. Both formal and informal communications are crucial for proper functioning, ensuring the rights, responsibilities, and accountability of leadership, managers, teachers, and non-academic staff. The organization's vision, mission, values, goals, objectives, strategy, tactics, and programs should be communicated to stakeholders promptly.

In strategy execution, the importance of a smooth communication system was underscored by participants. The HEI strategy should be communicated throughout the organization so that everyone involved can contribute to achieving their goals. Authority, responsibility, and accountability should be clearly communicated. One of the VCs in this connection noted:

Communication of the integrated vision plan by transformative academic leadership is the only way to successfully implement the strategies and other goals of the visionary plan. Effective communication can change the mindset of all the teaching and administrative staff. We have to pay significant attention to it (P 46).

Forty-two participants, including VCs, registrars, deans, assistant deans, campus chiefs, and educators, agreed that communication is crucial for the successful operation of HEIs and equally important for both planning and execution. This way was elaborated by a campus chief:

The planning and execution processes utilize both formal and informal communication practices. Formal communication practices include meetings, discussions, and feedback collection from faculty members, students, community leaders, and other stakeholders. Informal communication includes casual talks with students, guardians, and staff, as well as personal interactions with community leaders and comments on social media posts (P 11).

Both internal and external communications are equally important. A campus chief at CBAC mentioned:

Effective communication is a major success factor for implementing the strategic plan. Internal communication modes include notices, circulations, and regular staff meetings. The college has established an EMIS cell for recording, analyzing, and retrieving academic data. This system allows department heads and authorities to be involved in internal decision-making and monitoring performance (P 11).

Communication with external stakeholders is also vital. Information about the college's academic, financial, and administrative activities is disseminated through annual progress reports. Feedback to published data informs decisions such as introducing new programs or expanding physical facilities.

Strategic Communication as a Key Function. A participant registrar (a registrar (P 39) highlighted the pivotal role of strategic communication in organizational development). He emphasized that without effective communication, executing strategies becomes challenging, potentially leading to failure. He stressed the importance of correct messaging and strategic communication in building understanding and trust and facilitating action.

One of the deans, in this connection, noted, "A well-designed communication system—both within and with external stakeholders—facilitates smooth strategic management." Effective communication is especially important for the implementation and success of any strategy, as observed by a senior-level leader (dean) at KU. This requires active communication among all concerned parties, ensuring that the right information reaches the right person at the right time for prompt decision-making.

KU has established an effective internal communication system and a separate unit with experts for external communication, liaison, and outreach.

Use of Various Communication Channels. A campus chief from CBAC (P 2) emphasized the importance of utilizing various communication channels both within and outside the campus. He highlighted meetings, seminars, and discussion programs as essential communication tools. He also advocated for policymakers to understand and facilitate the importance of strategic planning at the institutional level.

According to a VC and educationalist (P 43), communication is fundamental for all aspects of institutional development, including interpersonal interactions among authorities, personnel, students, parents, stakeholders, and the government. A comprehensive communication system has to address various needs, such as letters, official documents, notices, feedback,

promotional exchanges, grievances, mass media, reports, journals, brochures, bulletins, and newspapers.

One campus chief stressed the importance of maintaining two-way communication with stakeholders. A communication gap can lead to numerous problems and increased doubts, which hinder institutional development. Therefore, maintaining two-way communication with all stakeholders is essential to reduce uncertainties and facilitate institutional progress.

Some participants noted that communication issues, such as "lack of communication," "lack of information," and "ineffective dissemination of the formulated plan," can obstruct successful strategic planning and its execution. Barriers to communication include verbal, non-verbal, and miscellaneous obstacles such as perceptual and language differences, restrictive environments, distractions, deceptive tactics, and information overload. A lack of communication has caused delays in several academic and administrative activities at TU, according to one top leader (P 53).

Communication for Institutional Strength and Linkages. One of the research participants (P 41) from AFU highlighted the role of communication in strengthening the institution and fostering linkages with relevant public and private development organizations at both national and international levels. Effective communication is viewed as crucial for advancing the university's mission and objectives.

Policymakers and institutional leaders should prioritize the development of robust communication systems and strategies to enhance transparency, collaboration, and institutional effectiveness. Theoretical and empirical evidence underscores the critical role of communication in strategic management within HEIs. It is the backbone for effective strategy formulation, execution, monitoring, and control.

Institutional Autonomy

Autonomy refers to an HEI's right to decide what and how to do things in academia. Varghese (2011) and the WB (2015) observed that universities in Nepal enjoy a substantial degree of autonomy in academic, institutional, staffing, and financial dimensions. Accordingly, they can fix the fees to be levied on the students, diversify the sources of income, retain the grant received from the government, and the like. In academic matters, they can design and develop curricula and study programs and award degrees. Additionally, they can frame their rules, set academic and administrative structures, recruit, promote, and terminate the staff, and fix the terms and conditions of employment, and the like.

It was revealed that academic freedom and autonomy have been deeply rooted since the preparation and establishment of TU, when Oregon University Professor Hugh B. Wood (1962) worked during the planning and establishment phases of the university. As a result, in Nepal's higher education system, academic freedom and autonomy traditions have deep-rooted learning from the United States. The following is an excerpt from the planning commission report, in which Wood played a major role.

Though evolving out of national needs and circumstances and aiming to express the national genius, a university is often the highest national seat of learning. It is the university that sets the intellectual tone of education. In order that it may discharge this function well, it must enjoy a degree of autonomy to organize its intellectual and cultural life without any undue interference from the state ((Nepal National Education Planning Commission, 1956 p. 129).

In the meantime, the report cautioned, "They should stand aloof from politics in the mundane sense but should stand ready to promote the social, economic, political, and cultural welfare of the country" (p. 131).

Academic freedom and autonomy have been preserved even in the most radical reform program in Nepali higher education history (the National Education System Plan 1971–76). The

plan explicitly mentions that TU will function as an autonomous body with the policies, rules, and guidelines laid down by the National Education Committee. The report further states that the government will make available a fixed amount as grant-in-aid, and the university council will approve and adopt the university budget; the university will have decentralized administration and financial powers, among others (Ministry of Education, 1971).

Autonomy and Effective Management. The participants of this research highlighted the critical role of autonomy for effective management. It allows HEIs to decentralize their decision-making system. One of the deans (P 30) alludes to the fact that autonomy empowers departments and units within universities to make decisions independently, leading to more agile and efficient management practices. This aligns with the literature, where emphasis is laid on the importance of autonomy in enhancing organizational performance.

Another dean (P 56) highlighted the role of autonomy for steering the future of the HEIs. He held the view that autonomy facilitates the formulation and implementation of strategic plans tailored to the specific needs and objectives of each institution. Autonomous institutions have greater flexibility in mobilizing internal and external resources, enabling them to innovate and launch new programs. One of the registrars (P 52) illustrates a series of examples of how TU was able to generate internal and external resources through their strategies while introducing new market-relevant programs as well through examinations.

Autonomy within the University System. Recognizing that autonomy in university centers is insufficient and that authority should be devolved to the actual site of teaching and learning—the campus—an initiative to devolve authority from university centers to campuses has emerged as an exogenous influence (WB) in Nepal's higher education reform. As a result, the trend of devolving authority to campuses through decentralization was started in 1998/1999 by

the TU Decentralization Rules 1998/1999 (TU, 1998). The rules provided some financial and appointment rights to the constituent campuses and research centers.

As part of exogenous influence, the trend of transferring authority from TU Central to its campuses by converting them into autonomous campuses started in 2005 (TU, 2005). The autonomy rules provided additional financial, human resources, and academic rights to the campuses designated as TU autonomous campuses. As a result of TU's practice of granting autonomy to its constituent campuses, other universities have begun to grant autonomy from university central to dean offices, research centers, and campuses. However, it was revealed that the intended handling of authority on campuses did not materialize. The research participants (one management committee chairperson and four campus chiefs of the TU autonomous campus) held the view that university central authorities were unwilling to devolve their authority to the campus. One of the campus chiefs of the TU autonomous campus stated that

In reality, the TU Center did not grant the campus the authority outlined in the 2005 TU autonomy rules. TU has not given earmarked grants to the campuses, which creates hurdles in managing financial resources and restricts the ability to recruit human resources to the campuses. In informal talks, higher university authority told us that autonomy is to show WB how to bring additional financial resources to universities and campuses, and we have to balance the university's reality with the financial needs of the campus (P 29).

Affiliated campuses in Nepal have been enjoying financial, staffing, and institutional autonomy, excluding academic autonomy. They have to obtain affiliation from the university to run academic programs, and they have to follow the curriculum of the university, which conducts the examinations, publishes the results, and confers degrees on the students. With this, affiliated campuses are in dire need of academic autonomy. As a result of exogenous influence, TU initiates the process of giving academic autonomy to selected affiliated campuses that fulfill the criteria set forth. According to the TU autonomy rules, a small number of affiliated campuses have received academic autonomy from TU.

On March 26, 2006, TU amended its existing autonomy rules to shift autonomy even more toward the campuses. Consequently, both constituent and affiliated institutions can exercise significant academic autonomy powers in curriculum development, question paper design, question paper moderation, examination administration, student evaluation, and result publication.

One top-level leader (VC) at TU mentioned:

While granting academic autonomy is beneficial, we must ensure that TU's credibility remains unquestioned at all times. Granting academic autonomy means we agree to transfer TU's authority over designing and developing academic programs, crafting curriculum, and transferring examination-related aspects, but we still have to assume the responsibility of issuing transcripts and certificates in the name of TU to the students. We have to be very critical of the academic credentials of the campus that opted for academic autonomy before granting them academic autonomy (P. 51).

Academic autonomy is needed for HEIs not only at the university level but also at the campus level. Autonomy to develop curriculum and conduct examination and evaluation is crucial. The research participants held the view that academic autonomy allows institutions to design and revise curricula based on local, national, and global needs. This flexibility promotes innovation and responsiveness to changing educational demands. Autonomy in conducting examinations and evaluating student performance ensures accountability and quality assurance. It also helps to foster a sense of responsibility among faculty and administrators for the outcomes of academic programs. In terms of academic autonomy, one research participant associated with CBAC stated,

Before getting academic autonomy, we had been in a vicious cycle in academic matters. The curriculum was drafted and approved by the Dean's Office and approved by the Academic Council; the question papers have been prepared by someone else from the university; the answers of the students have been checked by others; the examination results have been published, taking a long time by the university; and the transcript and certificate have been issued by the university. We had been engaged in teaching students with the traditional, outdated curriculum prescribed by the university and had been happy with good students' results and depressed with poor students' results. Now, we are fortunate to have gotten academic autonomy from TU. We can craft or revise curriculum and

programs ourselves based on the contemporary academic environment within and outside the country, carrying out teaching and learning activities, conducting examinations, and the like (P 12).

Challenges and Obstacles to Academic Autonomy. The research participants realized that the capacity to make responsive use of autonomy is needed. Despite its benefits, achieving academic autonomy poses challenges such as financial constraints and capacity limitations. One research participant, the campus chief of CBAC, held the view that institutions have to invest in designing programs and infrastructure to fully realize the potential of academic autonomy. He further held the following view:

We are not in a position to assume academic autonomy. It is because we do not have the capacity to invest in designing academic programs, crafting curriculum, and assuming sole responsibility for the credibility of academic programs on our campus. Thus, at present, we are not planning to opt for academic autonomy (P 6).

Prior to 2006, HEIs could independently decide on matters that burdened the GoN treasury and later pledge for additional resources as a result of such an earlier decision. To curb the independent decisions that burden additional financial liabilities, GoN amended the respective acts of the universities and restricted the universities' ability to make independent decisions on financial matters. According to the Nepal Laws Amendment Act, 2062, clause 38 Kha, the approval of the GoN should be obtained when making rules on the subject of additional financial affairs or taking actions.

Transferring Autonomy by Establishing the MEC. Completely opposite moves have been made in medical education in Nepal, and the moves succeeded with the establishment of the Medical Education Commission, which eliminated the heart and soul of the universities—the academic autonomy previously enjoyed by universities in Nepal, along with the right to fix student fees that brought "academic shocks" to universities. As a result, universities and campuses have to follow the direction of MEC, and they are unable to function appropriately.

The reason behind establishing MEC was to bring radical reform to medical education in Nepal through a more robust system that would cater to the country's human resources needs. However, there have been mixed perceptions and results so far.

Granting autonomy to universities and university centers on campuses (both constituent and affiliated) and revoking autonomy by establishing MEC and centralizing authority previously enjoyed by universities were two moves that resulted in significant changes in the academic and administrative decision-making process. Further, it brings about changes in the governance and management mechanisms of higher education in Nepal. Both moves were intended to bring "*beneficial changes*" to higher education, but the fruits of such changes "*have yet to materialize or be realized.*"

Government and Institutional Relations. The research participants perceived that GoN has been interfering with university autonomy by various means. First, several participants perceived that the government exerts pressure through resource control. While universities enjoy academic autonomy, they often face challenges in financial autonomy due to government regulations and funding limitations, as indicated by one of the registrars (P 51).

The government officials pressured them to act or refrain from acting on certain measures. Representatives of the GoN in the Senate are pressured to respect autonomy.

Several participants acknowledged that the current appointment practices of university officials on various governing and administrative bodies based on political inclination hampered the autonomy of HEIs.

In contrast to this, a few research participants held the view that everything should not be considered an intervention. A professor highlighted the role of university authorities: according to him, university leadership plays a crucial role in safeguarding institutional autonomy and negotiating with government authorities to secure resources and support (P. 35). When HEIs are

removed from their responsibilities, governments should assume responsibility for the well-being of society as a whole.

Interference in Academic Autonomy by the Professional Council. Professional councils in Nepal have been engaged to maintain the professional standards of the professions that professionals pursue. Some of them had been engaged since the establishment of HEIs in matters of student quota fixation, etc. The engagement of professional councils related to health education and medical education has been delegated to MEC, and the rest of the professional councils are already involved in such matters. There was a perception among HEI leaders that professional councils did not respect the autonomy of the universities; they still presented themselves as rulers and controllers.

Table 21

Autonomy of HEIs in Nepal

Dimension	Universities	Constituent Campuses/Schools	Affiliated Campuses
Academic	Full range	Admit students based on criteria fixed by the university and conduct classes.	Admit students based on criteria fixed by the university and conduct classes.
Financial	Full ranges are subject to constraints imposed by the government on their grant.	Fixed tuition fees	Full range
Staff	Full range	No	Full range
Organizational	Full range	No	Full range

Accountability towards Stakeholders. Autonomy and accountability are the two sides of the same coin. Some of the participants held the view that autonomy without accountability is worthless and accountability without authority is useless. HEIs should be aware while using autonomy, and autonomy should not be abused. Autonomy is an essential element of HET's

management system. In conjunction with this, the prime minister and chancellor of KU, in his address to the 60th Senate Meeting, stated that:

I think it is appropriate to give you the autonomy you are looking for. Institutions need autonomy, but it should not be abused. You know how to make good use of autonomy. It has been seen from your achievements so far. I see no reason for the government to object. Instead, I believe that the country should help this university stick to its duties. This should be the policy of the GoN rather than my personal wish.

Level of Autonomy in HEIs in Nepal. Assessing autonomy through the perceptions of participants on financial, academic, staffing, and institutional aspects of HEIs revealed that HEIs enjoyed a significant level of autonomy. Despite the significant level of autonomy enjoyed by the university, the authority has been centralized at the university center, and there is a lack of delegation, decentralization, or autonomy granted to the authority working at the bottom or grassroots level.

Table 22

Perception toward Different Dimensions of Autonomy by Participants

Dimension of Autonomy	Autonomy		Relationship between autonomy and strategic management	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Financial autonomy	3.30	.926	3.64	.916
Academic autonomy	3.34	.925	3.75	.815
Staffing autonomy	3.29	.987	3.63	.856
Institutional autonomy	3.27	.880	3.67	.859
Overall autonomy	3.37	.68	3.67	.75

Source: Field Survey, 2020–22

Table 20 displays participants' perspectives on various financial, academic, staffing, and institutional dimensions of autonomy. The mean values are 3.30, 3.34, 3.29, 3.27, and 3.37 in the financial, academic, staffing, institutional, and overall categories, with a standard deviation of 0.93, 0.93, 0.99, 0.88, and 0.68, respectively. Similarly, findings revealed a positive relationship between all dimensions of autonomy and strategic management. The table clearly presents the relationship across different categories of autonomy: financial ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.92$), academic

($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.82$), staffing ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.86$), and institutional ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.86$), with an overall mean of 3.67 ($SD = 0.75$). These results suggest that a higher level of autonomy is associated with improved capacity for strategic formulation, execution, M&E, and control.

Autonomy as a Critical Factor for HEIs. Autonomy in universities plays a critical role in their effective management and strategic decision-making, as this analysis has synthesized various perspectives on autonomy being so critical for smooth strategic management. Autonomy only at the university center is not sufficient and should also be given at the campus level as well. A professor mentioned that autonomy is essential for such a strategy at HEIs in Nepal. Autonomy should be enhanced, and institutional autonomy should be granted in all aspects at all levels. At the same time, the research participants have also indicated that transparency and accountability should be ensured by the top management as their overseeing function. One of the university VCs and educationalists mentioned:

Autonomy is an important aspect of self-governance necessary for effective decision-making at a university for its academic work, standards, management, etc. Systems of self-responsibility and public accountability are integral parts of university autonomy. It is meticulously looked at in the case of the funding provided by the state and in ensuring academic freedom and human rights. Institutional autonomy is critical, particularly for ownership, creativity, and venturing into new possibilities and opportunities (P 43).

Granting autonomy to HEIs brought about substantial changes in the academic and administrative decision-making processes as well as governance and management mechanisms. Similarly, the centralization of authority to the Medical Education Commission by withdrawing it from universities substantially altered the governance and management mechanisms of HEIs in Nepal. Autonomy is not an end in itself; rather, it is a means to an end or a broader goal. Hence, autonomy in all aspects is essential for HEIs, as it turned out to be a critical factor for successful strategic management.

Participation and Ownership

Faculty participation is a core component of HEI operations in terms of SMP. True change requires the support of faculty and a commitment to implementing the strategic plan. Typically, strategic planning and management are top-down approaches, where the central administration, guided by the head of the HEI, prepares the mission, strategic goals, and objectives. Given the decentralized and fragmented nature of HEIs, involving a wide range of stakeholders makes the process more comprehensive. Engagement in the strategic plan preparation enhances ownership of the plans and facilitates their effective execution.

Political Management

Politics can be both beneficial and detrimental, as it is necessary for development, and at the same time, it can be problematic as well when it serves the vested interests of certain groups or individuals. The research participants emphasized that politics is a critical element that has to be managed skillfully for effective strategic management. Managing politics is a complex issue, and it cannot be easily resolved. In this context, a university VC noted:

Undeclared politics are a significant factor in strategic planning and implementation. Individuals in university positions often prioritize their political party's interests over the university's best academic interests. When university officials (such as rectors, registrars, and deans) allow their political affiliation to influence their responsibilities, it can lead to a decline in the institution's overall effectiveness. Appointments to university positions should be based on knowledge, skills, competence, and experience, rather than political background and allegiance (P 51).

Comparing Mean of Critical Factors among HEIs

University E and CBACs constantly recorded the highest mean scores across all factors as compared to other HEIs. Table 23 presents the mean and standard deviation on critical factors. Similarly, leadership has the highest mean value, followed by organizational culture. Likewise,

autonomy and the information and communication system had weaker scores as compared to leadership and organizational culture calling for improvement.

To determine whether significant differences exist in these critical factors across HEIs, I checked the ANOVA results, which showed a high F-statistic and a significance level of less than 0.001. It indicates statistically significant differences in critical factors, attributable likely to the unique characteristics of HEIs across different dimensions.

Table 23

Comparing Mean of Critical Factors of HEIs

Factors		A	B	C	D	E	F	CBACs	Total
Leadership	Mean	3.079	2.750	3.333	3.370	3.333	3.167	3.679	3.468
	Std. Deviation	0.753	0.993	0.509	0.655	0.236	0.555	0.818	0.820
Organizational Culture	Mean	3.190	2.611	3.048	3.370	3.667	3.222	3.672	3.479
	Std. Deviation	0.608	0.743	0.488	0.588	0.471	0.519	0.715	0.716
Governance	Mean	2.952	2.833	2.786	3.111	3.500	2.917	3.596	3.350
	Std. Deviation	0.803	0.931	0.756	0.741	0.000	0.733	0.780	0.834
Organizational Structure	Mean	3.101	3.292	3.143	3.361	4.250	3.063	3.590	3.430
	Std. Deviation	0.530	1.042	0.675	0.574	0.000	0.545	0.661	0.672
Information and communication system	Mean	2.889	3.056	2.524	3.111	3.667	3.083	3.643	3.374
	Std. Deviation	0.876	1.182	0.690	0.527	0.471	0.571	0.701	0.816
Autonomy	Mean	2.976	2.875	2.536	3.000	3.625	3.208	3.498	3.300
	Std. Deviation	0.794	0.877	0.713	0.968	0.884	0.698	0.639	0.747

CBACs had the highest mean value in leadership, organizational culture, and governance.

university B had the lowest mean values in leadership and organizational culture, whereas

university C had the lowest mean value in governance.

Likewise, the highest mean value for organizational structure, information and communication systems, and autonomy was found at university E, and the lowest mean value was at university C. Based on mean value, university E was in a better position in terms of critical factors, and university B is on the bottom line. The results indicate that HEIs with lower mean values need to enhance their performance in critical factors. Similarly, HEIs that exceed a

mean value of three should focus on maintaining their strengths while continuing to improve in the future.

Obstacles to Strategic Management in HEIs

Strategic management of HEIs is not without challenges in Nepal, as they are related to planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation as pervasive concerns that impact all facets of strategic management.

Strategic management difficulties stem from various levels: the network, system, university, and campus levels. The participants of this research identified several barriers to effective strategic management, including autonomy, leadership, internal governance and control, organizational structure, culture, and communication. These barriers are intricately linked to the critical factors mentioned earlier. Moreover, these factors were found to exert both supportive and challenging influences on strategy formulation, execution, monitoring, and control.

The research participants, including VCs, registrars, deans, assistant deans, department heads, and campus chiefs, as well as the faculty, deliberated on numerous issues concerning strategy formulation, execution, monitoring and evaluation, and control. They collectively pinpointed a total of 45 problems, with the most frequently mentioned ones revolving around critical factors such as leadership, communication, autonomy, internal governance, culture, and organizational structure. Interestingly, the participants identified "politics" or "political interference" as the primary challenge in higher education. The challenges to effective strategic management can be classified into planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation; control-related aspects; and factors pertinent to all stages of strategic management.

Obstacles Related to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning commences with recognizing the imperative for future-oriented change, facilitated by visionary and systematic thinking. Such visionary thinking is often cultivated by leaders within HEIs. It is of paramount importance for these leaders to grasp the significance of strategic management and planning. However, the research participants have expressed skepticism regarding the extent of awareness of strategic management among Nepali academic managers.

Table 24

Obstacles to Strategic Planning

Lack of clarity of vision, mission, or long-term vision.
Ideological conflicts in planning concepts.
Inability to interpret data.
Lack of knowledge in strategic planning.
Lack of realization of the importance of a strategic plan.
Lack of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and responsibility.
Mismatch between HEIs needs and funding agencies' priorities.
Poor strategic analysis.
Seeing strategic planning as a technical tool missing cultural, social, and political dimensions.
Strategic plan as a ritualistic practice to attract grants from the donors.
Unclear strategy or strategy itself.
The plan is not based on reality.

Source: Field survey, 2020-2022 & interview

Various challenges have been identified in formulating strategies for the Nepali higher education system. These encompass a lack of comprehension regarding the importance of strategic planning, ambiguity surrounding long-term vision and mission, the absence of an Educational Management Information System (EMIS), inadequate strategic analysis, insufficient

dedication to formulating strategies, the crafting of plans primarily benefiting others, a dearth of reality-based planning, and viewing the strategic plan merely as a technical tool devoid of consideration for its cultural, social, and political dimensions. Moreover, there have been instances of inadequate planning and a deficiency in succession planning. Furthermore, most strategic plans have primarily focused on physical infrastructure, with scanty attention given to instructional and quality enhancements. Financial resources assume a pivotal role in strategic management. The participants of the study have emphasized the necessity of considering the availability of financial resources during strategy development and their implementation.

Obstacles Related to Strategic Execution

Executing a strategy encompasses a myriad of intricate and interconnected activities that transcend organizational boundaries. The research participants have pinpointed numerous obstacles and issues hindering the implementation of the strategic plan. These encompass ineffective training, inadequate staffing, lack of motivation, unclear strategies, poor coordination, procurement challenges, and alignment problems.

Furthermore, the participants have also identified additional challenges, such as the absence of proper allocation of responsibilities, reluctance to take responsibility, absence of a reward and punishment system, lack of a culture of consistently following the plan, ownership issues (where the strategy is not embraced by all stakeholders or a lack of ownership of a fixed strategy), poor stakeholder mobilization and participation, and divergent approaches to adhering to the plan. The execution of a strategy necessitates the involvement of numerous individuals, and issues can arise due to poor implementation, insufficient exchange of information, and flawed execution.

Table 25*Obstacles to Strategy Implementation*

Poor communication.
Constraints of human resources.
Administrator's lack of training; ineffective training; lack of experts.
Crafted strategies are not properly implemented.
Delay and cumbersome decision-making process.
Excessive government control by bureaucrats.
Frequent changes in leadership and management.
Improper implementation and budgeting.
Lack of coordination.
Lack of follow-through (following the plan) or lack of constantly following the plan.
Lack of motivation.
Lack of a reward and punishment system.
Lack of a participatory approach.
Gap between planning, implementation, and fund flow.
Lengthy and bureaucratically heavy documentation process.
Procurement-related problems.
Requirements for planning flexibility.
Socioeconomic, cultural, and political problems and barriers.
Unwillingness to take responsibility.

Source: Field survey, 2020-2022 & interview

The other challenges impeding strategy execution include time gap between planning, implementation, and funding, inefficient management of institutional capacity and human resources, inability to manage change, cultural disparities, a gap between decision-makers' perceptions and actual stakeholders' working approaches, inadequate implementation and budgeting, problematic organizational structures, conflict with the organizational power structure, lack of understanding of the organizational structure and coordination methods, unclear

responsibility and accountability in the execution process (Hrebiniak, 2005), bias and prejudice of academicians, socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and political barriers, lack of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and responsibility, dominance of so-called educationists, administrators, and political leaders, and the need for longer time frames to execute the strategy. To address these issues, the participants suggested gaining a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and implementing an avoidance strategy in a collaborative way.

Obstacles Related to Strategic M&E

The final phase of strategic management, encompassing strategy M&E as well as control, faces several challenges in Nepal. These challenges span from inadequate institutional mechanisms for consistent monitoring and evaluation to issues surrounding the delegation of sufficient authority and responsibility. Additionally, there are challenges related to the failure to institutionalize M&E as a management system, a lack of a culture of continuous monitoring and M&E, deficient or irregular monitoring systems, absence of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS), biased evaluation and control practices, inadequate evaluation of plan achievements, improper monitoring procedures, and a failure to utilize monitoring data sequentially by HEIs in Nepal. One campus chief highlighted these challenges, emphasizing "a lack of a culture of continuous monitoring and M&E, poor monitoring, absence of EMIS, biased evaluation, and control (P.3)".

Success factors in strategy execution encompass decision rights, information availability, and organizational structure (Neilson, Martin, and Powers, 2008). Leadership possessing clear change agendas, effective implementation mechanisms, collaborative governance, as well as adequate resources and a shift in mindsets necessary for successful strategy execution, as mentioned by Xavier (2019), can mitigate implementation challenges. Carter and Daniel (2010)

categorized obstacles to strategy implementation into four groups: strategy formulation, change management, organizational power structures, and leadership.

Drawing from interviews and surveys, a multitude of issues concerning strategic management within HEIs in Nepal are noted. These issues are related to awareness regarding strategic management, ambiguity in goal setting, insufficient strategic analysis, formulation, execution, and evaluation of the plan, as well as inadequate control mechanisms.

Table 26

Obstacles to Monitoring & Evaluation

No effective dissemination of the formulated plan.
Ineffective and inefficient management of institutional capacity and human resources.
Lack of EMIS (Education Management Information System).
Lack of monitoring/No M & E.
Lack of performance measurement.
Lack of coordination.
Lack of realization of the importance of a strategic plan.
Lack of sensitization and training for higher educational leaders.
Building organizational culture and structure.
Ownership problem.
Policy-related problems.
Political influences.
Poor willingness to implement the strategy.
Issue of alignment between planning and execution.
Resource constraints.
Financial problem or budget constraint.
The gap in the perceptions and working approaches of decision-makers.
The hegemony of so-called educationists, administrators, and political leaders.

Source: Field survey, 2020-2022 & interview

In response to these issues, several participants have proposed solutions. There is a prevailing sentiment that strategic management practices can be enhanced to improve higher education in Nepal. The majority of participants advocated for reinforcing existing practices, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Additionally, they suggested raising awareness about strategic management and providing training to build capacity for strategic planning and execution.

The research participants further highlighted the necessity of fostering collaborative decision-making by engaging all stakeholders in the strategic management process. They advocated for a participatory approach throughout strategy formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Moreover, the participants emphasized involving the end-users in the development of long-term plans and fostering collaboration and cooperation among the stakeholders.

The findings of the study have also unveiled various barriers to effective strategic management in Nepali HEIs. To respond to these obstacles, the leaders of HEIs should address issues related to systematic power imbalances, adopt systemic thinking, and draw insights from organizational behavior theories.

Strategic Management and Performance of HEIs

Institutional performance is the result of systematic, goal-oriented activities that serve as a means to an end. As discussed earlier, there is no universal agreement on the aspects of institutional performance due to varying interpretations of standardized performance metrics. However, there is a general consensus that it encompasses both academic and non-academic dimensions. Academic performance typically pertains to teaching, learning, research, and

innovation, while non-academic performance relates to factors such as market position and growth, financial health, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional sustainability.

Strategic management has been employed as a tool to adapt to the changing environment. The majority of participants believed that effective strategic management significantly enhances the performance of HEIs. They have perceived a strong positive correlation between strategic management and HEI performance in key areas such as teaching, learning, market position and growth, financial stability, and institutional sustainability. Table 24 highlights the contribution of strategic management to the improvement of institutional performance.

As shown in Table 26, the mean values for teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial position, and institutional sustainability stand at 3.73, 3.75, 3.65, 3.64, and 3.78, respectively, with standard deviations of 0.866, 0.899, 0.938, 0.873, and 0.896. Overall, strategic management is perceived to have positively contributed to the performance of HEIs, with a mean value of 3.75 and a standard deviation of 0.86.

Table 27

Relationship between SMP and Institutional Performance

Dimension of HEIs Performance	Mean	SD
Teaching and learning	3.73	.866
Research and innovation	3.75	.899
Market position and growth	3.65	.938
Financial position	3.64	.873
Institutional sustainability	3.78	.896
Overall institutional performance	3.75	.870

Source: Field Survey, 2020-2022

Similarly, Table 28 presents the correlation matrix for strategic management variables (strategic initiation, strategic planning, strategy execution, and strategic M&E and control) with higher educational institutional performance. All strategic management variables are correlated and show positive correlation among them. Similarly, there exists a positive correlation among

performance variables—i.e., teaching, learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and sustainability. More importantly, there was a positive correlation between strategic management practice variables and institutional performance variables, and it ranged from $r=0.331$ to $r=0.464$.

Table 28 shows the relationship between strategic management variables: strategic management orientation, strategic planning, strategy execution, strategic M&E, and control. There exists a strong relation between strategic management orientation and strategic planning ($r = 0.703$, $P < 0.01$), strategy execution ($r = 0.719$, $P < 0.01$), strategy M&E, and control ($r = 0.624$, $P < 0.01$).

Table 28

Correlations (Pearson) between SMP and HEIs performance

	Strategic initiation	Strategic planning	Strategic execution	Strategic control	SMP	HE performance
Strategic Initiation	1					
Strategic planning	.703**	1				
Strategy execution	.719**	.799**	1			
Strategic control	.624**	.666**	.748**	1		
SMP	.848**	.887**	.921**	.879**	1	
HE performance	.331**	.361**	.458**	.411**	.444**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N= 203

It also shows a relationship between SMP variables and the performance of HEIs. Strategic management orientation ($r = 0.331$, $P < 0.01$), strategic planning ($r = 0.361$, $P < 0.01$), strategic M&E, and control ($r = 0.458$, $P < 0.01$) have a positive relationship with HEI performance. The strongest inter-variable relationships occur within strategic management processes, and strategic management variables and HEI performance have significant relationships; the relationships are generally weaker as compared to the interrelationship, while

strategic management variables indicate that factors beyond strategic management might also influence HEI performance.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning are the integrated functions of teachers, students, and curriculum supported by a positive learning environment. It is directly linked to the students' learning experiences during the program cycle. It was found that the quality of teaching and learning has been impacted by several factors, including the aspects related to strategic planning, execution, monitoring, and control. These aspects have resulted in a positive impact on teaching and learning with the additional funding poured into the HEIs through SHEP and HERP. There is a consensus among the respondents (P 37, P 38, P 39, P 8, P 22, P 34, P 43, P 56) that strategic management has a significant and positive impact on teaching and learning, as it is perceived as an essential element for creating an environment conducive to quality education and professional development of faculty members.

Interrelatedness between Teachings -Learning and Strategic Management. Teaching and learning are seen as interrelated terms in the context of strategic management. Effective teaching methods are crucial for enhancing student learning outcomes and overall institutional performance. Quality teaching and learning contribute to the adaptation of HEIs to changing environments and the production of market-oriented graduates (P 38, P 39, P 40, P 8, P 13, P 20, P 23, P 35).

Efforts to Improve Teaching and Learning. Many institutions are implementing various measures to enhance teaching and learning, such as introducing multimedia tools, providing faculty development programs, and incorporating innovative pedagogical techniques. However, challenges such as high dropout rates, low student attendance, and resistance to

technological adoption are in the way of full realization of these efforts (P 2, P 8, P 12, P 17, P 46, P 51).

Role of Technology in Teaching and Learning. There is a recognition of the role of technology, particularly information and communication technology (ICT), in improving teaching and learning outcomes. Efforts to integrate ICT into educational practices, such as multimedia learning and digital pedagogy, are being made to make teaching more effective and accessible (P 8, P 22, P 56, P 38, P 52).

Need for Comprehensive Professional Development. While efforts to enhance teaching and learning are underway, there is a consensus that comprehensive professional development plans for faculty members are almost absent. Institutions acknowledge the importance of empowering faculty with new pedagogical techniques and innovative teaching methods to improve the quality of education (P 11, P 20).

Some of the factors that negated the quality of teaching and learning included outdated curricula, lack of resources, and inadequate training for faculty members. By addressing these issues through strategic planning and its due execution, HEIs are able to improve the overall quality of education. However, it is important for ongoing monitoring and control mechanisms to ensure that these improvements are sustained over time. The majority of the participants—eight VCs, seven registrars, nine deans, twenty campus chiefs of CBACs, two planning chiefs, eight chiefs (TU constituent campus/central departments), and four academia-managers—held the view that proper strategy management enhances effective teaching and learning. Some of them mentioned that the quality of teaching and learning has direct links with strategic management practices. They further specified that the quality or standard of curricula, the quality of teachers and students, the pedagogy implemented, the assessment and evaluation system, the student

enrollment system, the physical, educational, and technological infrastructure, accreditation practices, student support services, the availability and quality of libraries, journals, books, and laboratories, and administrative policies and procedures, and the teaching and learning environment are found to be linked to strategic management practices.

One of the participating campus chiefs stated:

Strategic management has improved teaching and learning. In 2009, we provided laptops and high-speed internet to faculty members. Since then, we have introduced multimedia-based teaching and learning. Now teachers are familiar with and supported by modern technology, the benefits have been extended to the students (P 22).

Participants emphasized the need to enhance the quality of higher education. A key concern was the difference in quality between technical and general education. Addressing this issue, TU's VC stated that they introduced the semester-based system with the belief that it would foster closer interaction between teachers and students. As a result, according to him, the teaching-learning process has improved considerably.

The VC of TU also mentioned that most HEIs in Nepal have adopted the semester system, believing it would enhance the quality of education. However, both the semester and annual systems have their respective merits and drawbacks. In this context, one research participant (P 36) noted that teaching and learning remain largely curriculum-bound, with little learning extending beyond the confines of the curriculum. Regarding the quality of the curriculum, one assistant dean of KU mentioned,

We enroll average students but produce graduates with high-quality knowledge, skills, and learning experiences. We are number one and stand apart from others. Our curriculum is more dynamic than that of fully government-funded institutions. We regularly revise our curriculum to address the knowledge and skill gaps of our students based on the industry needs. We've incorporated unique features such as project work, internships, and fieldwork, which allow our students to develop teamwork skills, understand the procurement management process, conduct research, prepare reports, and improve their presentation opportunities (P. 31).

A strategic approach to teaching and learning is essential for the courses designed and offered, as the pedagogy, curriculum, and delivery activities, along with evaluation procedures, should align with the strategies outlined in the management plan. The teaching and learning environment is a critical factor in enhancing learning quality, as noted by a dean of TU. They emphasized that strategic management can effectively and efficiently create and maintain an environment within HEIs to promote, support, and sustain effective teaching and learning.

In this connection, one of the registrars of the universities stated:

Teaching and learning are interrelated concepts in the strategic management and performance of HEIs. The most effective way to assess good teaching is by measuring the amount of knowledge students have gained throughout the process. High-quality teaching and learning in the early years of education positively impact the performance of universities and colleges as they adapt to new environments. The influence of quality teaching and learning on students' lives in later academic phases cannot be overstated. Students are the most important resource at a university and should be provided with relevant instruction to develop the necessary skills (P 39)."

The Pass Rate of HEIs. A key indicator of HEIs' performance is efficiency, often measured by pass percentage. It was found that the pass percentage in higher education was generally lower compared to quota-based technical higher education systems. Additionally, the pass rates for the semester-based system are significantly better than those for the annual system. Similarly, the pass percentages in technical programs were higher than in general programs.

However, data on pass percentages were rarely available often, and there was no systematic reporting process. Based on available data, the annual pass rate appeared to be below fifty percent in many institutions. The average pass percentage at KU was above eighty percent, while PU had a pass rate of 69 percent (UGC, 2022), and PokU's was around 70 percent. AFU's average pass rate exceeded 60 percent, and MWU's was approximately 65 percent. The average pass percentage of TU's central departments was above ninety percent, while the pass rates at TU's constituent campuses were generally low in general faculties but higher in technical

institutes. For instance, the pass percentage at the Ayurveda Campus exceeded ninety percent, while Mahendra Ratna Campus reported pass rates between twenty and thirty percent.

The average pass percentage at the CBACs was between twenty and thirty percent (Appendix R). Based on the data, no clear upward trend in pass rates could be identified. Despite efforts to improve teaching and learning quality, HEIs were unable to significantly raise pass percentages. Possible reasons for these poor outcomes could range from inadequate student preparedness for higher education to poor-quality inputs in the curriculum, insufficient investment, ineffective teaching and learning processes, low faculty quality, and weaknesses in faculty evaluation systems.

Graduates Produced by HEIs. Graduates are the primary product of HEIs, expected to possess knowledge, skills, and attitudes at satisfactory levels. As Coman and Bonclu (2016) noted, students enter as raw materials and progress toward becoming finished products during the learning process. Awards and publications are also considered significant outputs of HEIs. However, not all research participants agreed that HEIs were consistently producing graduates with relevant knowledge and skills. Some of the key competencies expected of graduates include deep disciplinary knowledge and intellectual breadth, creative and critical thinking, teamwork and communication skills, professionalism and leadership readiness, intercultural and ethical competency, cultural awareness, digital capabilities, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

The annual graduate production capacity of HEIs in Nepal was found to be between 80,000 and 85,000 (UGC, 2017–2020). Among the affiliated CBACs studied, annual graduate production ranged from 28 to 695 (Appendix S). When compared to annual intake figures, roughly 20% fewer students graduated, highlighting a significant issue in graduate production, a challenge also observed in other HEIs. This suggests a substantial gap, which should be

addressed by adopting appropriate strategies to minimize educational waste. Additionally, research participants raised concerns that many graduates struggled to find suitable employment post-graduation, presenting a major challenge for HEIs. Thus, it is critical to continually update and revise programs through curriculum updates, innovative pedagogy, and improved evaluation and assessment systems.

In essence, strategic management plays a vital role in shaping the teaching and learning environment of HEIs. Institutions that prioritize strategic planning and allocate resources toward enhancing teaching quality, faculty development, and technological integration are more likely to achieve positive outcomes in terms of student performance and institutional effectiveness.

Research and Innovation

It is a well-documented fact that HEIs that are actively involved in research can create new knowledge. Engagement in research will lead to innovation, which later leads to invention and, finally, discovery. Students and faculty are major actors in knowledge generation and dissemination through academic activities at HEIs. However, student research is curriculum-driven; the student aims to complete the degree requirement as soon as possible, and it is considered as training for research. In contrast to student research, faculty research is highly acknowledged for generating new knowledge, disseminating it, and contributing to science. The research function of the majority of HEIs is mostly skewed by the thrust provided by HEIs in terms of teaching and research, type of research, and environment for research, or research ecosystem. The environment for research has four interrelated and interdependent elements: scientific culture that fosters the development of new ideas and thinking; the quality of human resources conducting research to produce new knowledge and disseminate the knowledge; the research budget and knowledge; synthesis and dissemination through peer-reviewed articles and

patents; and the principles that society can use as per their needs, as narrated by Altbach and Salmi (2011). The focus of HEIs makes a difference in research and innovation. The HEIs, with a focus on research and innovation, create an environment for students as well as for faculty research.

Management of Research and Innovation. Research management is a specialized area of management that needs to address several enabling management approaches. A research participant stated that institutions are acknowledging the importance of specialized management for research and innovation, which contributes to societal and economic advancement (P 39).

Quality Research and Engagement. Research management is a specialized area of management that needs to address several enabling management approaches. A research participant stated that institutions are acknowledging the importance of specialized management for research and innovation, which contributes to societal and economic advancement (P 39). Quality research and engagement are critical for a knowledge society. There's a focus on fostering quality research activities involving postgraduate students and faculty, contributing to scientific advancement (P 40).

Role of Universities in Research. Several respondents highlighted the role of universities in knowledge generation and dissemination. One of the registrars mentioned that universities are aiming to play a key role in creating research facilities and conducting applied and academic research programs to address emerging challenges, particularly in sectors like agriculture (p 40).

Integration with Curriculum. Some of the participants put forth their view that research should be interlinked with curriculum. Institutions are integrating research activities into the curriculum, conducting seminars on research methodology, and publishing research journals (P 16).

Alignment with Strategic Goals. As HEIs goals and thrust vary according to their priority,. The participants urged that research and innovation efforts should be aligned with the overall goals and objectives of the institutions, contributing to their stability and growth (P 18).

Need for Academic Freedom. Some of the participants indicated the need for academic freedom for researchers to promote research culture in HEIs in Nepal. According to participant (P 30), trust in the system and academic freedom for researchers are highlighted as essential factors for promoting research and innovation.

One of the participants stated that strategic management encourages and creates an environment for research and innovation, which are beneficial for the organization. The twin functions of the university—quality teaching and innovative research—are not conducted accordingly.

Faculty Involvement in Research. Various campuses and faculties are actively involved in research work, publication of research articles, and engagement in MPhil and Ph.D. research projects (P 2, P 4, P 16).

A handful of researchers at TU, KU, AFU, and PokU were found to be actively engaged in research, and they were able to secure external funds as well. It is noteworthy to mention here that AFU faculty and students have been carrying out research on 13 externally funded and 40 internally funded research projects.

Emphasis on Research and Innovation. There's a recognition that strategic plans focusing on research and innovation lead to improved performance in various sectors, including teaching and education (P 37). In the same vein, the VC of a university mentioned that institutional performance regarding research and innovation will be impacted based on the focus,

scope, and magnitude of the thrust provided by strategic management (P 43). The HEI should make strategic investments in research and innovation.

In Nepal's HEIs, very little research has been carried out, and there is a clear gap in research and innovation. Academic leaders are increasingly convinced that HEI cannot progress without a focus on research, and there is a growing culture of allocating research budgets on an annual basis. HEIs are initiating the publication of research journals, which create a venue for research dissemination to the academic community.

One of the VCs stated,

The university aims to play a pivotal role in establishing facilities for applied and academic research at both the national and regional levels. We acknowledge that conducting research is crucial for addressing both immediate and long-term challenges in enhancing agricultural productivity. We understand that these challenges can only be effectively tackled with a strong emphasis on research, extending from laboratory studies to field-based and application-oriented research (p. 38).

Investment in Research and Development. Research and innovation are core functions of HEIs. Expenditure on research and development in higher education is considered an investment in knowledge, crucial for innovation-driven economies. In this connection, one of the deans noted:

Research and innovation are integral to higher education. High-quality engineering education and contemporary R&D are crucial for fostering a knowledge-based and innovation-driven economy. Investment in research and development (R&D) within higher education is essentially an investment in knowledge. Institutions generate new knowledge through research, facilitate the transfer, adoption, and dissemination of knowledge from around the world, and provide advisory and consultancy services to government and business (p. 31).

Importance of Strategic Management for Research and Innovation. Most of the participants' view was that strategic management enhances research and development. Strategic management is considered crucial for creating a positive environment for research and

innovation, thereby increasing institutional performance, as narrated by a dean of KU and a professor of TU (P 34, P 35). A VC further added:

Without a sufficient number of higher education and research institutions to create a critical mass of skilled and educated individuals, no country can achieve genuine and sustainable development. Specifically, a country like ours cannot bridge the gap between itself and more industrially developed nations (p. 56).

Research findings need to be communicated to the wider scientific community through publication in highly ranked journals and by sharing them at conferences, seminars, and workshops. Recent data indicates that Nepal is ranked 91st globally with a 159 H-index in scientific publications, accounting for only 0.08% of worldwide publications, highlighting a relatively low performance in the global knowledge repository. According to the most recent Scimagoir data, TU is ranked 58th overall, with research at the 68th percentile, innovation at the 65th percentile, and societal performance at the 41st percentile. In comparison, KU is ranked 74th, with research and innovation also at the 68th and 65th percentiles, respectively, but with societal performance at the 75th percentile (<https://www.scimagoir.com/>, accessed on March 8, 2021).

Publication of Peer-reviewed Journals. Nepali HEIs are engaging in publishing scientific peer-reviewed journals to provide a platform for researchers to disseminate their work. One notable service, Nepal Journals Online (NepJOL), managed by TU, allows Nepali journals to be published online. As of July 31, 2021, the Central Library listed a total of 231 peer-reviewed journals on NepJOL (<https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/index>, accessed on August 3, 2021). However, only four Nepali journals are included in international indices, with one ranked in the third quartile and the other three in the fourth quartile. This reflects a relatively poor performance in terms of knowledge dissemination within the global scientific community.

The majority of the HEIs studied have been published in peer-reviewed journals. For instance, KU publishes six peer-reviewed journals, one magazine, and the "KU Insider," with one journal ranked in the third quartile. Similarly, PU, PokU, MWU, and AFU publish one, two, one, and one peer-reviewed journals, respectively (Appendix T). In addition, TU's constituent campuses and central departments are also actively publishing peer-reviewed journals. Among Community-CBACs, fourteen publish peer-reviewed journals, two publish general journals, and two do not publish any journals (Appendix S).

However, some of these HEIs struggle with consistency in their publication schedules, while others fail to publish regularly. An expert in the field emphasized that improving journal quality is both urgent and crucial to making Nepali journals competitive on a global scale.

Market Position and Growth

Higher education operates as a marketplace where various providers offer educational services to their customers—students, parents, and employers. HEIs cater to their target audiences by leveraging their unique market niches through diverse program offerings. According to research participants, strategic management helps HEIs secure a competitive market position and foster growth by enhancing infrastructure, expanding program portfolios, optimizing program delivery methods (through constituent and affiliated campuses), building faculty reputation, improving libraries and labs, and cultivating a strong institutional culture.

Expansion and Growth of HEIs through Affiliation by Universities. The right to grant affiliations is outlined in the Universities Act for universities in Nepal (TU Act, 1993, clause No. 26; KU Act, 1991, clause 5(b); AFU Act, clause No. 19; PokU Act, clause No. 20; PU Act, clause No. 16; and MWU Act, clause No. 19). Strategic plans from various universities (TU: 2000, 2014, 2018; PokU: 2003, 2008, 2018) specifically address strategic actions related to

affiliations. TU's strategic plan states that it will suspend affiliations except in the technical field. Conversely, PU, MWU, and AFU do not outline affiliation-related aspects in their strategic plans.

Despite this, affiliation remains a significant point of strategic debate and action in the higher education sector. It continues to be a contentious issue in university affairs, tied to government policies, the role of the UGC, university autonomy, and internal conflicts among various university organs and authorities. Decisions regarding extended constituent programs (KU), joint constituent campuses (PokU), and program additions are often made by the Council of Ministers rather than by the university's legal decision-making body.

The University Act envisions the establishment of affiliated campuses, and for its full implementation, having such campuses is essential. Regarding affiliation, the founding vice chancellor of AFU stated:

The University Act envisions the establishment of affiliated campuses to align with its spirit and provisions. To expand enrollment alongside the university's constituent campuses and foster internal competition, we invited applications from the private sector to operate affiliated colleges. Our goal was to select a few well-established colleges—academically, financially, and physically—that would enhance the university's academic and financial base. However, the direction of affiliation has since shifted (Kailashnath Pyakurel, personal communication).

In this context, a former registrar of AFU noted that government policy currently prohibits private affiliations, suggesting that the act should be amended to reflect this. The MOEST should cease issuing letters of intent. Despite the act allowing private colleges to be granted affiliations, the MOEST continues to distribute these letters to private entities, while the university has chosen to discontinue affiliations. If the government were to fulfill its responsibilities, expanding the constituent campuses and increasing the capacity of the central campus would be necessary. It has been suggested that expansion through the establishment of additional constituent campuses and allowing affiliated campuses to offer academic programs would be beneficial.

Affiliation as an Expansion and Resource Mobilization Strategy. The CBACs have primarily been established with affiliations from TU, with a few exceptions (PU-3, PokU-1), all within the for-profit private sector. TU's strategy of creating affiliated campuses aimed to expand academic activities without requiring substantial investments in areas where resources—particularly financial, physical, and academic—were lacking.

TU's strategic plan (2000) initially proposed transferring or handing over its constituent and affiliated campuses as part of a restructuring plan. However, this proposal has remained unimplemented, with TU neither agreeing to transfer its constituent campuses nor ceasing to grant affiliations. The TU plan (2018) outlines two conflicting affiliation strategies: suspending affiliations except in technical areas and integrating affiliated campuses through a merger plan. The disparity between these strategies highlights TU's challenge in addressing its past responsibilities without a reliable, feasible, and widely accepted strategic alternative that can produce positive outcomes in the current environment.

Evidence shows that affiliation-related activities generate significant revenue for universities. According to Subedi and Upreti (2014), political pressure and income from affiliation fees are key reasons for approving affiliated campuses. The finance chief at PokU notes that revenue from affiliations and students at affiliated campuses forms a substantial portion of the university's income, and any disruption to this income stream would exacerbate the university's financial difficulties.

Moreover, pressure from the private sector in Nepal, driven by economic and political motives, has led to controversy over granting affiliations. In response to political pressure and the need for alternative strategies, universities have adopted extension programs as a discrete approach. KU's extension program related to medical colleges and PokU's extension program

with other institutions can be seen as "disguised strategies," akin to Mintzberg's (2007) concept of emergent strategies.

Program Portfolio of Universities. Nepali universities offer academic programs ranging from the bachelor's level to the post-doctoral level through their constituent schools, campuses, and affiliated campuses, with a few exceptions. Three Nepali universities (TU, KU, and NSU) continue to run PCL programs despite the government policy to phase them out and separate this responsibility from the universities. The breadth and depth of program offerings are crucial for implementing each university's strategy.

Universities deliver their academic programs through constituent and affiliated campuses, allowing students to choose programs based on admission criteria. Factors influencing student choice include the reputation of the institution, the nature and relevance of the academic programs, fees, physical accessibility, faculty quality, and infrastructure (buildings, libraries, labs, etc.). Among these factors, the breadth and depth of the program portfolio are key to determining the university's market position and growth.

According to the latest data (Appendices U, V, and W), TU offers the largest program portfolio, with a total of 317 programs. These include forty-five in engineering, sixty-seven in medicine, thirty-seven in science and technology, twenty in agriculture and animal sciences, eleven in forestry, seventy in humanities and social sciences, thirty-six in education, five in law, and twenty-six in management.

KU has the second-largest portfolio, with 212 programs, including four in law, twenty-nine in engineering, twelve in management, forty-three in science, seventy-five in medical sciences, nineteen in the arts, and thirty in education. Of its total, twelve programs are offered through affiliated campuses.

PU offers seventy-one programs across various fields, including education, science and technology, management, humanities and social sciences, health science, law, agriculture, and forestry. PokU provides sixty-four programs, including eight in humanities and social sciences, twenty-five in science and technology, fourteen in management, and seventeen in health sciences.

AFU, a specialized university, offers eleven programs in agriculture, animal sciences, veterinary medicine, fisheries, and forestry, with a few in humanities and social sciences. Programs include five in agriculture, four in animal sciences (including veterinary science and fisheries), and two in forestry. Ph.D., M.Phil. and Master's programs are offered through constituent campuses, while bachelor's programs are available through affiliated campuses. Some programs are exclusive to constituent campuses, but most are offered through both.

MWU provides three programs in science and technology, five in engineering, one each in law and agriculture, eight in management, thirteen in education, and nineteen in humanities and social sciences.

TU, KU, AFU, and MWU primarily offer their programs through constituent campuses, with some available through both constituent and affiliated campuses and others only through affiliated campuses. In contrast, PU and PokU predominantly offer programs through affiliated campuses. The decision to offer programs through either type of campus is a strategic choice impacting the university's image, positioning, and growth. This strategy involves expanding academic offerings, revising curricula, and augmenting programs, as detailed in Appendices G and H for TU's constituent campuses and CBACs, respectively.

Two registrars and a planning chief highlighted the critical role of strategic management in determining university growth and status (P. 37, P. 39, P. 40). Another registrar noted that strategic planning involved evaluating the institution's current position and making decisions for

future development (P. 39). One VC emphasized that while growth is important, there must be strategic limitations to maintain quality and manage expansion challenges (P. 42).

Universities recognize their role in community development, particularly in sectors like agriculture and forestry (P. 40). Strategic management contributes to building brand image, producing marketable programs, and enhancing credibility (Interview, President of Public Campus Association). There is an understanding of the need for quality education that meets global market demands (P. 13).

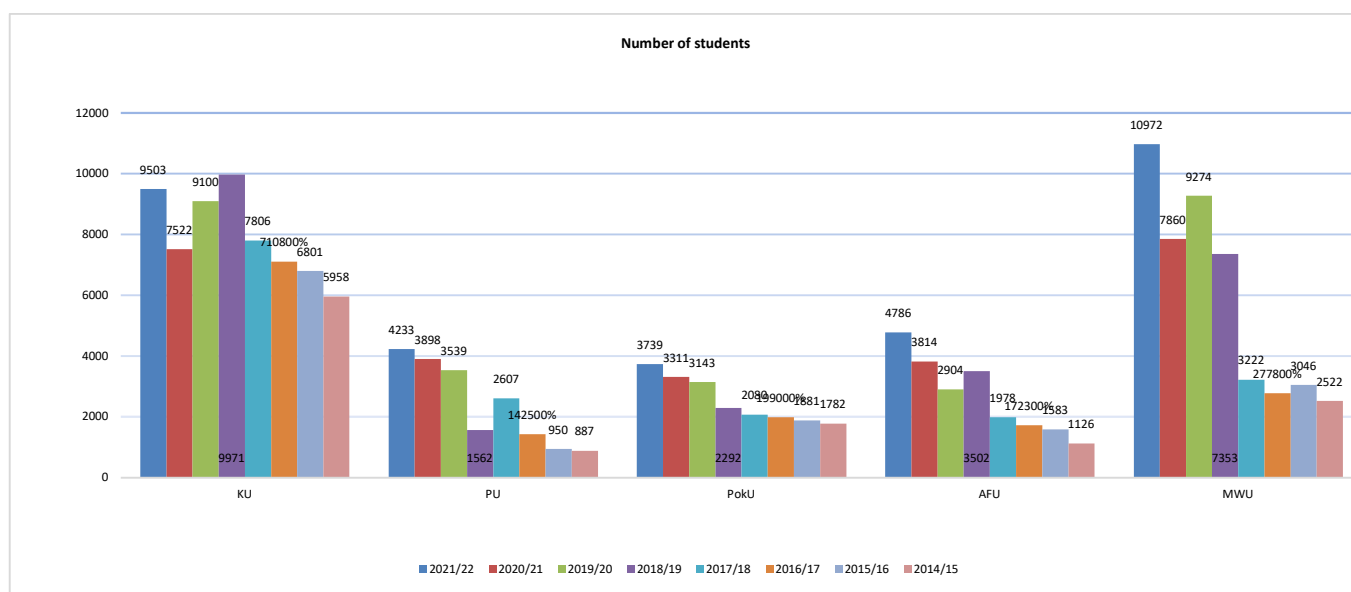
Some participants noted that higher education is increasingly aligning with market needs to enhance graduates' employability (P. 23, P. 56). A campus chief indicated that strategic management results in increased campus capacity, improved faculty capabilities, and better relationships with associations (P. 20). A TU professor suggested that incorporating strategic management principles into curricula could enhance competitiveness, performance, and structural development, leading to sustainability and growth (P. 35).

Enrollment Expansion. In general, student enrollment has been based on a prefixed quota in the technical field, followed by a competitive entrance examination. There have been mixed practices among HEIs in Nepal in student enrollment. It was found that the enrollment expansion strategy is linked to the individual department, campus, and school in line with the university's overall strategy. In the case of such a strategy, universities in Nepal have been using student enrollment practices through either constituent campuses or affiliated campuses. KU, PokU, MWU, AFU, and PU have been expanding their enrollment on both constituent and affiliated campuses over the years, which is a clear indication of using management strategy.

Figure 18 showed that the number of students had grown over the years despite a slight decrease in the number of students at KU in 2019/20 and 2020/21, PU in 2018/19, AFU in 2019/20, and MBU in 2016/17 and 2010/21 in their constituent campuses.

Figure 17

Trends in Enrollment 2014/15-2021/22 in universities



Source: Universities, 2014/015-2021/22; UGC, 2023a

Enrollment growth on the constituent campuses of KU, PU, and PokU was 59 percent, 377 percent, and 110 percent over an eight-year period, respectively, but the number of students appeared insignificant for the size of the university in the case of PU and PokU. AFU was able to increase students by nearly 325 percent in its constituent campuses over the eight years, whereas MWU was able to increase students by 335 percent, owing to the fact that MWU acquired TU's ten affiliated campuses in the form of MWU's constituent campuses.

TU's central departments under the Institute of Science and Technology (IOST) and constituent campuses have been admitting students based on pre-fixed quotas. They have been admitting students, and their performance on student increment is limited by quota. Out of six TU

constituent campuses, four were able to increase the number of students, while others faced a decrease in enrollment.

Similarly, CBACs have been trying to expand their enrollment; however, they were not able to do so due to the non-attractiveness of the programs they offered, difficulty in getting approval for additional programs from the university, and tough competition among the campuses (Appendix X). Many campuses reported increases in student numbers and program offerings, reflecting strategic management efforts (P 6, P 8, P 11). Only four of the selected 20 campuses have increased student enrollment over the last five years.

In recent years, it has been observed that the trend of thousands of Nepali students going abroad for higher studies has resulted in a decrease in the number of students in the HEIs in Nepal. The increase in competition among higher education providers contributed to the number of students, and the low number of students passing the class twelve examination was also observed by some research participants to be the cause of the decrease of student enrollment in the HEIs.

Program Expansion and Growth. Universities were found to be expanding their academic programs through the introduction of new programs at the bachelor's and master's levels via constituent campuses and affiliated campuses. Most of the CBACs' strategy was to expand market-based academic programs, but their realization was largely unfulfilled due to the university's affiliation and program addition policies. The majority of campuses were able to expand new programs at the bachelor level (vertical expansion) and master level (horizontal expansion) as part of their strategy of expanding new academic programs (Appendix U, Appendix V, and Appendix W). Except for one campus at the bachelor's level and three campuses at the master's level, all of the sample community-based HEIs were expanding their

academic programs. Appendixes R, S, and T highlight the growth of constituent and affiliated programs at universities and campuses. The data indicated that HEIs expanded or added programs in medicine, engineering, education, management, humanities and social sciences, law, agriculture, and forestry. Evidence indicated that all affiliated campuses have been able to add new programs in the past five years, but they have mostly added professional, market-driven, and technical education programs.

Retrenchment. Time and context have been changing day by day. In higher education, the learners, the content, and the pedagogy are also not the same as in the past and should be changed in the future to be adaptive to the environment (Khaniya, 2007, pp. 102–103). To be competitive and secure a satisfactory market position and growth in the country, HEIs must be able to retrench, delete, or abolish their non-attractive academic programs, subjects, and contents and move towards relevant academic programs, subjects, and contents. Traditionally, student enrollment was highest in what people called "general" disciplines: the humanities and social sciences, education, and management. As the attraction for these disciplines is decreasing, new contemporary programs and disciplines have emerged in the higher education market within the country and globally. As a result, it was found that retrenchment, deletion, or closure of academic programs, subjects, or content has been considered a university or HEI strategy. It is more often observed at affiliated CBACs, as most of them are in a position to close down their academic programs and subjects due to the students' choice for other subjects and programs.

The registrar of TU mentioned that TU has stopped taking admissions in campuses where there are fewer than ten students in a program, and as a result, some campuses have stopped their programs. It is relevant to mention that one of the goals of KU was to analyze the programs that should be deleted or added to meet national needs (KU, 2000). But retrenchment-related

strategies have implications for management related to human resources, and HEIs failure to address the issue has been problematic for their survival.

World University Ranking. Nepali HEIs aim to be included in global university rankings. There are various types of university ranking systems, and HEIs in Nepal refer to a select few. The Senate-approved Ten-Year Action Plan for KU stated that, as of now, KU ranks within the top 4,300 in the World University Rankings, within 1,200 in Asia, and within the top 100 in South Asia. By 2022, it aimed to reach within the top 500 in the World University Rankings and within the top 200 in Asia as a teaching- and research-focused residential university (KU, 2012).

Similarly, KU School of Management aims to attain a remarkable position in the ranking by 2019; it will be a world-class faculty with a global rank within the top 500 universities in the world and in Asia within the rank of 100 (KUSOM, 2007).

TU also intends to improve its global ranking, as its VC stated that "this year we were able to secure a world ranking position, and future ranking results will be better than this," referring to the World University Ranking (Interview with the VC).

In the world university ranking, KU ranked first, TU ranked second, followed by PokU, PU, AFU, and MWU in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth positions within the country, and their positions in the world university ranking were 6160, 6676, 8053, 10797, 10816, and 11704 in the year 2020 (<https://www.4icu.org/>) as presented in appendix W.

As per Webometrics, KU ranked first in terms of impact factor and openness, followed by TU, PokU, AFU, PU, and MWU, respectively (Appendix Y). However, in terms of the excellence of its scholars, TU was rated nearly two times higher.

Market Positioning. Forty research participants stated that strategic management positively impacted the market position and growth of HEIs. Some of the campuses highlighted their market position achievements, such as being the top-ranked in their district or among the top colleges in Nepal (P 2, P 4). One of the campus chiefs mentioned that they are among the top five colleges in Nepal, and the basis for securing the position was their vision, strategy, and implementation of the program accordingly. According to them, quality assurance processes, such as obtaining QAA certification, were highlighted as pivotal turning points for the campuses, leading to improvements in various areas (P 12 and P 16).

In this connection, one campus chief (P8) mentioned:

We have received QAA from UGC, been awarded as the best community campus two times, and our position is at the top among community campuses; the number of students is increasing; all these are the results of our strategic management practice.”

These findings underscore the role of strategic management in shaping the market position and growth of educational institutions, highlighting the need for proactive planning, community engagement, quality assurance, and alignment with market demands.

The Financial Performance of HEIs

Nepali universities rely on various funding sources, including student fees, government grants, foreign aid, affiliation fees, examination fees, interest income, and internal sources. KU stands out for its success in mobilizing both internal and external resources. Available data shows that KU generates approximately 70% of its income from student fees, 10% from affiliation fees, and 8-20% from R&D income, with the remaining income coming from other fees over the past five years. Compared to other universities, KU has demonstrated a remarkable ability to attract diverse funding sources, positioning it as a leading institution in the Nepali higher education landscape. In contrast, PU and PokU are heavily reliant on student fees collected through affiliated campuses, while MWU and AFU depend significantly on government grants.

The Financial Performance of TU Organs. The central departments and constituent campuses of TU, which function as both cost and revenue centers, receive government funding through the TU central office, approved by the TU Senate. Their income sources include student fees, government grants channeled through the TU Center, additional funds allocated by the TU Center, grants from GoN/UGC, research grants, and other external grants from various agencies, as well as internal income.

TU's autonomous campuses receive government grants earmarked by the UGC based on approved staff positions, regardless of whether these positions are vacant or filled, in line with SHEP/HERP and TU autonomy rules. The TU central office provides financial protection to its organs from long-term human resource financial obligations.

Financially, the central departments and constituent campuses of TU are in a favorable position. However, they face internal governance challenges in managing these financial resources to enhance academic performance.

The Financial Performance of a Sample CBACs. CBACs rely heavily on student fees and also receive various grants as aid from the UGC as well as provincial and local governments. However, these grants have proven insufficient to fully meet their financial needs. Compared to universities, the financial position of most CBACs is relatively weak, with only a few in better financial standing.

Several financial indicators, such as net worth, debt-to-worth ratio, and cash/bank balance, were used to assess the financial health of CBACs (Appendix Z). Net worth ranged from Rs. 490 million to Rs. 13 million, and debt levels varied from Rs. 2 million to Rs. 450 million. The debt-to-worth ratio ranged from 1% to 71%, and cash/bank balances ranged from Rs. 1.9 million to Rs. 265 million. These figures indicate that most affiliated campuses struggle

financially, although a few are performing well and are expected to maintain their performance if current trends continue.

In light of declining government grants, HEIs should diversify their revenue sources by expanding non-traditional academic offerings, developing innovative fundraising programs, and reevaluating the delivery of academic, student, and auxiliary services. Additionally, HEIs need to recover resources tied up in inefficient or outdated programs and redirect them towards new strategic objectives. A strong financial position is crucial for sustaining an organization, as it supports better infrastructure, attracts and retains high-quality staff, provides scholarships and fellowships to bright students, and enables funding for research, enhanced ICT infrastructure, and improved labs and libraries for teaching and research.

Stakeholders Satisfaction

A study by the Center for Policy Studies and Rural Development (2018) revealed that HEIs with strategic planning and execution practices had a 67.9 percent satisfaction rate, while faculty satisfaction was found to be 82.4 percent. Regarding employer satisfaction, employers expressed greater satisfaction with male employees in areas such as commitment to assigned work, determination in achieving goals, moral and ethical character, and staff discipline. Male employees were also rated higher than female employees in leadership skills, advanced computer knowledge, initiative, IT skills, motivation to learn, adaptability to adverse circumstances, creative thinking, and research inclination. The study also highlighted gaps in the competency levels among graduates (Center for Policy Studies and Rural Development, 2018).

Another study by the Center for Policy Studies and Rural Development (2018), evaluating the HERP (2014–2020), found that faculty, student, and stakeholder ratings of campus

performance improved significantly. This improvement was largely attributed to the emphasis on QAA and reform grants, achieved through strategic planning and its implementation.

One council participant noted:

The quality of graduates from HEIs is often measured by their absorption into the labor market. There is a noticeable gap between the skills and knowledge demanded by employers and what recent graduates possess. From the council's perspective, some colleges only meet the minimum criteria set by norms and standards, while others exceed them. Graduates from institutions that surpassed the council's requirements tend to be more capable than those from institutions that merely met the minimum standards. Adhering to the council's norms and standards would have better prepared graduates for the job market" (interview, Council Senior Official).

The research participants have asserted that the labor market serves as a crucial matrix for evaluating the quality of graduates from HEIs, indicating a perceived misalignment between the knowledge and skills possessed by recent graduates and the requirements of the job market. One senior officer of a council suggested that colleges meeting or exceeding the council's established norms and standards produced more capable graduates, indicating that adherence to these criteria enhanced graduates' preparedness for the job market.

Sustainability of HEI

Sustainability has become an increasingly important issue for HEIs. HEIs, through their structures and processes, have to maintain the ability to function effectively over the long term. This concept aligns with the focus on the triple bottom line: traditional financial health (e.g., surplus), social responsibility, and environmental responsibility, as outlined by Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford (2016).

In interviews with 40 participants, including vice chancellors, registrars, deans, and campus chiefs, the consensus was that effective strategic management plays a key role in promoting institutional sustainability. The participants identified sustainability in terms of financial stability, institutional longevity, and social, political, and environmental sustainability.

Financial Sustainability. All universities in Nepal are primarily funded by public funds, which are supplemented by student fees and various other sources of revenue. HEIs in Nepal are classified based on their level of public funding: substantially funded, partially funded, minimally funded, or not funded at all through the public exchequer. For-profit HEIs generally do not receive grants from the UGC, with only a few exceptions.

The GoN funds higher education through the UGC in the form of recurrent grants, capital grants, and project-specific special grants. All universities receive development or capital funds based on their specific developmental needs, negotiated with the government depending on the availability of resources. Additionally, all types of HEIs receive support from the UGC to organize seminars, workshops, conferences, and training for faculty and staff. However, the scale of such support is relatively low compared to the size and needs of Nepal's higher education system.

An IQAC coordinator from a constituent campus highlighted that to implement the strategic plan and achieve institutional goals, sustainability in terms of funding, physical and human resources, student enrollment, and political support is essential. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate strategies that address these key components. The sustainability of institutions ultimately impacts the overall performance of HEIs. (P. 28)

Universities in Nepal have diversified sources of income, with the majority being financially sustainable. The GoN provides substantial grants, which are supplemented by student fees, affiliation fees, student service charges, and both internal and external donations and assistance. However, compared to KU, the constituent schools at two other universities, PokU and PU, have smaller student populations. Though they receive grants, these funds are often insufficient to cover their recurrent costs. On average, UGC funding covers less than 20 percent

of the universities' recurrent expenditures, requiring them to depend on additional sources of funding to meet their financial obligations.

KU relies heavily on student fees to cover its recurrent costs. Its sustainability is closely tied to its program offerings, the quality of its academic programs, and its ability to compete in a dynamic educational environment. While KU's financing strategies have historically ensured sound financial health, the university must continue to innovate to maintain its competitive edge. An ex-registrar of the AFU noted that effective strategic management of resources is key to institutional sustainability.

PU and PokU largely depend on income from affiliation fees and fees paid by students from affiliated campuses. With these funding sources, both universities are currently in stable financial positions. However, their constituent campuses have relatively small student bodies, which is not ideal for long-term sustainability. Relying heavily on students from affiliated campuses to cover costs may not always be a viable strategy. Nevertheless, these universities have managed to sustain themselves by introducing new academic programs, granting affiliations to new colleges, and expanding their constituent campuses. Their financial outlook remains secure due to these adaptive strategies.

CBACs receive government funding based on formulas for recurrent expenditures, as well as project-based grants for infrastructure development. Some CBACs have also benefited from funding through UGC initiatives such as the SHEP and the HERP. This has allowed certain campuses to upgrade their physical infrastructure and improve their financial positions. The campuses studied are generally top-tier community campuses, with a few exceptions. They predominantly rely on student fees and offer academic programs in fields such as education, humanities, social sciences, and management, with limited offerings in the sciences.

However, traditional programs in these areas are losing popularity as students gravitate toward market-driven subjects like medicine, engineering, agriculture, forestry, and ICT. The growth of affiliated campuses offering outdated or less in-demand programs has led to a decline in student enrollment, putting financial strain on many campuses. As a result, some institutions have entered a state of crisis, facing dwindling student numbers and a significant loss of income from student fees.

As institutions, these CBACs are not currently fully sustainable. Achieving financial sustainability in the future will require them to offer academic programs that align with the needs of both students and the labor market. Addressing this challenge, one campus chief observed,

Opening a higher education institution is an easy task, but ensuring its longevity is a significant challenge. Many community-run HEIs in Nepal are struggling to survive. While they are non-profit organizations, they consistently face sustainability issues. In this context, having both short-term and long-term visions is crucial. Strategic management plays a vital role in supporting their performance and working towards sustainability (P 13).

Almost all campuses are focused on introducing additional market-driven programs to meet the demand of their students and support program growth and expansion strategies. This approach would not be feasible without a corresponding university strategy that grants affiliations for these new programs at the request of the campuses. The alignment of university strategies with those of the CBACs is essential. Therefore, their strategies should be in sync with that of the university. However, there appears to be a disconnection between TU's strategy to de-affiliate campuses offering general subjects and the campuses' strategies to expand academic programs, resulting in neither strategy being effectively implemented.

Despite this, there is a glimmer of hope in the form of academic autonomy for some of the more capable affiliated campuses. A few CBACs have achieved financial sustainability, though the majority are still struggling to meet their financial obligations. Three campuses have already

secured academic autonomy, and several others have applied to TU for the same. With academic autonomy, these campuses would have the freedom to design new programs and curricula, conduct their examinations, and manage academic programs, while TU would continue to issue certificates to students. This level of autonomy would greatly contribute to the long-term academic and financial sustainability of these campuses. Thus, granting full autonomy to these high-performing campuses would be a viable option.

Financial sustainability, which includes securing diverse funding sources and exercising prudent financial management, was highlighted by research participants (P 13, P 30, P 31, and P 52) as integral to institutional sustainability. These participants emphasized the importance of diversified funding and agile financial management in ensuring the continued operation of academic programs.

The study found that most of the HEIs under study, including universities, face challenges in achieving financial sustainability and are unable to operate as financially independent units without government support. However, KU's performance in managing its resources strategically to ensure financial sustainability stands out as particularly noteworthy.

Institutional Sustainability. The second issue related to sustainability is the institutional dimension. HEIs that have a sound system of operations and management in their administrative, academic, and other functions, guided by the principles of good governance, are more likely to be sustainable. Institutions that engage in periodic and systematic planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of their programs and budgets also tend to maintain sustainability. In this context, one professor from TU mentioned:

Institutional sustainability depends on maintaining responsive output flows, such as high-quality and valued outputs and services; cost-effective delivery mechanisms for goods and

services through effective organization and management; and stable resource flows, including recurrent costs, capital investments, and human resources. Strategic management provides a framework that outlines medium- and long-term objectives and priorities, performance criteria, methods for achieving these goals, and resource allocation. Implementing this framework fosters a proactive approach, ensuring institutions meet stakeholder expectations while generating goodwill and value (P 35).

Similarly, another campus chief stated that strategic management ensures the sustainability of HEIs by making positive progress in all areas, including teaching and learning, research and development, and financial discipline, among others. Strategic plans focus on physical facility development, faculty professional development, starting new programs, maintaining quality standards, and enhancing ties with the community (P 11), thus ensuring sustainability.

Social-Political Sustainability. The third sustainability issue for HEIs pertains to their socio-political dimension. HEIs play a crucial role in teaching, learning, and research, and they are established with public support and endorsement from political and social leadership. Ensuring their long-term sustainability in this regard is vital.

A key challenge for HEIs is their legal identity. Currently, some campuses, such as those affiliated with TU, lack permanent legal status. While they operate under specific legislation or statutes, these must align with the policies of the university or UGC. For any institution to be truly sustainable, it must possess a clear and unquestionable legal identity.

Additionally, with the rise of alternative higher education models like online learning and open universities, traditional HEIs face pressure to update their academic programs, curricula, pedagogy, and evaluation methods. Campuses without academic autonomy are particularly

vulnerable to these shifts, while those with autonomy are better equipped to adapt. Fortunately, universities in Nepal have a significant degree of academic, staffing, financial, and institutional autonomy, albeit with some limitations, making them more sustainable in the long run.

To ensure sustainability across financial, academic, and social dimensions, academic autonomy is essential. Several research participants (P 13, P 30, P 31, and P 52) emphasized the importance of academic autonomy for achieving sustainability.

One of the deans explained:

We have academic autonomy and are able to respond to market demands. From an academic perspective, we are sustainable, and there are no concerns in that regard. However, in terms of finances, it is true that we fully depend on student fees for our resources. If students are not satisfied with our programs or the quality of education, we would no longer be sustainable. Therefore, we are working to ensure that KU's School of Engineering remains financially sustainable by addressing this reality (P 31).

The quantitative data indicates that strategic management significantly enhances HEI performance across teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial stability, and institutional sustainability. This is further reinforced by qualitative data, which supports the quantitative findings. These results suggest that a well-designed and effectively implemented strategic plan contributes to both the qualitative and quantitative growth of HEIs.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the research findings in response to the questions presented in Chapter One, followed by a discussion linking the findings to existing bodies of knowledge. The findings and discussions are held in five key themes: the extent of adoption and application of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal, the processes and tools adopted in strategic management, critical factors influencing strategic management, the challenges faced, and the impact on the institutional performance of HEIs. This chapter ends with a summary of the chapter.

Adoption and Application of Strategic Management in HEIs

My first research question was, "What is the extent of adoption and application of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal?" I have discussed the answer to this question under the following themes.

Initiation of Strategic Planning in Nepal

The adoption and application of strategic management in Nepal started in the early 2000s. Initially driven by the exogenous influence of the WB, Nepali HEIs began formalizing strategic plans to align with global standards and national priorities. Key milestones of this development included the early long-term development plans of TU, which laid the groundwork for subsequent development. In parallel to this, KU formally started the strategic planning process in 2003, followed by PokU in 2003. The SHEP and HERP projects implemented through WB assistance further accelerated the adoption of strategic planning across universities and CBACs, requiring compliance with UGC requirements and quality assurance benchmarks.

The World Bank-funded SHEP project led to over 100 campuses and seven universities adopting strategic plans. The HERP project led to more than 150 higher education institutions adopting strategic plans. This consequence of external funding reinforces the relevance of resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) to HEIs in Nepal. It raises concerns about

the financial dependency and autonomy of HEIs, questioning whether externally driven reforms align with national priorities and long-term sustainability. Nepal has specific challenges in teaching, research, and governance, which are entirely different from those of the Global North, and mimicking global models to obtain funding and accreditation purposes is a matter of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Due to the financial structure, institutional capacity, and governance autonomy, there is always tension between global and local phenomena.

Levels of Strategic Planning

With TU taking the lead by developing and updating strategic plans such as "TU Vision 2020" and related action plans, the strategic plans in Nepali HEIs have been characterized by multiple planning cycles with three distinct levels. Universities, including KU and PokU, followed the same path, developing strategic plans at various intervals. The preparation of strategic plans at the university, faculty/institute, and campus levels has become more prevalent, reflecting a hierarchical approach to strategic management within these institutions, as indicated by Wit and Meyer (2014) and Taylor and Miroiu (2002). These levels must be aligned with the corporate level (university), business level (faculty/institute), and functional level (campus) planning in the context of strategic management (Shirley, 1983). However, in some cases, a misalignment of strategic planning between the university and faculty/institute levels has been observed.

Purpose of Strategic Planning

The purpose of strategic planning in Nepali HEIs is multi-faceted. Practically, HEIs are engaged in strategic planning to enhance operational efficiency, attract and retain talented faculty and students, and mobilize resources effectively. In addition, strategic planning plays a role in

fulfilling external obligations, primarily from national and international funding bodies, such as the WB and UGC, which require reform in higher education through systematic planning and accreditation as indicated by Hayward (2008). This joint motivation underscores the complicated relationship between the internal and external forces that drive organizational behavior.

The strategic planning process in Nepali HEIs embodies both instrumental/rational and political factors. This is because it has become necessary for institutions to sustain effective governance through strategy under the conditions of a changing educational landscape and compliance with regulatory and funding regulations. This holistic view of the strategic planning of HEIs parallels the increasing interest in accountability in governance and heightened emphasis on quality enhancement by the higher education sector in Nepal.

Mechanisms of Strategic Planning

There are several engagements and institutional structures to propose strategic plans for Nepali HEIs. In most universities, the planning directorate or division reporting to the VC is charged with strategic planning at the university level. In reality, many HEIs employ consultants or experts to prepare strategic plans after conducting a stakeholder consultation process, although some institutions have established their strategic planning teams as well. The literature suggests that strategic planning should involve some staff so that the plan is pertinent and adopted by the institution's members. Appropriately, strategic planning committees are also crucial for the process, building proposals from the faculty and outside experts and bringing all received information into the proper strategic plan. Some institutions have formed internal strategic planning teams as well.

Effective strategic planning requires appropriate representation by various stakeholders to ensure the plan's relevance and buy-in. Moreover, strategic planning committees play a central

role in the process by collecting input from a range of stakeholders, including faculty and external experts, and integrating this feedback into a comprehensive strategic plan. Cooperative activities inside the firm and fact-based analysis from outside the firm are the methods applied in planning, for instance, SWOT analysis and the organization's core competency analysis.

Approaches to Strategic Planning

The HEIs in Nepal have adopted both top-down and bottom-up approaches in strategic planning. The first approach, the top-down approach, focused on leadership decision-making in the formulation of strategies, while the bottom-up approach focused on the receipt of feedback from stakeholders. The planning process is meant to be inclusive, efficient, and accountable, and planning consultations and discussions are often held within and with other stakeholders as well.

Degree of Application of Strategic Management

As previously presented, the mean value of strategic management initiation is 3.53 with an SD of 0.52. Similarly, the mean value of overall strategic planning (external environmental analysis, internal environmental analysis, strategic choice, and strategic planning alignment) was 3.36 and the SD was 0.53. The mean value of strategic execution (short-term objectives, communication, organizational leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, resource planning, internal governance, general management, functional strategies, change management, and execution alignment) had an SD of 0.55. Lastly, M&E and control (strategic M&E and control, corrective actions) had a mean value of 3.25 with an SD of 0.67, whereas the overall mean value stood at 3.41 with an SD of 0.51. This result shows that strategic management practices have been adopted at moderate-to-high levels.

Interrelationships exist among strategic management practice variables, spanning strategic planning, strategy execution, M&E, and control. A strong positive correlation was noted between

strategic planning variables (strategic management awareness, strategic goal awareness, external environment analysis, internal environment analysis, strategic choice, and planning alignment), strategic implementation variables (short-term objectives, programs, and policies; communication; organizational structure; resource planning; general management; leadership; organizational culture; internal governance; functional strategies; and change management), and strategic M&E and control variables (strategic control, feedback system, and corrective actions). The quantitative results obtained through the survey showed a moderate-to-high degree of SMP.

Similarly, there was a positive correlation between SMP variables. The content analysis of the strategic plans of HEIs showed the prevalence of strategic planning practices in HEIs. Likewise, qualitative data suggest the degree of adoption of strategic planning, execution, M&E, and control in HEIs. Mean value of SMP variables vary across HEIs and it measured statistically significant. The difference may be attributed to the unique characteristics of HEIs, such as geographical location, institutional set up, organizational culture, leadership, and other clientele-related factors (Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman & Bamford, 2016).

Putting these results together, a strategic planning process organized by HEIs through external and internal inputs was observed, where external inputs were found to be dominant in most cases. The execution process was organized based on annual budgets and programmes. However, barring a few, most HEIs have failed to link strategic planning to their annual plans and programs, mainly the academic aspects of strategic plans. The M&E and control groups showed weaker practices than planning practices.

There is a sound awareness of strategic management principles and objectives among the leaders, academic managers, and faculty of HEIs in Nepal, which reveals their comprehension of strategic management. Nevertheless, awareness has not been translated into good performance in

the field and remains a challenge. There is usually the integration of various planning approaches and numerous multifaceted HEI stakeholder engagements as the two features defining strategic planning in Nepali HEIs, which focus on the creation of feasible, workable, and congruent institutional and external goals and objectives. Putting quantitative results from the survey and qualitative insights through content analysis of strategic plans, interviews, and FGDs, we can infer that HEIs practiced strategic management to different degrees and levels.

Strategic management in higher education, while originating around the early 1980s in the U.S. higher education system (Keller, 1983), has grown to be global in the late 20th century. Strategic management design in the public higher education of Europe began, at a rapid pace, after the intervention of ‘New Managerialism’ in the public sector. Surprisingly, the implementation of strategic management in Nepali HEIs has remained 20 years behind the U.S. Current practices connote that the process of strategic management in Nepal is nascent and has yet to carve out a proper management paradigm, method, and approach to deal with modern management dynamics.

Strategic Management Process in Higher Education

The second research question I posed was, ‘What are the processes and instruments of strategic management in HEIs of Nepal? I have elaborated my response under the following headings.

The study showed that strategic management processes were organized into three broader processes consisting strategic planning, strategy execution, and monitoring, evaluation, and control. Key findings and discussion examining these processes are given below:

Strategic Planning

The strategic planning process in Nepali HEIs is a comprehensive and multifaceted approach involving the key steps 1) forming a strategic planning team, 2) strategic analysis by internal environment analysis and external environment analysis 3) setting vision, mission, core values, goals, and objectives 4) Strategies 5) Strategic actions.

Forming Strategic Planning Team. The first is the formation of a strategic planning team, which typically offers the strategic plan and is composed of internal faculty, experts, and external consultants. The team to be formed is important because it always involves aspects of strategic thought that are needed for strategic visioning. However, these teams may not address consumer needs effectively or appropriately, and the success of these multidisciplinary teams varies depending on the involvement and interest of the team members.

Strategy Analysis. The strategic analysis phase can be considered to be the most important one because it provides a deeper understanding of the internal and external environment of HEIs. PESTLE, PEST, or PESTLE analysis was used together with other traditional tools such as the SWOT and SWOC analyses. Although all of these tools are known in today's HEIs, the extent to which these tools were applied was not always intensive and comprehensive, meaning that the relative maturity of each HEI in its understanding of its strategic positioning was not always the same.

Strategy definition and direction setting are done as the first stage of work. When the analysis is done, the next step is to determine the strategic orientation of the institution. This encompasses determining the strategic direction, objectives, and key values that the HEI intends to embrace when in operation. These strategic elements are then adapted to suit each institution concerning its conditions in Nepal. For instance, TU has changed its vision to increase global

acknowledgment and quality education, while KU's vision concentrates on practical accomplishment and worldwide influence.

Appraising Current Institutional Performance. Appraising current institutional performance involves evaluating both academic and non-academic dimensions to ensure alignment with strategic goals. Academic performance is assessed through the quality of programs, curriculum relevance, research output, student engagement, and attainment of quality certification. Institutions also review the effectiveness of experiential learning practices and the integration of ICT in teaching and administrative processes.

On the non-academic front, key indicators include enrollment trends, infrastructure adequacy, human resource capacity, financial sustainability, governance efficiency, and the strength of campus community partnership. Regular appraisal helps identify areas of strength, uncover challenges, and refine strategies to enhance institutional efficiency, effectiveness, and impact.

Environmental Analysis (internal and external). HEIs in Nepal adopt a dual approach to environmental analysis by assessing internal and external factors. Internally they evaluate factors such as faculty capabilities, infrastructure, and curriculum relevance to identify strengths and weaknesses. Externally, HEIs monitor government policies, industry trends, and competitive pressures to uncover opportunities and threats. For example, HEIs leverage technological advancements to enhance teaching methods and build collaborations with industries to align educational programs with market demand. This analysis helps HEIs to create adaptive and forward-looking strategies.

Strategic Direction Setting: Vision, Mission, Values, Goals, and Objectives

Strategic definition and direction setting form the foundation for institutional growth and impact, anchored by a clear vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives. The vision outlines the institution's long-term aspirations, while the mission defines its core purpose and commitment to stakeholders. Institutional values guide ethical practices and decision-making, ensuring alignment with societal expectations and academic integrity. Goals provide broad strategic targets that align with the vision, while objectives break these down into actionable, measurable steps. Together, these elements shape the HEI's priorities, drive resource allocation, and provide a roadmap for achieving excellence in academics, research, and community engagement.

Strategy Formulation. Defining what a strategy is requires crucial strategic issue identification and developing feasible solutions for them. That is why the proper alignment of the institution with its aims and goals and the environment it exists in is only possible after completing this step.

To make sure that the strategies are workable, acceptable, and efficient, the formulation process frequently involves input from various stakeholders. The planning process yields the following outcomes: the vision, mission, core values, goals, objectives, and strategies. Both academic and non-academic elements are covered by these tactics.

Alignment of Strategies. Ensuring alignment between the formulated strategies and the institution's operational plans is essential for successful implementation. This alignment includes integrating strategic goals with annual budgets, human resources plans, and other operational processes. However, in many Nepali HEIs, this alignment is often weak, leading to challenges in executing them effectively.

Strategy Implementation, M&E Plan: It is recommended to create a detailed implementation monitoring and evaluation plan as an outcome of the strategic planning process at the end of the process. Specifically, the implementation plan describes how and when the strategies will be carried out, which organizational units will be involved and holding which responsibilities, while the M&E plan defines how the progress will be assessed and the results of the strategies' application determined.

In this discussion, it is indicated that the strategic planning process in Nepali HEIs is systematic but has higher variability in terms of rigor and associated effectiveness. Some institutions are likely to have a well-developed structure in the planning of their programs due to compliance factors like funding or accreditation, while others have no structure in their planning process. The external consultants and strategic analysis tools are widely used, and the level of analysis and correspondence to the institutional capabilities influencing the success of the stated strategic plans also differed.

Strategy Implementation

This study shows that systematic planning of implementing the strategies in Nepali HEIs is based on structural equation modeling, but it also exposes numerous barriers and hindrances that affect the systematic planning of strategic management.

Structured Execution. The concept of strategic planning in Nepali HEIs involves a more or less conscious procedure of action, and the action plans formulated here are implemented typically in a systematic manner. After reaching strategic decisions, a strategic plan always needs acknowledgment by the university Senate or other corresponding institutions. These directives remind faculties and departments of the approved plan to be put into implementation. These

derivatives are structured in a manner that provides institutional support to the strategic plans and incorporates them into the framework of the HEI as a guide towards action.

Challenges in Strategy Implementation. Despite the formal structure, several challenges hinder the effective implementation of strategies: Firstly, resource constraints are a major barrier to effective strategy implementation, as there are usually inadequate financial resources and human capital. HEIs in Nepal heavily rely on government funding, which limits their flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs and priorities. This reliance on outside finance generates substantial limitations relating to predictability in mobilizing resources necessary for the achievement of strategic directions.

Second, the integrative issue of the internal and external departments to enhance the implementation processes is vital. However, poor coordination hampers the strategic process, and consequently, there is a disconnection or gap between planned and executed strategies. Lack of proper coordination and integration of work among various departments of the institution has been identified, which leads to strategic inconsistency in operations.

Thirdly, continuing, the management of change is still one of the key issues in the strategy implementation process. There is always a lot of resistance to change when it comes to adopting new ways and fruitful technologies crucial for the realization of strategic objectives set by great higher education institutions. Such resistance is typically rooted in organizational culture and the organizational employees' disinclination to operationalize change.

Fourthly, external factors, particularly political interests and government policies, frequently influence the implementation of strategies in Nepali HEIs. For example, despite a strategic decision by TU not to open new campuses, political pressures led to the establishment of new campuses in the agriculture and engineering fields. Likewise, the phased-out Proficiency

Certificate Level at TU was also a slow process and more an outside nexus-driven process by the Higher Secondary Education Board—the GoN—than a TU-led process. These cases show that emergent and unanticipated processes can sometimes prevail over strategic initiatives and goals to deliver outcomes deviating from the planned course.

Insights of Strategy Implementation. The execution of strategies within Nepali HEIs, as reflected in quantitative assessments, shows an overall satisfactory practice with a mean value of 3.41 out of 5. Specific elements of strategy implementation, such as organizational culture and leadership, were rated higher, indicating their positive impact on strategy execution. However, other domains, including change management and resources used in implementation, were relatively rated lower, implying major deficiencies within these fundamental aspects of implementation.

This study has identified that the process of implementing a strategy in Nepali HEIs is multifaceted and is composed of intended, college-actual, and emergent strategies. Even though some institutions have commendable progress in implementing strategic plans to show strengths in factors such as organizational culture and leadership, others are experiencing recurring issues that hamper the implementation of the strategic plans. Some of the challenges faced in strategic management include risk in accessing resources, lack of coordination in the organization, and organizational resistance to change.

Secondly, other extraneous factors, including political pressures and governmental policies, make it even more difficult to propose the best method for facilitating the implementation process. Such factors can cause major shifts in an organization's direction and end up having a disconnection between the strategic plan and the strategic reality. The overall effectiveness of the strategic implementation in Nepali HEIs is therefore mixed since the

capability and capacity of HEIs in terms of internal and external environments and their ability to mitigate and respond to these challenges differ from one institution to the other.

Thus, Nepali HEIs should focus on managing the resource deficits, integrating Nepali HEI departments and stakeholders, and implementing different change management activities to improve the strategy implementation. Also, institutions have to manage the influence of the external environment on their strategic activities to enable the general strategic initiatives not to be distorted by emergent and unanticipated processes.

Strategy M&E and Control in HEIs

The existing M&E practices in Nepali HEIs are considered weak and irregular. The tasks are fulfilled at an institutional level, and the structures for M&E are developed, but the processes themselves are most frequently scattered and not systematically interrelated. A sustainable organizational culture for M&E is still a work in progress, and both internal and external mechanisms to support positive change, including audits and checks, are seen as more ceremonial than efficient. This view is also supported by the quantitative level data derived from moderate mean scores obtained regarding strategic control and feedback systems. In general, the researched institutions have some theoretically based examples of M&E frameworks and development practices; however, the level of their implementation and application appears to be highly unsystematic and can hardly be deemed successful and adequate in terms of strategic goal achievement and proper evaluation.

M&E of Nepali HEIs is relevant to assess the implementation process of achieving strategic fits and outcomes under the aim of the institution. However, this process is often characterized by the following issues:

Weak and Inconsistent Practices. The weak and erratic state of the M&E practices in Nepali HEIs can be taken generally as a fact. Although institutional structures for M&E exist, their implementation is often fragmented and lacks systematic integration across different levels of the institution.

Ritualistic Approaches. Internal and external M&E mechanisms, such as audits and compliance checks, are often conducted in a ritualistic manner rather than being used as effective tools for strategic control and feedback. It limits the ability of institutions proactively to identify and address issues in the implementation process.

Moderate Effectiveness. Quantitative data indicate that the effectiveness of M&E practices varies significantly across institutions, with moderate mean scores for strategic control and feedback systems. It indicates that while some institutions have already developed functional M&E frameworks, others are finding it difficult to implement them properly.

M&E represents an essential but relatively unnoticed phase of strategic HEI management in Nepal. Behind all these, the absence of harmonized and comprehensive M&E procedures limits institutions from tracking progress and effects to the extent of making important tweaks to the strategies they adopt. This weakness in the M&E process usually leads to nonfulfillment of strategic plans or does not bring the expected results.

The discrepancy in perceptions among leadership, management, and participants regarding the practice of monitoring and evaluation can be related to two key factors. The first factor pertains to the varying roles and general perception held by participants in HEIs about the function and responsibilities of leadership. The second factor relates to how leadership itself is conceptualized, where leaders often perceive their involvement in M&E as either insufficient or merely as fulfilling an administrative formality rather than as a meaningful strategic process.

Instruments of Strategic Management

SWOT, SWOC, and PESTEL are the strategic management tools that are widely used in Nepalese HEI for identifying strategic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and evaluating the sector's microenvironment for strategic planning. SWOT and its related methodologies are famous and accepted, but whether the use of these tools is effective or not fully depends on the concept of its interpretation. The low practice frequency of other strategic tools raises awareness and utilization patterns that are considerate of the fact that oriental literature contains these more advanced forms of strategic tools.

Contents of strategic plan

Contents of strategic plans of HEIs indicate strategic planning practices as well as a roadmap for strategic execution, M&E, and control. The interview and FGDs insight showed the strategic planning process, execution, M&E, and control process of HEIs. Similarly, the annual plan and programs and budget, as well as annual progress reports, showed the degree of strategic implementation and M&E practices.

Aspects of strategies

HEIs focus on academic management, which is critical for their social impact, as mentioned by Taylor and Miroiu (2002). Key strategies include developing and maintaining high-quality academic programs, ensuring academic excellence, and producing marketable human resources. Curriculum innovation plays a central role, with reforms aimed at enhancing students' engagement through active and experiential learning, supported by advancement in ICT. Research is another essential component, contributing to students' learning and faculty development. Achieving quality certification is a significant goal for HEIs in Nepal, reflecting its importance in strategic planning.

Non-academic strategies are essential for supporting academic goals and ensuring overall institutional success. These strategies cover areas such as student enrollment, infrastructure development, human resource management, financial resources, ICT integration, governance, and campus community linkages. HEIs focus on attracting and retaining high-quality students, developing robust physical infrastructure, and ensuring faculty and staff capabilities through targeted human resource strategies. Financial sustainability is achieved through strategic resource management and cost recovery methods. ICT is leveraged to modernize teaching, learning, and administrative processes; governance and management strategies aim to enhance institutional efficiency and effectiveness, while partnerships broaden collaboration opportunities.

Putting these results together, a strategic planning process organized by HEIs through external and internal inputs indicates that external inputs were dominant in most of the cases. The execution process was organized through an annual budget and programs. However, barring a few, most of the HEIs fail to link strategic planning to their annual plan and programs, mainly the academic aspects of the strategic plan. The M&E and control turned out to be a weak practice as compared to planning practices.

It is relevant to note that SWOT analysis was popular during the 1950s and the Porter model during the 1980s. Strategic intent, core competencies, and market-focused organizations were less prevalent in Nepal.

The strategic management process in Nepali HEIs is characterized by four key stages, as most of the literature illustrates (David and David, 2016): strategic analysis, strategic planning, strategy execution, and strategy M&E and control. Each of them includes several important activities and processes that determine the efficiency of strategic management. The results of the study indicate that Nepali HEIs have adopted strategic management processes as suggested by the

existing literature. Strategic planning processes mainly consist of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, execution, and M&E and control, which are consistent with existing linear-based models, as explained by scholars in the field (David and David, 2019; Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, & Bamford, 2012). Previous studies (Hayward, 2008) have shown similar results and patterns in the adoption of strategic management processes in developing countries.

Nepali HEIs predominantly follow linear models of strategic management. This reflects their familiarity with and preference for structured, step-by-step planning approaches, which align with their current competencies and their efforts to align with global practices. However, alternative approaches—such as emergent or adaptive strategic management—highly value flexibility, responsiveness, and iterative decision-making, which may be more appropriate in dynamic and rapidly changing environments.

The prevailing reliance on linear models in Nepali HEIs may stem from the dominant bureaucratic structures within these institutions. While linear models provide a clear and structured foundation, integrating more adaptive approaches could strengthen the strategic capacity of Nepali HEIs and enhance their responsiveness to change.

Critical Factors of Strategic Management

My third research question was, how do critical factors of strategic management impact SMP in HEIs in Nepal? I have discussed the findings of the research question under the following themes.

The mean values for key factors—autonomy, communication, organizational leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, and internal governance—were 3.30, 3.37, 3.44, 3.50, 3.43, and 3.35, respectively, with standard deviations of 0.75, 0.82, 0.68, 0.67, and 0.83.

These values highlight moderate to high levels of significance for each factor in the context of SMP.

Relationships among these critical factors (communication, organizational structure, leadership, organizational culture, governance, and autonomy) were found to be significant. Furthermore, the correlation coefficients between SMP and these critical factors demonstrated high values (communication: $r = 0.826$; organizational structure: $r = 0.758$; leadership: $r = 0.700$; organizational culture: $r = 0.724$; governance: $r = 0.736$; and autonomy: $r = 0.665$). These correlations indicate that while the factors are interrelated, their connection with SMP is even more pronounced, underscoring their pivotal role in the strategic management of HEIs.

Interviews and FGD data highlighted the importance of institutional autonomy, internal governance, information and communication systems, organizational culture, organizational structure, and leadership as critical factors influencing SMP. The findings suggest that the relationships between SMP and critical factors are multifaceted and interdependent, which are discussed below:

Institutional Autonomy

The mean values of academic, human resource, financial, and institutional dimensions were found to be 3.30, 3.34, 3.30, and 3.27, with standard deviations of 0.923, 0.924, 0.986, and 0.878, respectively. The mean value of autonomy was 3.30 with SD 0.75, and the SMP for autonomy correlated at 0.665, a moderate level. This can be interpreted as autonomy being one of the critical factors for SMP.

Interviews and FGDs participants highlighted autonomy from at least three angles: from the university perspective, from decentralized and autonomous constituent campuses, and from CBAC perspectives. Autonomy to decentralized campuses and autonomous campuses was mostly

related to granting power to the campuses by the university's central authorities. Similarly, 'academic autonomy to CBACs was understood as authority from TU to CBACs on academic matters.

The central issue of autonomy was found in the decision-making rights of the HEIs from the government. The voices of participants illustrate this vividly. A campus chief from CBAC reflected, "Autonomy is a self-government or a freedom to act. If the leader is always guided or interfered with by others, he/she can't develop his/her brilliant ideas. There must be an environment of doing different works independently." Another research participant succinctly summarized, "Autonomy enhances the ability to formulate MVGO as the requirement of the institution without any bias; autonomy flourishes with prompt management, minimizing the gap of contradictions." These qualitative insights suggest that autonomy is also important to SMP.

Survey results, interview narratives, and FGD insights provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between autonomy and SMP. Survey data confirm statistically significant positive correlations between SMP and autonomy. Qualitative data add depth, revealing that the effectiveness of these factors depends on their interconnectedness and alignment with institutional goals.

Since TU's founding, institutional autonomy has been acknowledged in Nepal, where universities have access to a range of autonomy, including staffing, budgetary, institutional, and academic autonomy. However, this autonomy is often centralized within a small group of university authorities, which has raised concerns about the extent of autonomy ensured within the university system. TU's decentralization rules and autonomy regulations are steps toward enhancing autonomy within the organs of HEIs, yet the effectiveness of these measures is often

questioned. There are frequent questions on the centralization of authority on one front and the inadequacy of autonomy provided to the university on the other.

Professional councils in Nepal can sometimes undermine university autonomy by imposing their power over HEIs. Similarly, the establishment of the Medical Education Commission has been viewed as a transfer of universities' academic and fee-fixing autonomy in medical education. This raises critical questions: Why do HEIs need autonomy? How effectively do they utilize autonomy? Are they accountable for their autonomy?

There is a general perception that Nepali HEIs do not fully leverage their autonomy and are failing to be accountable to society. This has led to a growing demand for greater autonomy among various stakeholders. The findings suggest that autonomy is a critical factor in the strategic management of Nepali HEIs. It must be directed towards the sustainable development and growth of HEIs in a manner that is accountable to society.

Beyond the formal relationship between the state and universities, it is crucial to empower both internal and external constituencies for effective strategic management, as Martin (1992) highlights. Institutional self-regulation and self-determination are essential for fostering innovation and improving quality (Van Vught, 1989). Shirley (2013) emphasizes that institutional autonomy impacts various aspects of university operations, like setting institutional goals, student intake, program offerings, and pricing strategies, ultimately enabling institutions to adapt more effectively to their environments.

As observed by Varghese and Michaela (2013), the autonomy of HEIs in East Asian countries has led to significant changes in governance, management structures, financial management, staff recruitment, and administrative responsibilities. Similarly, in Nepal, the

autonomy of HEIs must be safeguarded and recognized as a critical factor in moving forward strategic management practices.

Information and Communication System

The mean value of communication was found to be 3.37 with an SD of 0.82, and the SMP to communication autonomy correlates at a stronger level. This indicates information and communication are critical factors for effective SMP.

Strategic management in HEIs depends much on the efficiency of the information and communication system in the process (Uvali-Trumbi & Martin, 2021; Martin, 1992). Nevertheless, in the Nepalese context, it is found that adequate information regarding educational inputs, processes, productions, resultant outcomes, and impacts is not frequently available. Some external information relating to the job market, employability, and other environmental changes affecting HEIs is not regularly collected. These institutions are thus not well placed to evaluate the internal and external conditions for organizational diagnosis and strategic management of organizational issues.

Moreover, there are various barriers to internal and external organizational communication in HEIs, and the actions taken to mitigate these barriers did not address new challenges in communication in HEIs effectively. This comes in handy in the formulation, as pointed out by Martin (1992), of the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategies. Unfortunately, currently, many of the HEIs in Nepal have not created sound information and communication technologies necessary for internal and external communications.

To be effective in strategic management, the leaders of HEI must always consider several obstacles in the flow of communication and come up with strategies that fall under these categories: the establishment of objectives and targets, identification of target audiences, message

construction, choice of communication media, and feedback processes. This integrated approach to managing organizational communication goes a long way in reducing barriers and hence enhancing the communication process, which is central in achieving stakeholders' commitment towards organizational objectives as well as enhancing the efficient implementation of strategic plans.

Governance

Another important element affecting the strategic management of HEIs in Nepal is governance. The mean value of internal governance was found to be 3.35 with SD 0.83, and the SMP to internal governance correlates at a stronger level, which indicates that governance is an enabler for effective SMP.

Several institutions, including the MOEST, the Ministry of Finance, the UGC, and the universities and HEIs themselves, share control of higher education in Nepal. At the university level, the senate, academic council, and executive council are found as the main governing bodies of the university, whereas the faculty board under the leadership of the dean is found as the main body at the faculty/institute level. With regard to campus level, CMC is the main governing body. The internal governance and control within the university was found to be weak (Acharya, 2021), and as a result, it also weakened the SMP.

A VC shared in an interview, "It depends on the type of leadership; if the leadership is highly dynamic with world-travelled knowledge and experience, and he/she can easily gear up the pace of internal governance and can have the command-control of it... otherwise the internal governance and control will have a negative impact on the implementation of the overall vision plan of the leadership." Similarly, a dean revealed that "corporate governance is a must to achieve goals as well as to make responsible decisions."

Scholars like Subedi (2021) and Acharya (2021) have noted that insufficient internal governance exists among Nepal's higher education institutions. The development, implementation, monitoring, and assessment of strategies are only a few of the phases of strategic management that governance structures can have a substantial impact on. To guarantee that strategic goals are carried out as intended and that institutions are held responsible for their performance, effective governance is necessary. However, in the Nepali context, governance challenges such as political interference and unclear decision-making processes have been obstacles to effective strategic management.

Martin (1992) and Clark (1983) have documented that governance structures can either positively or negatively influence strategic management. For Nepali HEIs, like any other HEIs, addressing governance challenges is as crucial to improving SMP as to their planning.

Institutional Leadership

The mean value of leadership was found to be 3.48 with a 0.68 standard deviation, and the SMP to institutional leadership correlates at a 0.70 stronger level, showing leadership as an integral and critical element for successful SMP.

Leadership is at the core of strategic management in HEIs, particularly in vision setting and the overall direction of the HEIs. The study findings reveal that leadership is crucial in strategic management, and a frequently raised issue is political appointments to leadership positions by politicians and leaders' inability to drive the HEIs in the expected direction.

Bass (1987) asserted that effective leadership involves envisioning a desired future state for the organization by articulating that vision in a way that empowers others to bring it to life (Bass, 1987; Hitt, Ireland, Hoskission, & Mankutty, 2012). The importance of communication is critical to inspire and align institutional vision, mission, goals, strategies, and resources, as

indicated by Bennis and Naus (1985). Martin (1992), Taylor, Machado, and Peterson (2008), and Azhar, Ikram, Rashid, and Saqib (1998) assert that leadership plays a critical role in strategic management, which is also valid in the Nepali context. It is seen that higher education leadership positions are often appointed based on political inclinations rather than academic qualifications or leadership competencies, which are essential for envisioning and achieving a well-designed future.

Organizational Culture

The mean value of organizational culture was found to be 3.50 with a standard deviation of 0.67, and the SMP to organizational culture correlates at 0.724, which can be placed at a stronger level. This shows there is a critical role of organizational culture in SMP.

Insights from interviews and FGDs revealed that current higher education culture is not conducive to improving the quality of higher education in the country. This indicates a need for cultural change to make higher education more responsive to social needs.

Peter Drucker (1999) stated that "culture eats strategy for breakfast," underscoring the importance of organizational culture in shaping strategic management outcomes. In Nepali HEIs, the existing organizational culture is not always supportive of sound SMP needing to change in the future. It is revealed that the act, history, funding, size, and location make institutional culture unique, and some aspects of culture are the same and some are entirely different from each other. For instance, the culture of TU and KU is quite different, and so are the cultures of CBACs and universities, which cannot be considered the same.

It is a well-established fact from previous research by Martin (1992), Martins and Terblanche (2003), and Coman and Bonciu (2016) that culture is a significant element in strategic management. HEIs must align their strategies with culture, and most of the time, cultural change

is necessary. Similarly, it should be noted that cultural change is not an easy job. Nepali HEIs' existing culture is not supporting proper strategic management, and there is an urgent need to alter the existing culture, though changing organizational culture is inherently difficult.

Organizational Structure

The mean value of organizational structure was found to be 3.47 with a standard deviation of 0.67, and the SMP to organizational structure correlated at a moderate level, indicating how allocation of authority, responsibility, and accountability among organizational hierarchies is done.

Interviews and FGDs on the existing organizational structure of HEIs revealed some changes in the organizational structure, such as the organizational structure of 'decentralized campuses and autonomous campuses' under TU and the organizational structure of accredited CBACs. The changes took place as a result of strategies adopted through reform grants or the QAA system.

It is widely understood that an organization's structure is closely intertwined with its strategic management processes. There are three main perspectives on the relationship between strategy and structure. The first is that structure follows strategy, as narrated by Chandler (1962): strategic choices determine organizational structure. Second, strategy follows structure, as mentioned by Mintzberg (1979): organizational structure influences strategic decisions. The third view is a more balanced one, which states that strategy and structure are intertwined and complementary (Kaplan & Norton, 2006; Kim & Mauborgne, 2009).

In the context of Nepali universities, the major university structure has been fixed by the act, whereas the university itself can fix its organization within the parameters of the act. Furthermore, the universities can frame their organizational structure based on the functions of

the university. In this context, all three phenomena as narrated earlier were observed. However, organizational structures often hinder effective strategic management because of their rigidity and lack of flexibility. Decentralized structures allow HEIs to adapt more effectively to environmental changes (Burns & Stalker, 1961). However, the combination of hierarchical and democratic principles within HEIs frequently leads to confusion in decision-making, as noted by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Katz and Kahn (1978).

Political Management

Political management is a distinct and significant part of strategic management carried out by HEIs in Nepal. Political leaders' interference typically restricts the implementation of plans and decisions, further complicating strategic delivery. At the same time, political interference, especially with powerful leaders from different parties, diminishes autonomy and confuses alignment with the national development priorities of the strategic plan. It is a given fact that political interference plays havoc with strategic management in Nepali HEIs, and hence the very stability and sustenance of these institutions are at stake.

Ownership and Commitment

Successful application of strategic management in HEIs requires ownership and commitment to the strategic planning process (Martin, 1992). Strategic plans are unlikely to be completed successfully without essential commitment and ownership from key stakeholders such as leaders, academics, and administrative staff. Ensuring that all stakeholders are engaged in the strategic management process and committed to achieving the institution's goals is crucial for overcoming challenges and realizing the benefits of strategic planning.

Survey data showed a highly positive correlation between SMP factors and critical factors. The interview and FGD have indicated that more emphasis on these factors is to be paid,

as they are considered to be critical factors of strategic management. The results of the studies suggest that the critical factors can have a positive impact on the adaptation and application of strategic management in higher education, and this is equally applicable in Nepali HEIs too.

The organizational structure, culture, information and communication system, internal governance, leadership, institutional autonomy, political management, and ownership and commitment were identified as critical factors of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal. The critical factors identified -autonomy, communication, governance, leadership, culture, structure, political management, and ownership and commitment—are all interrelated and have a significant impact on the strategic management of Nepali HEIs. As every component contributes uniquely to strategic outcomes, its combined impact affects the overall effectiveness of strategic management approaches. Additionally, external pressures, such as political interference, further complicate the interplay between these factors in the context of Nepali HEIs, as they have commonly undermined institutional autonomy and disrupted the strategic planning process.

This study's findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the significance of adaptability, flexibility, and alignment between strategy and structure for successful strategic management (Chandler, 1962; Mintzberg, 1979; Kaplan & Norton, 2006). However, the specific difficulties that Nepali HEIs face—especially in the areas of political management and governance—highlight the necessity and use of customized methods of strategic management that take into account the particular circumstances of these establishments. Political management's power-over strategy frequently destroys these institutions.

Obstacles to Strategic Management

My fourth research question was, 'what are the obstacles and challenges to strategic management in higher education in Nepal?' In this study, the following have been identified as

the barriers to the effective implementation of SMP in HEIs in Nepal. These challenges have greatly delayed the advancement of the institutions' performance in enhancing the quality of education and realization of their strategic objectives.

It was established that one of the major problems included a lack of appropriate knowledge and awareness regarding strategic planning amongst the academic leaders. This lack of awareness threatens to have a negative impact on the long-term vision as far as the alignment of strategies to institutional needs is concerned. In addition, political factors negatively interfere with strategic plans and cause poor information sharing and poor stakeholder cooperation. These concerns raise major deficits in the implementation, supervision, and examination of tactical operations.

Also, the study has noted that these difficulties are not accompanied by adequate transparency, accountability, or resources. Taken together, they have produced ill-thought-out and often irrelevant coping strategies that do not match with the real needs of the education sphere. The culturally and organizationally embedded structures of most HEIs, further complemented by various socio-political constraints, are also aversive when it comes to the implementation and sustainability of contextual strategic initiatives.

Thus, it is argued in the study that there is a need for major reforms in the Nepali HEIs' SMP by increasing awareness toward the centrality of strategic management and training of educational leaders. It is also important that the decision-making process of strategic management be participative to invite all the stakeholders.

The cooperation as well as the constant control and employment of the learned information may improve HEIs' strategic planning and implementation. It is important to resolve the problems of governance and organizational culture, as well as the relations for resource

management, for the enhancement of the strategic management process. By adopting these measures, HEIs in Nepal can better navigate the complexities of strategic management, ultimately leading to improved institutional performance and sustainability in the higher education sector.

The study showed the problems or obstacles of strategic management as they are associated with strategic planning, implementation, and M&E and control.

These problems can also be seen as individual, organizational, behavioral, and environmental factors. The insight gained from surveys, interviews, and FGDs suggests that there are problems with the SMP of HEIs, and these problems pose challenges to achieving goals.

Previous studies (Hayward, 2008) show similar obstacles and challenges in the adoption of strategic management processes in developing countries.

Many of the perceived challenges associated with strategic management in Nepal align with the conclusions drawn from previous studies by Alashloo, Castka, and Sharp (2005); Miller, Wilson, and Hickson (2004); Alexander (1985); Hrebiniak (2013); and Neilson, Martin, and Powers (2008). These studies underline the prevalence of organizational, individual, and environmental issues within the context of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal.

Institutional Performance

My fifth research question was, "What is the relationship between strategic management and the institutional performance of higher education? The findings suggest that strategic management practices encompassing planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control positively impact institutional performance of HEIs. Both qualitative and quantitative data have consistently highlighted improvements in teaching, learning, research, innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and institutional sustainability as outcomes of

effective strategic management. Insight from qualitative data and quantitative data shows a positive correlation between strategic management and institutional performance. The survey data showed a positive correlation between SMP variables and institutional performance. I have discussed the response to this question under the following subheadings.

Teaching and Learning

As mentioned earlier, the survey data showed a positive correlation between SMP variables and institutional performance variables. Interviews and FDGs have shown that strategic management plays a critical role in enhancing teaching and learning in Nepal's HEIs. There is always a significant improvement in educational quality when strategic planning, execution monitoring, and control are efficiently coordinated to make the teaching and learning environment more productive.

The pass percentages of CBACs from 2013/14 to 2021/22 show notable variability across years and campuses. Some campuses exhibited a significant upward trend, peaking at 51.59% in 2020/21. In contrast, other campuses generally maintained lower pass percentages, with fluctuations around the mid-20% range. Overall, the trends reveal mixed progress, with certain campuses achieving consistent improvement while others faced challenges in maintaining or increasing pass rates. Based on the increasing trend of pass percentages, it can be interpreted that SMP has enhanced the teaching and learning process.

SHEP (2007-2014) and HERP (2015-2020) have assisted the HEIs in providing faculty development, multimedia, and other techniques in teaching pedagogy. However, challenges like a high dropout rate, poor student attendance, and resistance to innovation, particularly the use of technology, continue to prevail. These problems speak of the need for constant training for the teachers and continuous improvement of the taught curricula to fit the market needs. However,

the attempts have not been completely successful, and still, a great many HEIs continue experiencing low pass rates with an increase in graduates experiencing difficulties finding adequate jobs. This is an indication that there are areas of low coverage in terms of teaching and learning processes, and this underlines the fact that the effort to close these gaps requires the practice of strategic management on a systematic basis.

The pass percentage stood at an average of 30 percent in general subjects and the annual system, whereas it was higher in semester and technical subjects. The graduation rate is low as compared to the annual enrollment rate. By integrating both data sets, it can be interpreted that strategies are to be geared up to enhance teaching and learning, which will eventually help to boost teaching and learning as per the expectation of the learners.

Generally, teaching and learning are crucial for HEIs functioning. It spans a wide spectrum of performance criteria covering both qualitative and quantitative measures. The first and most important aspect is an increment in students learning outcomes measured through knowledge acquisition, critical thinking and problem solving, and their communication skills.

Student engagement in classroom participation, time spent on learning activities, and participation in extracurricular activities are also tied to learning. Effectiveness of teaching processes is evaluated through course evaluation, student performance (exam), and the use of innovative teaching methods.

One of the common measures used by most of the HEIs in evaluating the performance is the graduation rate, retention rates, and drop-out rate of students. Aspects such as faculty performance, curriculum and program quality, student satisfaction, postgraduate success, and inclusiveness and accessibility in terms of diverse learners and access to technology, together

with participation of students in research and innovation, are the other measures of the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Research and Innovation

The survey data showed a positive correlation between SMP and institutional performance related to research and innovation. Nepali HEIs are lagging behind when it comes to research and innovation. However, they still have the potential to create new knowledge and hence drive social processes. The research-fostering practices are still in their embryonic stage, and their implementation appears to be very slow. Several HEIs have assigned budgets for research purposes, and the academic staff members are motivated through the provision of research grants to participate in research activity.

It was documented that faculty publications, including contributions to peer-reviewed and ranked journals, indicate growing engagement in academic research. Additionally, the initiation and continuation of publishing peer-reviewed journals by Nepali HEIs highlights a positive trend toward institutionalizing research and innovation in Nepal. These activities through faculty research reflect incremental progress, yet a lot has to be done to foster a research and innovation culture in the higher education landscape in Nepal.

Although research has begun at institutions like KU and TU with publications in peer-reviewed journals and external funding, the research culture and productivity remain decisive issues in the sector. The constraints include a slow pace of research, low research productivity, low investment in research and development, and a lack of academic freedom. Strategic management is critical to the task of establishing a research culture, engaging faculties, and mainstreaming research into the system. Nonetheless, a significant number of Nepalese HEIs are,

in the global context, yet to develop a strong culture and environment favorable to research and development.

Interviews and FGD insights have indicated a positive link between SMP and research and innovation. It was found that publication in peer-reviewed journals is a move toward an emphasis on research and innovation. The initiative taken by HEIs in publishing peer-reviewed journals also exemplifies the RDI initiative, which can be interpreted as appropriate focus on RDI helping to uplift the RDI culture of HEIs.

Market Position and Growth

The survey data of the study has revealed a positive correlation between SMP and institutional performance, particularly in market position and growth. TU has the highest number of constituent campuses, followed by MWU, AFU, KU, PU, and PokU. Similarly, TU also led in the number of affiliated campuses, followed by PU, PokU, KU, AFU, and MWU.

In terms of student enrollment, TU has the largest number of students, followed by PU, PokU, KU, MWU, and AFU. Among CBACs, some saw an increase in student numbers, while others experienced a decline.

TU also offered the most extensive program portfolio, followed by KU, PU, PokU, MWU, and AFU. CBACs showed variability in program offerings across campuses. Over a five-year period, HEIs were able to expand their range of programs significantly.

Regarding the World University Rankings (WUR), as of January 2021, KU ranked first among the six universities, followed by TU, PokU, AFU, PU, and MWU. HEIs highlighted their strategic positioning through QAA-certified campuses and promoted their top campuses to enhance market visibility.

There is a growing trend of HEIs in Nepal aligning their strategies with market demands, targeting students, parents, and employers. Data suggests that strategic management has enabled HEIs to strengthen their market position and achieve growth through infrastructure development, program expansion, and increased faculty credibility.

The expansion through affiliations has contributed to growth, but it has also raised concerns about maintaining academic standards and institutional independence. A shift in student preferences away from traditional fields such as humanities and social sciences has compelled institutions to either reformulate or discontinue these programs. Despite these challenges, strategic management has helped universities like KU and TU establish strong market positions and sustain their growth.

Most HEIs have experienced enrollment growth. However, recent years have seen a decline in some institutions due to the expansion of campuses and an increase in students seeking education abroad. Universities have expanded their market share through affiliations, and the diversified program portfolios indicate positive trends in their market positioning. The recorded achievement of WUR and QAA certification has further reinforced the competitive standing of HEIs. WUR data indicates that HEIs need significant improvements to better their rankings, as the current standings are not that satisfactory.

Overall, the integration of survey findings, FGDs, interviews, researcher's insights, and annual reports underscores the importance of strategic management in securing the market position and growth of HEIs in Nepal.

Financial Health

The HEIs in Nepal established as public institutions are heavily dependent on public funding supplemented by various funding sources, including tuition fees, internal resources, and

international support. Financial information showed that TU, AFU, and MWU, receiving substantial grants from the public exchequer supplemented by divergent funding sources, are in a safe financial position. Similarly, PU and PokU have also been getting public funding. However, their backbone of financing relied on student fees collected through their affiliated campuses. KU showed success in mobilizing resources, particularly regarding student fees and revenue raised from research and development. The constituent campuses, on the other hand, have been receiving funding from the government but are faced with governance issues in managing such funds.

CBACs tend to be less financially sustainable, and they mostly depend on student fee income and grants. This has forced the HEIs to search for other sources of revenue and offer more nontraditional programs to cater to such areas as infrastructure, research, and faculty compensation, as the grants from the government are being reduced. Financial data shows the financial health of HEIs, and this insight suggests that without public funding, none of the HEIs can remain financially healthy in the long run.

Stakeholder Satisfaction

Satisfaction among stakeholders of HEIs has mixed indications. The HEIs that undertook support from SHEP/HERP project funding had developed strategic planning with execution practices, resulting in an overall satisfaction rate of 67.9 percent, despite the faculty satisfaction rate being higher than 82.4 percent. Employers were typically more favorable toward male workers' reliability, honesty, and competency, especially in management and technical work, than toward female employees (Center for Policy Studies and Rural Development, 2014, 2020).

What is noticed is still a gap regarding the competencies of graduates and actual job requirements. HEIs that conform strictly to council standards and normativity can graduate more

competent graduates, indicating that these norms are to be raised as criteria for bettering graduates' performance.

Institutional Sustainability

In terms of financial perspective, universities in Nepal have multiple sources of revenue, such as government grants, student fees, endowments, charges levied to students studying in affiliated campuses, and other internal income. These funds have, however, proved to be inadequate to meet all expenses, hence relying on other sources of income.

When it comes to individual universities, TU, AFU, and MWU are heavily government-funded universities, whereas KU, PU, and PokU are not funded as much as TU. Most of these universities' expenditure burden was borne by student fees and fees and charges levied through affiliated campuses to the students studying in the affiliated campuses. When it comes to external funding to universities, KU has demonstrated noticeable achievement as compared to other universities.

CBACs face financial challenges, mainly relying on student fees and government grant funding, and have to adapt to the market requirements to remain economically sustainable and viable by offering programs that correspond to the needs of the labor market. Market-aligned academic programs that meet labor market demands are crucial for the financial sustainability of universities, and this is more crucial for HEIs that lack a substantial level of funding from the exchequer.

The CBACs have TU's affiliation and work under affiliation approval letters with self-developing rules, regulations, and working procedures. Their rules, regulations, and working procedures are not duly incorporated in the prevailing legislature of Nepal. Recently, there was an initiative to approve the working policies of these campuses by TU. However, this cannot be

considered a fully legally incorporated entity to date. Thus, there is always a question in having institutional sustainability of CBACs as legally registered and accepted institutions. However, they were considered an important organization of the higher education system in Nepal, and socially and politically they are termed as sustainable initiatives.

HEIs that are able to respond to the market needs and demands are sustainable in the long run through their marketable academic programs. Therefore, their capacity to design and offer academic programs is crucial for sustainability. Approval for market-relevant academic programs from the university or academic autonomy to design and implement academic programs is critical for HEIs. From this perspective, constituent campuses of the universities are sustainable, whereas CBACs are under the threat of sustainability.

The concept of institutional sustainability is also associated with good governance and strategic management, as the HEIs that incorporate in their program steps in systematic planning and assessment tend to be more sustainable.

Institutional Performance of HEIs

Theoretical frameworks provide a foundation for analyzing institutional performance in HEIs, as the systems theory emphasizes the interconnected nature of inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes, suggesting that institutional performance is shaped by a dynamic chain of interrelated factors. Nepal's higher education system has yet to establish consistent performance benchmarks, which could include metrics such as faculty and staff numbers, public funding levels, program diversity, student enrollment, pass rates, dropout rates, cost per student, and graduate output.

As this research has identified key components of institutional performance, including teaching and learning, research and innovation, financial health, stakeholder satisfaction, market

positioning, and sustainability, the findings aligned with existing literature and affirmed that robust strategic management practices only can enhance institutional performance to the satisfaction of both stakeholders and the market.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

The study has integrated both qualitative and quantitative insights to confirm that SMP is pivotal in achieving performance outcomes of the HEIs. Interviews offered in-depth and context-specific insights, while survey data provided generalizable evidence. Together, these findings have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between SMP and institutional performance metrics.

The central idea of strategic management is to enhance institutional performance by aligning resource allocation in a dynamic environment. HEIs in Nepal are also trying to achieve positive performance results. One of the cases is related to the TU certificate phase-out and the introduction of the semester system, where they achieved positive results through competency in managing stakeholders (both positive and negative contributors) politically. The balancing role of leadership is crucial, as it manages stakeholders by mitigating negative influences and leveraging opportunities for the achievement of strategic targets of HEIs, as highlighted by Makhdoom (2012) in stakeholder engagement and facilitating leadership.

Previous research also supports these conclusions. For example, George, Walker, and Monster (2019) highlighted the positive impact of strategic management on institutional performance, while Issac (2002), Hayward (2008), Haung (2012), and Rowley (2001) were in line with the findings. Similarly, Neioslon, Martin, and Powers (2008) emphasized the importance of strategic alignment in fostering institutional growth and stakeholder satisfaction.

Qualitative findings from this study underscore the importance of leadership, institutional autonomy, and organizational culture in successfully implementing SMP. These factors complement the survey results, which showed high mean values and a strong positive correlation between SMP and institutional performance.

Proposed Framework of Strategic Management

My sixth research question was, "How can strategic management be organized in well-HEIs in Nepal?" I have discussed the answer to this question by proposing a strategic management framework.

Proposed Strategic Management Framework

This framework is proposed for Nepali HEIs that suggests strategic planning can be formulated in a suitable environment of strategic management where special emphasis is placed on the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategies aimed at increasing performance.

This framework was developed after analyzing the models and frameworks of strategic management from high-performing HEIs in Nepal. The HEIs that are involved in formulating, implementing, monitoring, and controlling strategic management with their strategic management practices served as the baseline for the proposed framework. The proposed framework has a resemblance to other existing models as it further encompasses particular attributes specific to the context of Nepali HEIs.

The framework is also an extension of the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2, where internal, task, and external environmental inputs are described in the strategic management processes. These processes include strategy development and deployment, operation and management control, as well as regulations and examination in the achievement of institutional

objectives. The feedback loop that is part of the framework has a performance monitoring and feedback system based on its results.

Key Elements of the Framework

The framework recommends that an evaluation of the present performance should be central to the strategic planning process in most institutions. They emphasize the use of reactive (focusing on problems that exist in the present), interactive (responding to changes occurring in the working environment), and anticipative planning strategies (developing programs that take into account changes that may affect the working environment in the future).

The framework also defines performance measures inclusive of stakeholder satisfaction, financial returns, market share, quality of teaching and learning, and sustainability. It implies that there is a need for a performance management system in HEIs to be locally developed to suit these performance criteria. There is no all-round, well-functional standard performance management system or popular standard performance criteria at the national, system, or institutional level apart from a few indicators like gross enrollment ratio, STEM and non-STEM student enrollment, pass rates, the number of graduates produced, etc. In addition, critical factors- leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, information and communication systems, and autonomy-are imbedded in the framework to show that they function as both driving and constraining forces.

To follow the proposed strategic management framework, focus should be laid on the evaluation of the current institutional performance, which forms the basis of strategic planning. It highlights the dynamics of strategy formulation, deployment, control, and evaluation, emphasizing system-based strategic planning and organizational performance. The design also

calls for the establishment of a performance management system to provide an evaluation of performance based on metrics established for the institution.

Summary

Over the past 25 years, strategic planning has been practiced within Nepal's higher education landscape. However, of the seventeen universities incorporated under separate acts by the GON, three (RJU, NOU, and NSU) have yet to develop strategic plans. The main objective of strategic management is to anticipate emerging challenges, design future strategies, and achieve desired outcomes through proactive strategies and tactics. While HEIs are making efforts in this direction, the evidence indicates that these efforts are insufficient, particularly in terms of implementation, M&E, and control.

Nepal does not have a comprehensive strategic management framework at both the national and institutional levels. Without a guiding framework, planning practices have become mere academic exercises. Therefore, it is recommended that the proposed framework be adopted to guide the strategic management processes within HEIs in Nepal.

From a systems theory perspective, strategic management processes are integrated, interconnected, and interdependent, working together to achieve common goals. Environmental analysis should be conducted diligently to identify opportunities, challenges, threats, strengths, and weaknesses. Strategy formulation can be influenced by resource-based views, competition-based views, and resource dependency theory (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2015). Each of these perspectives has its influence on strategic management processes.

In the Nepali situation, most of the HEIs are involved in some form of strategic planning since they often require funding from the WB or the UGC. Consequently, the strategies employed

tend to represent and involve the terms, conditions, and priority areas dictated by the external bodies rather than the institutional objectives.

The existing SMP adopted in Nepali HEIs is still relatively ineffective in covering emerging issues. It is critical to establish a robust model to analyze these issues effectively and support the SMPs. Additionally, political interference in HEIs in Nepal demands urgent attention to prevent the distortion of academic culture by political forces.

Chapter Six

Proposed Framework for Strategic Management of HEIs

This chapter presents a proposed normative framework for strategic management at HEIs in Nepal. The framework consists of components like integrated processes, systems, and functions of formulation, execution, evaluation, and control of strategies for managing HEIs. The framework is based on relevant information and insights gained through various sources: literature review, historical perspective of the higher education system in Nepal, opportunities and challenges faced by the higher education milieu, findings derived from exploration into the experiences of HEIs, and the researcher's personal experience and judgment.

The strategic plan of an HEI guides institutional decisions, ensuring that strategic management aligns with the HEI's goals while adhering to the mandates set forth by the GoN and UGC to maintain operational and financial health both now and in the future. Although every strategic plan is unique and tailored to the specific culture and needs of the institution, it typically includes the following elements:

- An explanation of the planning process

- Foundational information (mission, vision, values, etc.)

- Desired outcomes (goals, objectives, etc.)

- Strategies and actions for achieving these goals

- Metrics for measuring success (performance metrics, key performance indicators

- (KPIs))

Rationale and Bases of Proposed Strategic Management Framework

The primary objective of proposing a strategic management framework for HEIs in Nepal is to introduce foresight in planning and management initiatives. Strategic management is an essential mechanism for enabling institutions to critically assess both their internal and external environments to adapt to changing contexts. Through this process, HEIs can evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats or challenges to identify strategic issues that require attention. By implementing such a framework, HEIs can align their strategies with their mission, vision, values, and overall goals, ensuring the institution's future is sustainably managed.

This proposed framework is not only intended to streamline the process of strategic planning but also to ensure a consistent approach across various HEIs in Nepal. It encourages institutions to engage in continuous monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms, all of which are necessary to ensure the successful execution of the crafted strategic plans. Ultimately, these processes will lead to the enhancement of teaching and learning outcomes, greater research and innovation outputs, sound financial management, improved market positioning, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional sustainability.

The foundation for the proposed framework was laid through an extensive review of strategic management models from the business, public, and education sectors. More importantly, I thoroughly examined the available strategic plans of HEIs in Nepal to understand their development, implementation, and effectiveness. This comprehensive review, combined with my twenty-five years of personal experience, as well as insights gathered from discussions with key academic and administrative leaders (e.g., vice-chancellors and campus chiefs), helped me shape the proposed framework. The feedback and expert opinions I received me to integrate best practices, theories, and context-specific insights to ensure the framework's relevance to Nepali HEIs.

One of the main observations from reviewing the existing strategic plans is the lack of a standardized framework or model to guide the entire spectrum of HEIs in Nepal. While many strategic plans have been prepared to meet the QAA requirements or to secure funding from the UGC or other donor agencies, there is still an absence of a true strategic management culture. Currently, strategic management is not seen as a transformative tool to help institutions assess their environment, prioritize actions, and allocate resources efficiently. Without a standardized strategic management model, institutions are left to rely on ad hoc, uncoordinated efforts that do not fully capitalize on the potential benefits of systematic planning.

I am suggesting this framework because HEIs in Nepal are struggling without proper guidance on how to navigate the complexities of institutional growth, sustainability, and academic excellence. A strategic management framework provides a clear vision for the future, detailing how institutions can achieve their goals and outlining the steps they need to take to get there. It also helps answer key questions: How will we know if we have succeeded? How do we measure our progress? What resources are needed to meet our goals?

Without such a framework, HEIs lack a structured approach to strategic planning and execution. This gap has led to missed opportunities for institutional development and a reliance on short-term goals rather than long-term visioning. By addressing these gaps, the proposed framework can provide a foundation upon which HEIs can build their strategic plans, ensuring that they are aligned with national priorities, institutional values, and global trends.

The strategic management framework proposed here can significantly contribute to the strategic planning processes of HEIs in Nepal by providing a clear, structured approach to institutional growth and sustainability. It offers HEIs a comprehensive tool to revamp their existing planning practices, ensuring that these practices are not only standardized but also tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each institution.

In particular, the framework encourages HEIs to:

Design a clear vision and mission that outline their long-term goals and core purposes by setting well-defined institutional values, goals, and objectives that focus on enhancing learning outcomes, fostering research and innovation, improving market positioning and growth, increasing stakeholder satisfaction, ensuring sound financial health, and securing long-term institutional sustainability.

Align institutional strategies with national and global priorities while maintaining a focus on their unique mission and vision.

Prioritize resource allocation for critical areas such as teaching quality, research output, infrastructure development, and market positioning.

Facilitate decision-making processes through the continuous assessment of external and internal factors.

Encourage innovation and collaboration by fostering a culture of continuous improvement and feedback.

Ensure sustainability by promoting a long-term vision that is responsive to the changing educational landscape, both locally and globally.

The proposed framework is novel in that it has integrated key strategic management factors such as institutional leadership, communication and information systems, organizational culture, structure, and autonomy. Further it has also delineated strategic management outcomes in terms of market position and growth, teaching and learning, research and innovation, financial position, stakeholders' satisfaction, and sustainability. The framework has clearly presented these factors as critical input and output dimensions representing a significant departure from those commonly addressed in the existing strategic management practices.

The development and implementation of a strategic management framework for HEIs in Nepal are both timely and necessary. It provides a comprehensive roadmap for institutional

transformation, allowing HEIs to address critical challenges, enhance performance, and sustain growth in an increasingly competitive global educational landscape. By integrating insights from existing strategic plans, feedback from academic leaders, and best practices from strategic management literature, this framework has the potential to revolutionize the way HEIs in Nepal operate and flourish.

Steering the Strategic Planning Process

Strategic planning is the process of envisioning the desired future. In this context, a disciplined and thoughtful process should be adopted by engaging relevant stakeholders in creating a shared future vision. It can be led either internally or externally. Firstly, HEI leaders who assess current institutional performance or posture can lead the strategic planning process. Secondly, leadership for strategic planning can be initiated through external agencies, ranging from funding agencies to regulating agencies or any other external bodies outside the HEI. Regardless of the leadership source, a major reference point for strategic planning for HEIs should be the national goals articulated in the Constitution of Nepal, 2015; Education Policy, 2019; allied policies related to higher education; and the Sixteenth Plan (2024/25-2029/30), as well as provincial plans (where applicable).

The Strategic Planning Team

Once the need for a strategic plan is established, it is essential to form a team dedicated to its preparation. A distinct strategic planning committee should be established to take on the responsibility of preparing, executing, monitoring, evaluating, and controlling the strategic plan for the HEI. Ensuring the involvement of both internal and external stakeholders is crucial throughout the process. Internal stakeholders include faculty, staff, students, and alumni, while

external stakeholders comprise community members, employers, funding agencies, and government bodies.

At the university level, two key mechanisms are necessary: a Steering Committee for Strategic Planning and a Strategic Planning Committee (SPC). The vice-chancellor (VC), as the chief executive officer of the university, plays a pivotal role in this process. The VC's vision and actions are critical in steering the HEI's strategic planning process. Given the technical nature of strategic plan preparation, a Strategic Planning Steering Committee (SPSC) should be established to develop the plan with expertise, ensuring broad representation across the university. The existing planning division or directorate should function as the secretary, with the planning unit serving as the secretariat of the strategic plan. When selecting SPC members, it is important to consider basic generic skills, such as conceptualization and communication, along with specific technical competencies.

The mechanism for strategy plan preparation should ensure representation from academic managers, faculty, general staff, students, alumni, employers, and other relevant stakeholders, coordinated by senior faculty members. If needed, consultants and experts may be engaged to fill gaps in knowledge, skills, and capabilities within the SPC, depending on available resources.

The strategic plan should be prepared with the appropriate level of participation from all stakeholders, from conception to completion. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches have strengths and weaknesses, and to mitigate the shortcomings, an integrative or participative approach is necessary. The strategic plan should thus be developed through a combination of top-down and bottom-up consultations, involving both internal and external stakeholders, and should be agreed upon in relevant strategic areas. However, the SPC should assess the context and select the most suitable approach accordingly.

Desired Inputs of the Proposed Framework

The desired inputs of the framework include internal, immediate, and external environmental inputs. From a systems theory perspective (Bertalanffy, 1969), all inputs are derived from various environments—internal, micro, and macro—processed within the system, and then returned as outputs and outcomes to the environment. This concept is supported by Wheelen, Hunger, Hoffman, and Bamford (2016); Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, and Manikutty (2012); David and David (2019); de Wit and Meyer (2014); and Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2016).

Assessing the Current Situation of HEI

The strategic management process begins with an assessment of the HEI's current situation. This involves evaluating two key aspects: the institution's current performance and its existing strategic posture.

Current Institutional Performance. The performance of HEIs can be assessed at macro, meso, and micro levels. Macro-level performance focuses on the overall performance of higher education at the national level. Meso-level performance relates to the performance of the higher education sector as a whole, while micro-level performance pertains to the performance of individual HEIs. At the institutional or micro level, it is crucial to assess the current performance of HEIs by evaluating areas such as teaching and learning, research and innovation, stakeholder satisfaction, financial health, market position, growth, and sustainability. Additionally, it is important to evaluate the existing performance and identify shortcomings within the higher education system in Nepal.

Current strategic posture of HEI. The current strategic posture of an HEI needs to be assessed to effectively move forward in terms of its vision, mission, core values, goals,

objectives, and policies. At this stage, the HEI should critically evaluate its vision in both the present context and future scenarios. Similarly, the mission should be analyzed to determine if it is aligned with the institution's direction. Additionally, the current goals and objectives should be reviewed to ensure they are appropriately articulated. Lastly, the HEI should evaluate its strategies, tactics, and actions to determine if they are truly beneficial to its stakeholders.

Assessing the Governance and Management System of the HEI. Governance and management practices should be reviewed, as they significantly influence the future direction of an HEI. Existing governance structures, functions, and processes need to be examined to identify gaps and assess how governance decisions have been implemented by the administration and management.

Strategic Analysis

Strategic analysis begins with the involvement of individuals responsible for contributing to the planning process. Their participation in data gathering and analysis is crucial at this stage. The industrial-organizational theory of Hitt, Ireland, Hoskisson, and Manikutty (2012) guides the external analysis; the resource-based view (Barney, 1991; Teece, 2009) informs the internal analysis; and contingency theory helps align the organization with its external environment.

Internal Analysis. The internal analysis encompasses a review of several critical aspects, including the existing vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives of the organization. It also involves evaluating organizational resources such as structure, culture, and business processes, as well as assessing leadership and other related elements.

Vision, Mission, and Goals. HEI strategies should align with the VMGO. The mission defines the organization's purpose and serves as a guiding compass. The vision represents the desired future state the HEI aims to achieve. The values of the HEI should shape behaviors and

decision-making processes. Organizational goals specify the broader targets towards which efforts are directed; while they provide general guidance, they should be actionable. Objectives, on the other hand, are specific, measurable actions derived from goals. To ensure effective strategy, HEI needs to critically review its current vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives to assess their relevance, acceptance, and feasibility for implementation.

Strategies. HEIs have to ensure consistency between different hierarchical strategies. Institutional-level strategies should guide campus-level functional strategies, which in turn should guide programme-level strategies. Furthermore, program-level strategies should inform program-specific functional strategies. This alignment should be recursive, where program-level functional strategies contribute to program-level strategies, which then inform campus-level functional strategies and ultimately reinforce institutional-level strategies. Proper compatibility and integration across these levels are essential for reflecting a clear sense of the organization's identity and purpose.

Position in the Education Industry: Assess whether the HEI is well-positioned in the higher education market or if it faces challenges that may impact its ability to implement strategic changes effectively.

Product and Service Quality: Evaluate the quality of products and services offered by the HEI in comparison to those of other institutions in the higher education market.

Reputation and Brand: The reputation and brand of an HEI are crucial in the higher education sector. Assess the institution's standing in terms of student preference, recognition, and other relevant factors.

Financial Resources: Financial resources are essential for HEI operations. Examine sources of revenue, availability, and the overall financial health, including strengths and weaknesses.

Human Resources: Evaluate the experience, capabilities, knowledge, skills, and judgments of employees. Competencies, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the overall mix of human resources, should be assessed with future requirements in mind.

Organizational Systems and Processes: Review current systems and processes to identify strengths, best practices, weaknesses, and bottlenecks. Determine if the organization's business model supports or hinders its operations.

Physical Resources: Consider the level of technology, geographic locations, access to cost-effective suppliers, teaching and research facilities, and other physical resources such as equipment, labs, and libraries.

Informational and Communications Resources: Assess the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in managing the HEIs and their effectiveness in supporting organizational functions.

Organizational Culture: Analyze the organizational culture, including its beliefs, values, rituals, and practices. Evaluate whether the culture supports or conflicts with the HEI's strategies.

Organizational Structure: Examine how the organizational structure impacts operations. A structure aligned with strategies is a strength, while misalignment can be a weakness.

Organizational Leadership: Leadership is a critical factor. Assess how the vision, values, and qualities of the leadership influence the effectiveness of the HEI.

HEIs should thoroughly analyze their resources and capabilities from various perspectives. Resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized provide a competitive edge in the higher education market.

Stakeholder's Analysis. Organizational stakeholders play a crucial role in the strategy formulation, execution, evaluation, and control processes. Their concerns and interests should be considered early in the strategy development process. Identifying major stakeholders at the outset is essential to ensure their involvement in strategy formulation, execution, and evaluation as needed by the HEI. Stakeholders generally fall into two categories:

Primary Stakeholders (Students): Primary stakeholders include current and prospective students. HEIs need to assess their expectations, which typically include quality education, job placement, a well-equipped library, good sports facilities, advanced lab equipment, scholarship opportunities, modern technology, effective management, and future growth opportunities. While this list is not exhaustive, it is vital for HEIs to understand and address these expectations.

Secondary Stakeholders: Secondary stakeholders are individuals or groups that exert both positive and negative influence on the HEI and have specific expectations from them. These include parents of current and prospective students, government agencies, employers, the general public, faculty, non-teaching staff, donors, alumni, the Senate, and partnering institutions.

It is important to identify their expectations in terms of priorities and their level of influence or power. Stakeholders may have varying degrees of power and influence: some wield significant power, others have moderate or average influence, and some possess minimal influence. Additionally, assessing their cooperativeness with respect to HEI strategies is crucial. Some stakeholders may be highly cooperative, others may oppose certain strategies, and some

may exhibit unpredictable behavior. Based on their influence and cooperativeness, stakeholders should be actively engaged in the strategic process.

External Environmental Analysis

Every HEI is influenced by its environment in various ways. These influences can be broadly categorized into two types: task environment and macro (or general) environmental forces. HEIs need to conduct environmental scanning, a systematic and scientific process of gathering and analyzing data to understand relevant trends and forces affecting them.

Task Environmental Analysis: The task environment consists of directly related forces or elements that can positively or negatively impact the HEI. These elements include competitors, suppliers, customers, new entrants, and substitutes, as outlined in Porter's Five Forces model (Porter, 1980). HEIs should identify these elements and assess their degree of influence.

Macro Environmental Analysis: Macro or general environmental forces are elements that influence HEIs from a broader perspective and are beyond their control. These forces include political-legal, economic, socio-cultural, technological, and ecological factors. Continuous scanning of the macro-environment is essential for HEIs to stay informed about external conditions affecting their operations.

Political-Legal Forces: These include the outcomes of elections, legislation, judicial decisions, and actions by various governmental bodies at all levels. Political and legal factors significantly impact HEIs, ranging from policy formation to legal compliance.

Economic Forces: Economic factors encompass fluctuations in GDP, inflation rates, interest rates, energy prices, healthcare costs, and labor market conditions. These factors influence both macro- and micro-economic aspects related to HEIs, including funding and resource availability.

Ecological Forces: These involve the ecological and natural surroundings, including environmental conditions in workplaces, cities, and living spaces. Such factors have long-term implications for HEIs, affecting their sustainability and operational practices.

Socio-Cultural Forces: Socio-cultural forces include social values, trends, traditions, and religious practices that influence HEIs. These elements reflect the collective beliefs and attitudes of society, affecting institutional culture and practices.

Technological Forces: Technology impacts HEIs by driving innovation and change within the higher education sector. It plays a crucial role in creating new opportunities and transforming educational practices globally.

SWOT/SWOC/PESTEL Analysis

After analyzing both the internal and external environments, it is essential to synthesize the findings into a more concrete form. This involves identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the HEI, as well as the opportunities and threats (or challenges) present in the external environment. To integrate these outcomes effectively, tools such as SWOT, SWOC, and PESTEL analysis can be employed.

In the context of strategic planning, four key scenarios arise from combining internal and external factors:

ST (Strengths and Threats): Leveraging the HEI's strengths to mitigate or counteract external threats.

SO (Strengths and Opportunities): Utilizing the HEI's strengths to seize or maximize opportunities available in the external environment.

Table 29

TOWS Matrix for HEIs

	Internal environmental outcome	External environmental outcome
ST	Use of strengths	Mitigate threats by using strengths.
SO	Use of strengths	Grasp the opportunities by using institutional strengths.
WT	Minimize the weaknesses.	Minimize the threats at a minimum level so that HE can recover from the threats and gain strengths.
WO	Minimize the weaknesses.	Capitalize on the opportunities.

Source: Weihrich, 1999

WT (Weaknesses and Threats): Addressing and minimizing internal weaknesses to reduce vulnerability to external threats.

WO (Weaknesses and Opportunities): Overcoming internal weaknesses to capitalize on external opportunities.

Higher education managers may choose to use the TOWS matrix (Table 22) to develop strategies based on these scenarios, guiding the institution towards more effective and strategic decision-making.

The Output of Strategic Analysis: Strategic Issues

The outcome of a thorough, objective, and systematic environmental analysis is the identification of strategic issues for the HEI. The planning team have to identify these strategic issues from non-strategic ones, focusing on critical areas that impact the institution's success. Strategic issues may include concerns such as low quality and relevance of education, a declining market share, subpar teaching and learning experiences, or poor financial performance. Based on the identified strategic issues, the HEI should develop and implement strategies to effectively address and resolve these challenges.

Direction Setting

Setting directions is a crucial task for HEIs, as it defines the rationale for their establishment and ongoing operation. While the primary responsibilities of any HEI typically include teaching, research, and societal service, these broad responsibilities should be articulated clearly and explicitly to establish a clear direction. Once the strategic analysis is completed and the SWOT profile is developed, the HEI should proceed to develop or revise its vision, mission, values, goals, and objectives in an integrated manner. This comprehensive approach ensures that the vision, mission, core values, goals, and objectives are cohesively aligned and effectively guide the institution's strategic planning and execution.

Vision Statement: The vision statement defines the desired future state and represents the organization's aspiration for what it aims to achieve in the long term. Institutional leaders should clearly articulate what the HEI intends to accomplish in the future.

Mission Statement: The mission statement outlines the core activities and focus of the HEI to reach its envisioned future. It typically includes the institution's commitment to providing quality education, conducting research, and offering services to society. It should encompass the main purpose, values, goals, stakeholder interests, unique characteristics, and sustainability objectives of the HEI.

Statement of Values: The statement of values highlights the principles that the HEI prioritizes in its operations. It serves as a set of guiding principles for both employees and management, steering their actions and decisions in alignment with the institution's core values.

Institutional Goals: Goals are broad, overarching aims that guide the mission of the HEI. They represent general yet achievable targets that the institution strives to reach, providing a directional framework for its activities.

Institutional Objectives: Objectives are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART) targets that contribute to achieving the broader goals. They provide actionable steps that are essential for the successful realization of the institutional goals.

Strategy Formulation

The process of addressing strategic issues identified during the strategic analysis phase is known as "strategic formulation." This phase commonly involves revisiting and, if necessary, revising the existing vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values of the HEI based on insights gained from the strategic analysis.

Three common scenarios may arise during this phase:

Existing Alignment: The HEI already has a vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values that align with its strategic needs. In this case, the current framework may be deemed satisfactory, and no major revisions are necessary.

Revisions Required: If the existing vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values do not meet expectations or align with the HEI's current strategic needs, they need to be revisited and adjusted to better fit the changing context.

Initial Development: When an HEI is formulating a strategic plan for the first time, it needs to develop its vision, mission, goals, objectives, and values from scratch to establish a clear strategic direction.

Addressing Strategic Issues

There may be multiple options available to address strategic issues. It is essential to develop a set of strategic options tailored to the specific situation. Identifying these options is a complex task, as it shapes the overall strategic direction and decisions of the HEI. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the strategic issues and potential solutions is crucial.

Evaluating Strategic Options

Strategic options should be evaluated based on resources, capabilities, and other relevant decision criteria. A detailed assessment of each option may be necessary to determine the best solution for addressing strategic issues. Key criteria for evaluating strategic options include suitability (Hardie, 1998), feasibility, and acceptability (Freeman, 1984). HEIs may use various tools, such as the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) matrix, General Electric Company's (GCE) matrix, and Hofer's matrix, to aid in selecting the most appropriate strategy.

Choosing Strategies and Strategic Decisions

Selecting a strategic option is a critical decision-making process. A strategic decision is characterized by its difficulty in reversal, significant resource commitment, and wide-ranging impact on the entire HEI. The long-term goals of the HEI will be influenced by this decision, which is inherently unstructured and complex.

Alignment

HEIs need to ensure that the chosen strategy aligns with the policies, plans, and external governance mechanisms set by the GoN. Additionally, middle-level strategies should be consistent with university-level strategies. It is also essential to ensure that critical aspects of the strategy align with the overall strategic direction of the HEI.

Finalizing the Strategic Plan

After finalizing the strategies, attention should shift to implementation of the strategic plan. This includes detailing how the strategic plan will be put into action, outlining the expected outcomes of the plan's implementation, and establishing mechanisms for evaluation and control. These considerations are crucial for successful execution and monitoring of the strategic plan.

Strategy Execution

Strategy execution is a critical and complex function in strategic management. As Kazmi (2008) notes, it involves activating strategies, managing change, and achieving effectiveness. Effective strategy execution requires HEI leaders to take responsibility for implementing the strategic plan, which is often more challenging than the planning phase. This process should bring about beneficial changes for stakeholders and involves numerous activities. Successful execution relies on consultation and ownership, with the active participation of all staff members.

Developing Action Plan. To execute the strategic plan, it is essential to develop a detailed action plan. The action plan, part of the broader operational plan, should outline actions in terms of timing, location, responsibilities, and methods. It breaks down the strategies into manageable tactics and specific actions necessary for achieving the chosen strategy.

Annual Policies, Programs, Goals, and Objectives. Short-term policies, programs, goals, and objectives should be developed based on the strategic plan. These annual plans and policies should contribute to or help achieve the strategic goals. Aligning annual plans with the strategic plan is crucial for effective execution.

Organizational Structure. The organizational structure, often described as the "blueprint" of the organization, defines authority, responsibilities, accountability, formal communication channels, and coordination mechanisms. Effective strategy implementation may require designing or adjusting the organizational structure to support the strategy. Academic managers should consider that strategy and structure are interdependent, with structure often following strategy (Mintzberg, 1993) and strategy aligning with structure (Chandler, 1962).

Resource Allocation. Strategic plans have to be supported by adequate resources, particularly financial resources. Resource management involves budgeting and addressing

financial allocations. The annual budget, which includes recurrent and capital expenditures, should be approved by the Senate or appropriate authority. The strategic plan needs to align with the annual budget to ensure successful implementation. Resources include financial, physical, human, informational, and other relevant components.

Leading to Execution. Effective leadership is crucial for strategy execution. Leaders should engage through transformational leadership, visionary approaches, and influential work. The choice of leadership style—democratic, laissez-faire, or autocratic—should fit the situation. A leader's competence, dedication, and sincerity impact organizational performance. Depending on the context, transactional or transformational leadership styles may be necessary.

Mobilizing and Managing Human Resources. Human resources are essential for the smooth operation of HEIs. This includes academia, administrators, faculty, and support personnel. Faculty members play a pivotal role in teaching, learning, and research. Ensuring that human resources have the necessary knowledge, skills, and capabilities is vital for successful strategy execution.

Coordination. Effective coordination is necessary to align strategy with execution. This includes coordinating tasks, people, methods, and various elements of the plan. Proper cooperation and coordination are essential for successful strategy implementation.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) System. ICT systems are crucial for both internal and external operations of HEIs. Developing and maintaining an appropriate level of ICT infrastructure is necessary for smooth strategy execution. Both formal and informal communication channels play a role in managing HEIs strategically.

Building a Supporting Culture for Change. Organizational culture should align with the strategy for effective execution. The notion that "culture eats strategy for breakfast"

underscores the importance of cultural compatibility. Leaders must understand, manage, and potentially change the organizational culture to support strategy execution. Strategy and culture should nurture each other, with strategy driving cultural change when necessary.

Change Management. Change management is an integral part of strategic execution. This involves initiating, executing, and maintaining changes as part of the strategic management process.

Strategy Evaluation and Control

Strategy monitoring is the final internal management process in strategic management. It involves assessing the effectiveness of chosen strategies in achieving goals and objectives. This process requires gathering information on the plan's execution and analyzing discrepancies between intended and realized strategies. Addressing these gaps involves corrective actions or reinforcing successful elements to ensure planned results are achieved. HEI leaders and administrators have to identify focus areas for control.

Establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The first step in evaluation and control is to establish key performance indicators or performance standards. A balanced scorecard, encompassing financial, internal process, customer, and innovation dimensions, is one option for HEIs. Regardless of the method chosen, it is essential to set key performance standards for the entire HEI or functional units, based on base-level data related to each strategy.

Developing a Monitoring System. HEIs have to develop a robust monitoring system that should include:

- A dedicated organizational structure with clear authority, responsibility, and accountability

- Human resources with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experience

- Monitoring partnerships and plans

Cost monitoring plans

Advocacy, communication, and cultural considerations related to monitoring

Routine program monitoring

Surveys and surveillance

Evaluation research and learning

Monitoring database supervision and data auditing

Data dissemination and use

Monitoring Progress. Monitoring should occur in parallel with strategy execution.

Performance can be measured qualitatively, quantitatively, or both. An effective information system is necessary to facilitate this process.

Performance Evaluation. Performance evaluation involves comparing actual performance against predefined benchmarks, standards, or KPIs to identify deviations and their causes. If deviations are detected, corrective actions should be taken to address any issues during execution. Depending on the situation, various control methods may be employed, including premises of control, special alert control, implementation control, and strategic surveillance.

Updating the Plan

The strategic plan should be updated or revised following its successful implementation (plan cycle completion) or in response to other triggers such as mid-cycle evaluations or annual reviews. This process involves several key steps:

Evaluate the Plan: Assess the success and failures of the plan by comparing intended objectives with actual results. Identify obstacles encountered and lessons learned. Document these findings to inform future planning.

Assess the External Environment: Update the strategic plan with the latest findings from an external environment assessment to ensure it remains relevant to current conditions.

Evaluate Institutional Capacity: Conduct a reassessment of institutional capacity in light of the updated external context. This helps determine if the organization has the necessary resources and capabilities to support the revised strategy.

Revise the Plan: Based on the evaluation and new insights, revise the strategic plan to address identified gaps and integrate new opportunities or challenges.

Update the Plan: Ensure that the revised plan is updated and communicated effectively to facilitate its smooth operation and implementation.

These steps ensure that the strategic plan remains dynamic and aligned with both internal and external changes, supporting the ongoing effectiveness and relevance of the HEI's strategic direction.

Expected Outputs and Outcomes of the Proposed Framework

The desired outcomes of the proposed framework are:

Teaching and Learning: Through quality curriculum and innovative teaching, learning, and assessment systems, produce graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that contribute to societal and economic transformation.

Research and Innovation: Promote and support research and innovation to advance academic and practical knowledge. Facilitate the generation, dissemination, and patenting of new knowledge for the broader benefit of society and the economy.

Market Position and Growth: Strengthen the institution's market position and ensure sustained growth.

Financial Well-being: Achieve financial stability and prosperity of HEIs as well as economic growth and development of the country can be visualized, and a healthy and vibrant society can be achieved.

Stakeholders' Satisfaction: Enhanced stakeholders' satisfaction through institutional processes. In addition to this, address and solve wider social problems through active community involvement.

Sustainability: Obtained sustainability in financial, institutional, socio-political, and ecological dimensions.

Critical Factors

The strategic management process is shaped by a variety of factors, including leadership, organisational culture, structure, information and communication systems, and autonomy, as highlighted by both researchers and practitioners (Bryson, 2018; Wheelen & Hunger, 2017). It is therefore crucial to consider these factors throughout the strategic management process, not merely to exert a one-way influence, but also to recognise how this influence can be reciprocal.

Conclusions

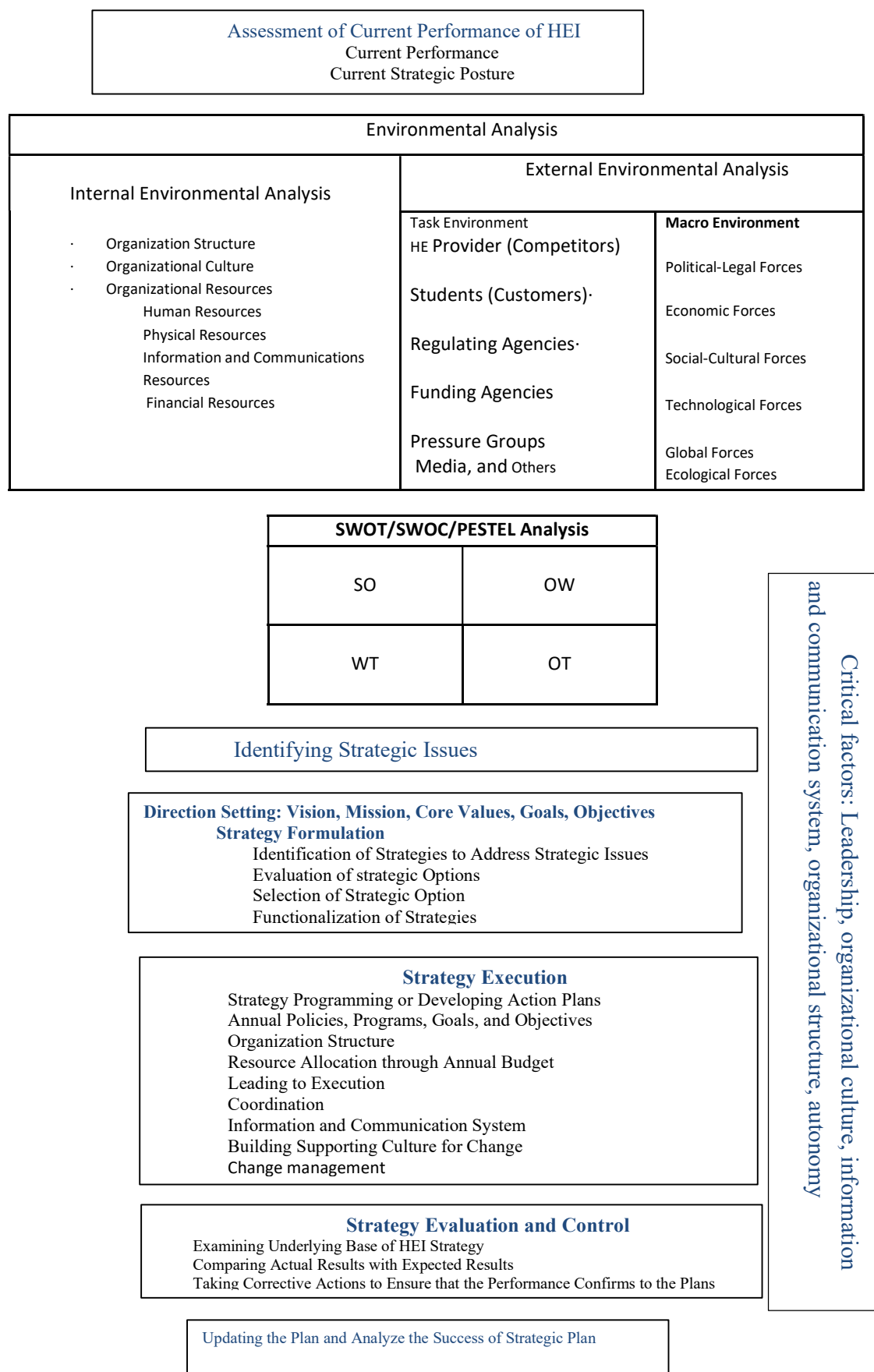
Strategic management is an ongoing learning experience that encompasses strategic analysis, formulation, and execution as a cyclical process. Monitoring, evaluation, and control are integral parts to this cycle, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptation.

The pace of change is both rapid and constant, with dynamics that can be either disruptive or indicative of a new normal. In this environment, maintaining business as usual is no longer viable. It is imperative for HEIs to demonstrate their real contributions by proving their value, redefining their purpose, and effectively responding to the evolving needs of society on a global scale.

Box 3: Brief Summary of Strategic Management Framework of HEI for Nepal

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Steering for Strategic Management of HEI On Boarding the Strategic Planning Team 2. Current Situation of HEI <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current Performance (Teaching-learning, enrollment, graduation rate, research and development, documentation and publication, finance, institutional management, human resources etc.) Strategic Posture Vision Mission Values Goals and Objectives Strategies Policies 5. Governance of HEI <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. University Senate/ Academic Council/ Executive Council b. Top Management Team 6. External environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Natural Physical Environment b. General/Macro Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political-Legal Environment Economic Environment Socio-Cultural Environment Technological Environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> c. Task Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HE Provider (Competitors) Students (Customers) Regulating Agencies Funding Agencies Pressure Groups Media, and others <ol style="list-style-type: none"> d. Summary of External Factors 7. Internal environment <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Organization Structure b. Organizational Culture c. Organizational Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Resources Physical Resources Information and Communications Resources Financial Resources |
|---|

- d. Summary of Internal Factors
- 8. Analysis of Strategic Factors (SWOT Analysis)
 - a. Situation Analysis (SWOT Analysis): Strategic Issues
 - b. Review of Mission, Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Values, and Norms
- 9. Strategic Alternatives and Recommended Strategies
 - a. Strategic Alternatives
 - b. Recommended Alternatives
- 10. Strategy Implementation
 - a. Strategy Programming or Developing Action Plans
 - b. Annual Policies, Programs, Goals, and Objectives (Short-term and Functional)
 - c. Annual Budget
 - d. Organization Structure
 - e. Resource Allocation
 - f. Leadership
 - g. Coordination
 - h. Information and Communication System
 - i. Building Supporting Culture for Change
 - j. Change Management
- 11. Evaluation and Control
 - a. Setting Performance Standards
 - b. Measuring Performance
 - c. Comparing Performance Against Standards
 - d. Taking Corrective Actions (if Deviation Found)
 - e. Review and Revisit Performance Standards
- 12. Integrating Critical Factors
 - a. Leadership
 - b. Organizational culture
 - c. Organizational information and communication system
 - d. Organization structure
 - e. Autonomy
- 12. Updating the Plan
 - a. Evaluation (Actual Plan)
 - b. Analysis of the Success of Strategic Plan (Actual Plan)
 - c. Assessment of the External Environment
 - d. Evaluation of Institutional Capacity
 - e. Revision of Strategic Plan
 - f. Updating of Strategic Plan

Figure 18*Proposed Framework of Strategic Management for HEIs in Nepal*

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

This concluding chapter encapsulates the essence of the entire dissertation, as the research problem of the dissertation is rooted in the emerging challenges posed by external factors in the higher education sub-sector and HEIs' response to these challenges through novel management techniques, namely strategic management. In Nepal's higher education context, research gaps existed in the adoption and application of strategic management. The central research problem was therefore to explore the strategic management practices of HEIs in Nepal.

Universities and their constituent campuses, schools, and departments, as well as university-affiliated campuses, share common goals, but their administrative processes differ due to institutional background, size, and history, which influence their strategic management. Universities are incorporated as a self-contained entity by an act and governed by external and internal agencies, where the senate works as the supreme decision-making body within national higher education policy. CBACs secure government funding through UGC, but the level of funding varies significantly, having multiple funding sources consisting of constituent and affiliated campuses with significant levels of autonomy except for medical education. The constituent campuses and schools have become an integral part of the university system. They run academic programs with the approval of the university by following its curriculum and carrying out teaching and learning activities. Financial, human, and physical resources, as well as other institutional aspects, are overseen by the university within their authorities devolved by the center.

Affiliated campuses' academic aspects are managed and controlled by the affiliating university; however, other institutional aspects are managed and controlled by the affiliated

institution itself. These campuses are either incorporated as a not-for-profit entity or a for-profit entity. They carry out teaching-learning activities as constituent campuses, but financial, human, and physical resources, as well as other institutional aspects, are overseen by themselves.

Regarding CBACs, it was established through the initiation of a passionate group of educationalists, politicians, social workers, and intellectuals, and the campus statute has not been incorporated elsewhere but is considered a legal entity based on the university's affiliation as a de facto entity. CBACs have multiple funding sources and are getting a minimum level of government funding via UGC. For-profit-affiliated campuses are self-funding in the source of their finance.

Major Themes of the Study

Strategic management is an emerging discipline focused on decision-making actions that determine whether an organization thrives, survives, or fails. It encompasses components such as planning, execution, M&E, and control. In Nepal, strategic planning has been practiced since 2000. However, there is limited evidence on how strategic management is implemented in HEIs. This study has investigated strategy development within HEIs, commonly used tools, and the processes involved in strategic management, including implementation, M&E, and control. The central research problem was to explore the strategic management practices in Nepalese HEIs.

The objectives of this study were to explore the extent of adoption and application of strategic management in HEIs in Nepal, explore the processes of strategic management, find out the tools used in strategic management, uncover the obstacles to strategic management in HEIs, explore critical factors influencing adoption of strategic management in HEIs, assess the impact of strategic management on the performance of HEIs, and propose a strategic management framework for HEIs in Nepal.

The rationale for selecting and conducting the present research lies in the fact that HEIs in Nepal have been engaged in strategic planning for about twenty years, and there has been an absence of documented research on strategic management practices. This study limited itself to HEIs (universities, their constituent campuses or organs, and CBACs) that are involved in strategic planning in some way or other and excluded private HEIs and health academics. The major limitations of this undertaking were the lack of relevant literature related to strategic management practices in Nepal and the fact that the data were collected in an adverse COVID-19 situation.

A concurrent mixed research design was applied, and the sample consisted of six universities, one TU central department, six TU constituent campuses, and twenty TU CBACs. A total of 54 interviews (face-to-face, via Zoom, and in the form of telephonic interviews supported by written interviews based on questions) were conducted, and two focus group discussions (FGDs) for campus chiefs and CMC members were conducted. In addition, survey questionnaires were distributed to 300 target participants, and 203 were received as usable responses (68.00%). Similarly, the strategic plans of six universities, six constituent campuses, one TU central department, and twenty CBACs were reviewed, along with the school-wise strategic plans of KU and the institute- and faculty-wise strategic plans of TU (six), among others.

Summary of the Study

The research results are classified into seven major themes based on research questions. Research question one aimed to identify the extent of adoption of strategic management practices by HEIs in Nepal. Research question two sought to identify how the strategic management process and tools were used in strategic management, particularly in formulating and evaluating strategies. Likewise, the third research question identified the problems associated with strategic

management as perceived by academic leaders and academic managers. Research question four tried to uncover how critical factors affected strategic management in Nepal. The next research question sought to examine the relationship between strategic management and institutional performance. The final research question was related to propose a framework for strategic management of HEIs in Nepal.

Adoption and Application of Strategic Management

The study indicated that most HEIs attempted to manage themselves strategically. Out of 14 universities established under separate university acts in Nepal, nine have their own strategic plans. Additionally, the majority of faculties and institutions at TU and KU have prepared faculty-, institution-, and school-wise strategic plans.

Strategic management Initiation. Nepal has been adopting strategic management since the early 2000s, driven by exogenous influence aiming to formalize strategic plans to align with global standards and national priorities. Key milestones include the early long-term development plans for TU, KU, and PokU. The SHEP and HERP projects implemented through WB assistance further accelerated strategic planning across universities and CBACs.

Levels of Strategic Planning. Nepali HEIs have adopted a hierarchical approach to strategic planning, with university faculty/institute and campus levels being the primary focus; however, there has been some misalignment of planning between these levels, highlighting the need for alignment with corporate, business, and functional-level planning as well.

Purpose and Approaches of Strategic Planning. Strategic planning in Nepali HEIs is crucial for operational efficiency, talent attraction, resource mobilization, and fulfilling external obligations from national and international funding bodies. It involves both instrumental and political factors, ensuring effective governance and compliance with regulatory and funding

regulations. This holistic approach aligns with Nepal's increased focus on accountability and quality enhancement in higher education.

Mechanisms of Strategic Planning. There were different mechanisms for proposing strategic plans. At the university level, the planning directorate or division is responsible for strategic planning. Most of the HEIs employed consultants or experts to develop strategic plan documents. The majority of HEIs have established their strategic planning teams, while a few have hired consultants. The planning processes progressed with internal and external stakeholders consulting at varied levels, with the internal one dominating. HEIs used both top-down and bottom-up approaches to devise strategies focusing on leadership decision-making and stakeholder feedback systems.

Aspects of Strategies. HEIs prioritize academic management to achieve societal impact, focusing on high-quality academic programs, curriculum innovation, research, and quality certification. Key goals include enhancing student engagement through experiential learning and ICT, as well as producing skilled and marketable graduates. Non-academic strategies support these objectives by addressing student enrollment, infrastructure, improving faculty and staff capabilities, modernizing processes through ICT, and fostering collaboration through strategic partnerships.

Contents of Strategic Plan. The contents of the strategic plans of HEIs outline their planning practices, execution roadmaps, and M&E and control processes, including the outlining of vision, mission, core values, goals and objectives, strategies, and action steps, while annual plans, programs, budgets, and progress reports are also there to demonstrate their implementation, monitoring, and control process.

Strategic Planning. Strategic planning consists of elements like awareness of strategic planning and goals, internal and external environmental analysis, and strategic choices made by HEIs. There was a positive correlation between strategic planning variables and mean and standard deviation, telling us that the result of practices of strategic planning was satisfactory.

Regarding the adoption and application of strategic management, the study found that a majority of participants were knowledgeable about strategic management (mean value of 3.49 with a standard deviation of 0.58) and the goals of HEIs (mean value of 3.58 with a standard deviation of 0.57). Furthermore, the interview indicated that there has been an increase in awareness of strategic management and strategic goals among educational leaders and academic managers.

The majority of participants indicated that HEIs have practiced some form of strategic analysis, including both internal and external environmental assessments. The mean value for external environment assessment was 3.25 with a standard deviation of 0.68, while the mean value for internal environment assessment was 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.62. Strategic choice had a mean value of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.57, planning alignment had a mean value of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.81, and overall strategic planning practices had a mean value of 3.42 with a standard deviation of 0.49. This revealed that HEIs have rated strategic plans at a satisfactory level.

Additionally, aspects related to strategy execution, such as short-term objectives, programs, and policies; resource planning; functional strategies; change management; general management; organizational structure; leadership; communication; organizational culture; internal governance and control; and alignment, were found to have mean values ranging from

3.29 to 4.34, with SD ranging between 0.57 and 0.82. This indicates that the practice of strategy execution was considered satisfactory.

Similarly, there was a positive correlation between SMP variables, as a correlation between strategic management awareness, strategic goal awareness, and overall strategic awareness was noted. Similarly, there are positive correlations among strategic planning and strategic implementation variables. Lastly, there is a strong positive correlation between strategic awareness, strategic planning, execution, M&E, and control.

From the findings, it can be concluded that all the HEIs under study have practiced strategic planning, but the degree of adoption and application varied across the HEIs. Similarly, most HEIs were limited to strategic planning, with few moves beyond strategic planning for strategy implementation, M&E, and control.

Strategic Execution. Factors like communication, organizational structure, functional strategies, organizational culture, internal governance, general management, resource planning, leadership, and change management and execution alignment were found to be correlated with each other at a significant level, and their mean value with standard deviation tells us that strategic execution practices were at a moderate to satisfactory level.

Strategic M&E and Control. Strategic control and feedback systems and corrective action were the two components of strategic M&E and control. The M&E practices related to strategic control and feedback systems showed a mean value of 3.19 with a standard deviation of 0.70, while corrective action had a mean value of 3.34 with a standard deviation of 0.83. The overall mean value for M&E practices was 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.69, which is slightly weaker compared to strategy formulation and execution.

There were positive correlations between strategic awareness and strategic planning ($r=0.747$), strategic planning and strategic implementation ($r=0.844$), and strategic implementation and strategic M&E and control ($r=0.782$). Similarly, comparing SMP across HEIs revealed that there was a difference in mean value, which was a measured statistically significant difference. Insights from the interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) revealed that strategic management practices existed in Nepali HEIs. However, the implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control processes were weaker compared to the planning practices.

It can be concluded that Nepali HEIs practiced strategic management to a moderate or satisfactory degree.

Process of Strategic Management

Systematic processes or approaches applied to strategic management by HEIs in Nepal are not clearly delineated. It was found that the steering of strategic planning was external instead of internal in the majority of cases of HEIs (TU, PU, MWU, TU faculties/institutes, and TU central department, all sampled CBACs, and constituent campuses under the study). The strategic plans were developed to meet the requirements of the WB-funded project as implemented by UGC. KU, PokU, and AFUs' steering of the strategic plan was found to be internal as opposed to other cases. Generally, the following strategic management processes were applied in the HEIs:

Strategic Planning Committee. Most HEIs have formed a mechanism for developing a strategic plan, but there is no uniform name or structure for these committees. Most of them have a strategic plan for meeting the UGC requirements (to get additional funding or to be involved in the QAA process). In most cases, HEIs formed strategic planning committees, and some hired consultants to craft the strategic plan.

Strategic Analysis and Formulation. The strategic planning committee or similar entity was responsible for strategic analysis and internal environmental analysis, stakeholder analysis, task analysis, and macro environmental analysis, which have gained momentum over the years. There was a growing awareness and practice toward strategic analysis of the HEIs.

Stakeholder consultations were held in varying degrees, and in most cases, such consultations were limited to internal stakeholders. Based on such discussions, the strategic planning committee developed the vision, mission, norms and values, goals and objectives, and strategic plans for the HEIs. The strategic plan drafted by the strategic planning committee or similar organ was discussed with stakeholders, was endorsed by the competent authority, and became the strategic plan of the HEIs.

Strategic Plan Execution. Previously, there were no systematic approaches to implementing strategic plans at HEIs. However, the study found that the most common mechanism for doing so was through the annual budget and program. Despite this, there was a pervasive issue of defining functional strategies and prioritizing resource allocation.

Strategic Monitoring and Control. The study found that M&E in HEIs lacked systematization as it was limited to mere formality. A poor evaluation culture was also prevalent, with very few HEIs involved in strategic evaluation.

Strategic Management Instruments Used by HEIs

HEIs in Nepal had limited use of strategic management tools such as SWOT analysis, SWOC analysis, and PESTEL analysis. However, these tools had limited applicability and they nearly failed to draw the essence from the analysis to raise strategic concerns. SWOT analysis was the most commonly used tool, followed by SWOC analysis and PESTEL analysis. Industry analysis, market studies, and strategic maps were rarely applied, and only two universities (TU and KU) used world university rankings.

Obstacles to Strategic Management of HEIs

The study identified thirty obstacles to strategic management in HEIs. The most frequently mentioned problems were bad politics, poor governance, poor leadership, inadequacy of resources, lack of autonomy, and poor communication. The perceived gravity of problems varied based on the participants' positions, experiences, and involvement in HEI governance, administration, and management.

The problems identified were more related to strategic planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control. Among them, ambiguous policy, politics in higher education, leadership crises, weak governance, absence of autonomy with accountability, lack of resources, ineffective management, and lack of knowledge, skills, and capabilities to use modern management tools and techniques were pointed out as major problems of strategic management.

Critical Factors of Strategic Management

Strategic management can be successful if critical factors are given due consideration and addressed appropriately. Factors such as autonomy, institutional leadership, governance and control, institutional culture, organizational structure, information and communication, employee motivation, coordination, and commitment affect strategic management, including strategy

formulation, execution, monitoring, and control, either positively or negatively. These essential factors are to be adjusted in strategic management practices accordingly.

There was a significant positive correlation among the critical factor variables, and all these factors were positively correlated with SMP. Similarly, these critical factors were different across universities and CBACs. This indicates that governance, leadership, communication, autonomy, organizational culture, and organizational structure are regarded as critical factors.

Governance. The study found that internal as well as external governance of HEIs was weak, making it challenging to conduct strategic planning exercises, environmental analysis, develop strategic options, and execute, monitor, and evaluate its effectiveness.

Autonomy. The research revealed that HEIs in Nepal, particularly universities, have a considerable degree of academic, human resources, financial, and institutional autonomy. However, the authority is centralized in the hands of the central leadership, making it difficult to decentralize autonomy to constituent campuses and schools. HEI leaders feel that the government, political parties, and professional councils encroach on HEIs' autonomy. There was a paradoxical situation unfolding in Nepal: while TU has been promoting "decentralization," "autonomy," and "academic autonomy" for its campuses, the establishment of the Medical Education Commission (MEC) has, paradoxically, curtailed the university's academic freedom, including its ability to determine tuition fees.

Leadership. The study found that leadership is crucial in creating a vision, programming for that vision, executing it, and monitoring, evaluating, and controlling the strategies. The appointment of HEI leaders based on political alignment poses a challenge to well-expected strategic management exercises.

Organizational Structure. The study found that leadership is crucial in creating a vision, programming for that vision, executing it, and monitoring, evaluating, and controlling the strategies. The appointment of HEI leaders based on political alignment poses a challenge to well-expected strategic management exercises. The research identified organizational structure as a critical factor for strategic management. The Nepali HEI landscape shows that structure and strategy are interdependent. However, the study further revealed that structure has a more significant influence on shaping the strategy.

Information and Communication System. The study emphasized the critical role of information and communication systems in planning, executing, evaluating, and controlling strategies. It recommends the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to address the need for effective information and communication systems to steer the organization dynamically.

Strategic Management and Institutional Performance

The fifth research question explored the impact of SMP on various performance dimensions within HEIs in Nepal, where challenges such as limited resources and political interferences prevail.

The mean value of institutional performance ranged from satisfactory to moderate, and there was a correlation between SMP variables and institutional performance. Institutional performance serves as the dependent variable, while SMP variables (strategic initiation, strategic planning, strategy execution, and M&E and control) function as independent variables. This model helps predict that institutional performance can be improved by enhancing SMP variables.

Survey results indicate that there was a positive correlation between strategic management practice variables (strategic initiation, strategic planning, strategy execution, and monitoring and

evaluation) and institutional performance variables, i.e., teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and sustainability.

The majority of interview and FGD participants emphasized that proper strategic management significantly contributes to improved institutional performance. They highlighted improvements not only in terms of teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, but also in financial health (including surplus), sustainability, and social responsibility towards a wider spectrum of stakeholders and the environment.

Both qualitative insight and quantitative data showed that proper strategic management enhanced the performance of HEIs in terms of teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and institutional sustainability. Proper strategic management indeed positively affects the performance of HEIs in Nepal in performance areas. To further improve strategic management, HEIs need to address key enablers such as governance, autonomy, leadership, organizational structure, and information and communication. By doing so, HEIs can improve their institutional performance in terms of teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and sustainability.

Trends in Strategic Management

As mentioned earlier, the study found that the majority of universities in Nepal have a strategic plan, and five of them have been engaged in strategic planning for over a decade. It indicates that strategic implementation is a recent development.

This study has uncovered the status of strategic management practices in Nepal's higher education sector, identifying numerous challenges. Strengthening market relevance and quality education, promoting collaborative research and innovation, and enhancing equitable access to

underprivileged groups are crucial steps to be taken in the national context. To address these challenges, leaders and administrators of HEIs should take action through institutional processes.

This study has two categories of implications: theoretical and empirical. Theoretical implications refer to general phenomena that are explained theoretically, while empirical implications relate to the practical application of the research findings.

Framework for Strategic Management of HEIs in Nepal

Numerous models were found in the literature, and HEIs across the world have been using them that are ‘fit for their specific purpose,’ taking into account the context and level of awareness. Designing a strategic management framework for HEIs in Nepal is a challenging task, but I have proposed a framework that takes into action and considers the higher education environment in Nepal and the directions that need to be followed for innovation and economic competitiveness through knowledge production, preservation, and educating the next generation to become knowledge workers. This framework is expected to be useful for policymakers, academic leaders, managers, and researchers as well.

The framework comprises five interconnected components that function synergistically, iteratively, and continuously by being interactive with their environment. The components receive inputs from the environment, process them as depicted in the framework, and produce outputs, outcomes, and impacts on the environment.

The first component is a review of the current posture of HEIs, which involves assessing whether current performance and posture are satisfactory to constituencies or not. The second component is strategic analysis, which is a systematic assessment of the internal environment, task environment or industry analysis, macro or general environmental analysis, including

stakeholder analysis, and competitive analysis. Tools such as SWOT analysis, SWOC, and PESTLE can be used for this purpose.

The third component is strategy formulation, which involves identifying strategic issues and addressing them by finding, evaluating, and choosing alternatives that best suit the HEI situation. It also involves developing the institution's vision, mission, norms and values, goals, and objectives.

Strategy execution is the most difficult task of strategic management, which involves putting the plan into action through a myriad of activities such as strategic planning, creating an action plan or an operational plan, developing annual policies, programs, goals, and objectives, developing an annual budget, allocating resources, structuring the organization, leading to execution, managing human resources, coordination, managing information and communication systems, building a supportive culture for change, and managing change.

The fifth and final component is strategy monitoring and evaluation, which involves monitoring, evaluation, and control. Monitoring involves observing the execution of a strategy as it is being implemented, while evaluation is a process of scientifically gathering information regarding the status of execution in a time-bound manner. Evaluation can be *ex ante*, ongoing, or *ex post*.

The proposed framework consists of seven interrelated and independent elements that perform together based on an open system perspective. The elements are the strategic planning steering committee, the strategic planning committee, current performance and strategic posture, strategic analysis, strategy formulation, strategy execution, and strategic monitoring, control, evaluation, and learning. Inputs are taken from the environment (internal, task, and macro),

processed through the integrated system, and sent back to the environment as strategic outputs, outcomes, and impacts within the broader environment or ecosystem.

Theoretical Implications of the Research

The theoretical implications pertain to the process of theory-building, where the study draws from system theory, resource-based theory, resource dependency theory, and competition-based theory to explain the unique challenges of strategic management in Nepali higher education. The study notes that the concept of autonomy in higher education was derived from American higher education culture and that the neoliberal reform of the 1990s introduced the concept of the market mechanism. However, the paradoxical situation in HEIs in Nepal indicates that the theory of change is quite different from the global situation.

Empirical Implications of the Research

The empirical implications of the study relate to its contributions to academic management practices and policy-making processes. The study has examined the strategic management practices in HEIs and evaluated the impact of strategic management on HEI's performance. It has identified the central problem of the research as being exploration of the strategic management practices in HEIs and uncovering the planning practices in terms of strategic management awareness, goal awareness, internal and external environmental scanning, strategic choices, and strategy planning. The study therefore makes a strong note on the adoption of specific strategic management practices by HEIs as a vehicle to respond to the changing context to enhance their performance. The findings of the study are implicative for academic managers, policymakers, and the research community.

Implications for Academic Managers. The study's findings provide valuable insights for academic managers, aiding in informed decision-making concerning strategic management

processes. Additionally, these results are pertinent to HEI leaders, providing a more profound understanding of the nuances of strategic management and its potential to enhance HEI's performance within the Nepali context. To bolster strategic management practices and optimize performance, the following implications are made for the HEIs in Nepal:

Academic leaders can meticulously evaluate the proposed framework of strategic management as outlined in Chapter 7, tailoring it to suit the internal context of their institutions while preserving its essence.

It is advantageous for HEI leaders and managers to acquaint themselves with modern management tools and techniques, such as strategic management, and to comprehend their potential benefits and limitations.

Conducting an assessment of HEIs' current state in terms of service, beneficiaries, and stakeholders can help manage expectations and enhance performance in meeting them.

Conducting internal as well as external environmental analysis to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges within HEIs is crucial.

Establishing specific, measurable, achievable, and realistic long-term and short-term goals and objectives, along with time-bound targets, is imperative.

Reviewing goals, objectives, and the mission statement and considering the organization's culture, structure, leadership, autonomy, governance, and communication are necessary to relate them to drivers of strategic execution in response to changing work environments.

Policy Implications. For policymakers, the study's findings may provide valuable insights for designing policy instruments to create a progressive environment for higher education in Nepal. HEIs in Nepal face numerous challenges, present and future, requiring the adoption of strategic management practices to achieve long-term sustainability and success.

Education and work activities should be complementary, as the declining relevance of higher education to the workforce weakens the links and transition points from education to the workforce; making higher education relevant is therefore imperative.

Changes in technology, the creation of new employment categories, the evolving nature of work, and the mismatch of education with the workforce pose challenges to traditional HEI programs. Continuous and lifelong learning are emerging globally, requiring HEIs to modify, revamp, or retrench their traditional programs.

The quality of HEIs has remained a significant issue in Nepalese graduates becoming unfit for work and poor performance at work. These research findings show that appropriate strategies as outlined in the dissertation can be beneficial to enhance and ensure the quality of HEIs.

Most universities and CBACs in Nepal are not financially sustainable without state funding. Funding policies have a broader impact not only on HEIs getting public funds but also on those who do not. The study findings can help to craft policies with strategies and resources, with appropriate prioritization, to ensure sustainability for both types of HEIs.

Governance (internal and external) and regulatory frameworks have a considerable impact on strategic planning, execution, monitoring, evaluation, and control. Academic freedom and autonomy have an impact on governance and strategy management practices. Thus, policymakers' awareness of institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and a healthy external governance and regulatory framework can be beneficial to promoting innovation in higher education.

Accountability is vital, not only for external stakeholders but also for internal stakeholders. While planning and executing, HEIs have to be aware of accountability, and

policymakers should promote authority, autonomy, and accountability, as pointed out by this research.

Implications for Further Research. Strategic management initiatives for HEIs in Nepal have mostly been experimental and evolving due to the absence of research in this field. This has limited the experience of its application in existing strategic management.

Since the performance of HEIs is affected by other aspects of management besides strategic management, QAA has been considered as a mechanism and tool to assure and enhance quality in higher education. A further study should be carried out on the relationship between strategic management, quality assurance, and accreditation systems in Nepal.

Similar research can be conducted by health academics since they are primarily responsible for imparting health education in Nepal. This will help to generalize the findings to a wider higher education ecosystem in Nepal.

The next research project can focus on private affiliated colleges, which are major players in the higher education landscape in Nepal. For-profit affiliated HEIs, especially medical and engineering colleges, are advised to undertake such research.

Limitations of the Study

This research has the following limitations.

Scope-related limitations: Initially, I was highly enthusiastic about formulating research aims and objectives. However, during the research processes, I realized that I needed to narrow them down temporarily due to cost constraints.

Similarly, I encountered the fact that there is a shortage of previous studies in strategic management in Nepal and in higher education in particular. This research explores a novel area in the Nepali context, making it challenging to find sufficient existing literature.

Next, there was the unavailability of data related to HEIs' inputs, processes, and outputs, as the inadequacy of sound EMIS adversely affected accurate data collection, and collecting data related to graduates and financial records was particularly challenging.

Methodologically related limitations: The original data collection plan was to cover six universities, twenty CBACs, eight TU autonomous campuses, and five for-profit HEIs. However, I could not cover for-profit HEIs due to time and cost, which was my limitation.

Another limitation involved the implementation of the data collection method. Repeated requests had to be made to campuses and participants to confirm their time. This was perceived as an annoying act by the participants, and there was a delay in receiving filled-out questionnaires and responses.

Similarly, the study was severely affected by the spread of COVID-19, as the data collection time was during the pandemic. The pandemic made it difficult to conduct on-site visits to all sampled HEIs. As a consequence, it took a longer time than stipulated, and an alternative model for data collection had been reorganized instead of the face-to-face interview modality.

Generalizability of findings-related limitations: This research is conducted in HEIs in Nepal. Nepal's higher education context, content, and processes are unique, with some similarities to the other developing countries and distinct differences from developed nations. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized globally and are subject to limitations in their applicability.

The individual participants in interviews and surveys were expected to be fully knowledgeable about the required aspects of strategic management, and the survey results were drawn from those who returned the questionnaire.

Researcher's Reflection

The reflection of the research plan spans from its conception to completion, encompassing corrective processes, lessons learned, and experiences gained throughout the journey. Personal reflection is crucial at every stage of the research process, from proposal development to presentation, research methodology, data collection and analysis, and dissertation writing. It became clear to me that research is an iterative process, and I gained valuable corrective lessons and experiences during the entire journey.

Initially, I was in the management stream of education and later pursued educational leadership. With over twenty years of experience with UGC, I have become a learner of higher education planning, budgeting, and funding systems. I had the opportunity to observe the strategic plans of numerous HEIs prepared for HERP funding or QAA requirements, which sparked my interest in the subject. At first, I felt overwhelmed by the scope of my research, but as I progressed, I narrowed it down to make my study manageable.

The literature review, thematic, policy, or theoretical review, along with review of contemporary research, helped me identify research gaps and lapses and develop a conceptual framework based on these perspectives.

Creswell and Garratt (2008) and Onwucgbuzie and Johnson (2006) suggest that mono-method research is simpler than mixed-method research. Initially, I intended to use mixed methodology to grasp knowledge on both qualitative and quantitative methods. I employed a mixed design approach, but I soon realized that each methodology has its own unique strengths and weaknesses, and mixed methodology also has unique strengths and weaknesses. Mastering these strengths and becoming aware of weaknesses is crucial for using the mixed method, as Sahin and Oztürk (2019) narrate. In the field, I discovered that mixed methodology provides a

unique experience in dealing with both the quantitative and qualitative nature of inquiry and conveying meaning differently. The methodological choice and application significantly affect understanding strategic management exercises in the Nepali context. I used various tools, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, FGDs, observations, and a survey questionnaire. I assessed the credibility, transferability, dependability, and triangulation of qualitative data and the validity and reliability of quantitative data, presenting both in a holistic manner.

The most challenging and interesting task was interviewing participants. As I work at UGC, they know me, so I had to be very cautious, avoiding bias and prejudice and staying focused on the topic. Interviews with higher authorities were particularly challenging. I collected quantitative data through a survey questionnaire and the HEI's record system.

During the data analysis phase, I analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data, which have different analysis methods. It was challenging to understand the holistic picture, but I learned to use SPSS for quantitative data analysis and MAXQDA for qualitative data interpretation, where numerous categories emerged and specific themes were developed and triangulated with quantitative information.

The evidence-based findings and outcomes supported the research claims, and the discussions were based on the data and findings. The comparable results had not previously been reported in Nepal, and the qualitative findings were unique in the Nepali setting. The inquiry revealed inadequate connection and coherence with priorities, fundraising, rewards, and the accreditation process.

Concluding Statement

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on HEIs' research by addressing the gaps in strategic management practices in Nepal. It is revealed that the practices of strategic management and the level of implementation vary across different HEIs. While some are still in the early stages, a few HEIs are in a better position. The results demonstrate a strong correlation between environmental scanning, strategy formulation, execution, monitoring, evaluation, and the control of HEIs' performance in teaching and learning, research and innovation, market position and growth, financial health, and institutional sustainability.

The most critical aspect of higher education is to have a clear strategic vision, a sharper focus on strategically important goals, and a deeper understanding of a rapidly changing environment that presents a new set of challenges, as highlighted by Wilson (1994). Strategic planning is the initial step towards addressing these challenges.

The research study emphasized the critical role of strategic management practices in HEIs in Nepal, stressing the necessity of innovation and adaptability in response to rapidly changing societal, economic, and technological conditions. By incorporating both global best practices and local contexts, the study highlighted strategic management as a key tool for addressing complex challenges in HEIs, such as demographic shifts, financial limitations, and evolving academic demands. The study urged academic managers and institutional leaders to prioritize strategic initiatives that enhance institutional capabilities, encourage innovation, and drive excellence across all areas of higher education. Ultimately, adopting a dynamic approach to strategic management will better equip Nepali HEIs to act as transformative agents, committed to advancing knowledge, fostering human development, and contributing to societal progress.

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Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Study on Strategic Management of HEIs in Nepal**Dear Sir/Madam,**

This is Kedar Prasad Acharya, Ph.D. Scholar at the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University. I am undertaking Ph.D. research on “Strategic Management of HEIs in Nepal” under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Basu Dev Kafle.

I am pleased to inform you that your name has been selected as a respondent for the study. Therefore, I request you to kindly provide your opinions according to your experience and feelings about the theme of the study. Your response will be kept completely confidential and collectively presented in the statistical form kindly request you to filled-up the questionnaire so that I can complete my research work in time.

Personal Profile

Name: - (Optional).....

Age: -.....

Sex: - ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Other

Name of your Organization: -.....

Address of organization: -

Contact No: -

Category of organization: -

University ☐ Constituent Campus/Central Department/School ☐ Community-based affiliated Campus ☐Affiliated Private Campus ☐ Other (Please specify) ☐.....Category of Job Position: - Academic ☐ Administrative ☐ Academia cum Administrative ☐

Job Position: -.....

Year/s of service: -.....

Academic qualification: -

Ph.D. ☐ M. Phil ☐ Master ☐ Bachelor ☐ Other ☐

Your Faculty group: -

Management ☐ Humanities & Social Sciences ☐ Science & Technology ☐ Medicine ☐Engineering ☐ Education ☐ Law ☐

Please read the following statements and circle the appropriate alternative number that comes closest to your opinion.						
	Statement	Very Much (5)	Much (4)	Moderate (3)	Less/Little (2)	Not at all/Least (1)
A1	Strategic management concept					
1	HEI adopted strategic management practices to a satisfactory level.	5	4	3	2	1
2	How well are you acquainted with and committed to strategic management?	5	4	3	2	1
3	Are you familiar with strategic management and strategic decisions?	5	4	3	2	1
4	With what frequency does your HEI use strategic management to improve the operation of HEIS?	5	4	3	2	1
5	Does your HEI emphasize long-run planning over short-run planning?	5	4	3	2	1
A2	Mission/Objectives/Strategies/Stakeholders Expectations					
1	How clear are you about your HEI mission?	5	4	3	2	1
2	How clear are you about your HEI goals and objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent are you aware of your HEI's strategies?	5	4	3	2	1
4	How was your HEI given priority in increasing market share?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How much is your HEI concerned with understanding and respecting the values and interests of its stakeholders, i.e., students, employees, and employers?	5	4	3	2	1
6	To what extent do you think your HEI has been efficient and effective in its activities over the years?	5	4	3	2	1
7	How much do you think your HEI has been committed to and successful in achieving stakeholders' satisfaction?	5	4	3	2	1
B1	External Environmental Assessment					
1	How often does your HEI scan and analyze its external environment, e.g., economic, cultural, political, social, legal, technological, etc.?	5	4	3	2	1
2	How much is your HEI focused on external stakeholders like the government, students, employers, and competitors?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent does your HEI use tools of external environment analysis like PEST, scenario planning, Porter's 5 forces analysis, competitor analysis, strategic group analysis, ETOP, etc.?	5	4	3	2	1
4	Does your HEI prepare a competitor's profile?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How much is your HEI concerned with the issue of social responsibility (SR)?	5	4	3	2	1
B2	Internal Environmental Assessment					
1	How often does your HEI appraise its internal environment and its resources? (Organizational enablers: people, processes, technology, etc.)	5	4	3	2	1
2	Does your HEI use techniques of internal environment analysis like resource audits, value chain analysis, comparative analysis, benchmarking, strategic advantage analysis, etc.?	5	4	3	2	1
3	How much has your HEI identified and used its core competencies, skills, and resources?	5	4	3	2	1
4	How much has your HEI identified and used its critical success factors?	5	4	3	2	1

5	What level of effort does management put into reducing non-value-added activities?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How much is your HEI committed to benchmarking, comparing its activities (i.e., its performance with similar HEIs in the industry)?	5	4	3	2	1
7	When compared with the best HEI in Nepal, does your HEI's teaching and learning do very well?	5	4	3	2	1
8	After comparing, how much does your HEI attempt to improve its performance to that level?	5	4	3	2	1
B3	Strategic Choice					
1	Does your HEI prepare a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-and-threats (SWOT) or SWOC (concerns and challenges) analysis?	5	4	3	2	1
2	How consistent is your HEI's strategy with the external environment?	5	4	3	2	1
3	How consistent is your HEI strategy with its resources?	5	4	3	2	1
4	How consistent is your HEI's strategy with its objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How feasible is your HEI strategy in terms of implementation?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How acceptable is your HEI's strategy for different stakeholders?	5	4	3	2	1
7	To what extent does your HEI use techniques (i.e., the BCG matrix, the GEC matrix, and Hofer's matrix) in selecting the best strategy?	5	4	3	2	1
8	How consistently has your HEI followed growth and expansion strategies over the years?	5	4	3	2	1
C	Alignment					
1	The university strategy has been aligned with a national higher education policy.	5	4	3	2	1
2	The university strategy has been aligned with the national plan of GoN.	5	4	3	2	1
3	The affiliated college's strategy is aligned with the university's strategy.	5	4	3	2	1
4	Constituent colleges, schools, and organ strategies are aligned with the university's strategy.	5	4	3	2	1
5	HEI's strategy is aligned with the regulatory framework of regulating agencies, professional councils, QAA, and MOEST.	5	4	3	2	1
6	The strategy of HEI is aligned with the organizational structure.	5	4	3	2	1
7	The strategy of HEI is aligned with resource allocation.	5	4	3	2	1
8	The strategy of HEIs is aligned with the human resources working in HEIs.	5	4	3	2	1
9	The strategy of HEIs is aligned with teaching, learning, and conducting research processes in HEIs.	5	4	3	2	1
D	Strategy Implementation					
D1	Short-term objectives, programs, and policies					
1	Have you practiced the identification of short-term objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
2	Have you practiced the formulation of programs, policies, and procedures for less than or equal to one year?	5	4	3	2	1
3	Has your HEI designed an appropriate reward system?	5	4	3	2	1
4	Communication	5	4	3	2	1
5	How does your HEI communicate its strategic plan to its organizational members?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How does your HEI communicate its strategic plan to external stakeholders?	5	4	3	2	1

7	How much clarity is there in your HEI on the issue of authority, responsibility, and accountability?	5	4	3	2	1
D2	Organization Structure					
1	How much do you think the university strategy will affect the organizational structure of HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
2	Do you think that the present organizational structure is appropriate for implementing the current university strategy?	5	4	3	2	1
3	How decentralized or autonomous is the organizational structure of your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
4	Do you think that the span of control, unity of command, and unity of direction of your HEI are in line with the university strategy?	5	4	3	2	1
D3	Resource Planning					
1	To what extent has the university strategy affected the resource planning and allocation of your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
2	What is the degree of freedom (i.e., from the head office) regarding resource planning on the campuses of your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
3	How much does the campus strategy affect resource requirements and resource allocation for your department, campus, or section?	5	4	3	2	1
4	While the HEI acquires new resources, how much do you ensure consistency and linkages between the existing and new resources?	5	4	3	2	1
D4	General Management					
1	Has your HEI ensured the presence of a strong general management system of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling?	5	4	3	2	1
D5	Leadership					
1	How committed is your HEI to implementing the selected university strategy?	5	4	3	2	1
2	To what extent has the university strategy affected the type of leadership in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent are the present leaders and leadership styles capable of implementing the current university strategy effectively?	5	4	3	2	1
4	Does your HEI provide training to develop teachers and employees into a multi-skilled workforce?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How good is the present leadership in terms of appropriateness, inspiration, trust, communication, participatory decision-making, etc.?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How much is your HEI committed to the academic-executive development plan and succession plan?	5	4	3	2	1
D6	Organizational culture					
1	Do you think that HEI culture has an impact on strategy formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control?	5	4	3	2	1
2	Do you think that there is a culture of participation and ownership in strategy formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control among people working in the HEIs?	5	4	3	2	1
3	Is there any effort to change organizational culture to facilitate strategy formulation, implementation, M&E, and control?	5	4	3	2	1
D7	Internal locus of governance and control					

1	Do you feel that the internal governance of your HEI is favorable for the formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control of strategies?	5	4	3	2	1
2	Do you think that the present internal governance is appropriate for sound strategy management?	5	4	3	2	1
D8	Autonomy					
1	What is the degree of financial autonomy you have experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
2	What is the degree of academic autonomy you have experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
3	What is the degree of staffing autonomy you have experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
4	What is the degree of institutional autonomy you have experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
5	Do you feel a positive link between strategic management and financial autonomy?	5	4	3	2	1
6	Do you feel a positive link between strategic management and academic autonomy?	5	4	3	2	1
7	Do you feel a positive link between strategic management and staff autonomy?	5	4	3	2	1
8	Do you feel a positive link between strategic management and institutional autonomy?	5	4	3	2	1
D9	Functional Strategies					
1	Do top leaders have knowledge and skills in functional management areas like teaching and learning, research, finance and accounting, human resources, and information technology?	5	4	3	2	1
2	To what extent has the university's strategy affected the functional plans, strategies, and policies in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
3	How much is the functional academic manager motivated to implement functional plans, strategies, and policies in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
4	How do you consider the financing and accounting strategies of your HEI to contribute to the HEI's objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How sound do you consider the research and innovation strategies of your HEI in contributing to the HEI's objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How sound do you consider the teaching and learning strategies of your HEI in contributing to the HEI's objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
7	How sound do you consider the operations strategies of your HEI in contributing to the HEI's objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
8	How sound do you consider the human resources strategies of your HEI in contributing to the HEI's objectives?	5	4	3	2	1
9	How sound do you consider the general administration strategies of your HEI in contributing to the HEI's objective?	5	4	3	2	1
10	How much is your HEI concerned with the use of R&D and new technology?	5	4	3	2	1
11	How innovative is your HEI in revising its policies?	5	4	3	2	1
D10	Change Management					

1	How easy is it to bring strategic change to your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
2	To what extent does your academic leader encourage, inspire, and welcome new ideas of yours or others down the hierarchy?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent are traditional assumptions and approaches questioned in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
4	If change is introduced in your organization, what is the degree of top management involvement?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How much incremental change or TQM have you experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
6	How many transformational changes or re-engineerings have you experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
7	What extent of radical organizational redesign has your organization experienced to improve productivity and financial performance?	5	4	3	2	1
8	What is the degree of policy and strategic change you have experienced over the last few years in your HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
9	How do you think the incentive to re-engineer is motivating?	5	4	3	2	1
E1	Strategic Control and Feedback					
1	Does your HEI improve its strategic information system (SIS) by hiring new employees and training the existing ones in MIS and computing?	5	4	3	2	1
2	How closely is the successful implementation of the strategy tied up with timely communication and feedback?	5	4	3	2	1
3	Does the HEI's management properly reward positive (or punish negative) performance?	5	4	3	2	1
4	How much has the HEI focused on strategic and preventive control?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How effective is the strategic control process (i.e., Setting standards, measuring performance, comparing them, and taking corrective action)?	5	4	3	2	1
6	Does the HEI use quantitative and qualitative criteria in strategic control?	5	4	3	2	1
E2	Corrective Action					
1	To what extent does your HEI go into revising performance standards if they are found to be too high or too low?	5	4	3	2	1
2	To what extent can your HEI go about revising its implementation procedures if they are found inadequate?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent can the HEI go about revising its own strategy if that is found inadequate?	5	4	3	2	1
4	To what extent can your HEI go about revising its objective if that is found inadequate?	5	4	3	2	1
5	How regularly does your HEI monitor, evaluate, and review the strategy's implementation?	5	4	3	2	1
F1	Higher educational performance					
1	To what extent does strategy management enhance teaching and learning?	5	4	3	2	1
2	To what extent does strategy management enhance research and innovation?	5	4	3	2	1
3	To what extent does strategy management enhance the market position and growth of HEI?	5	4	3	2	1

4	To what extent does strategy management enhance the financial position of HEI?	5	4	3	2	1
5	To what extent does strategy management enhance institutional sustainability?	5	4	3	2	1

1. What are your suggestions for improving the formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control strategies of HEIs in Nepal?

.....What
are the foreseeable problems of strategy formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and control in HEIs in Nepal?

.....Any
other suggestions you want to provide that you think are relevant to the present study?

.....

Thank you very much for your kind cooperation and for sparing your valuable time.

Appendix B: Interview questionnaire for HEIs leadership

How strategies are formulated (Vision, mission, goals, objectives, strategies, etc.), implemented, monitored, evaluated, and controlled in HEIs in Nepal? (At Your University or Campus)

How are strategies formulated? -----

How are strategies executed? -----

How are strategies monitored and controlled? -----

How do the following institutional factors influence strategic management?

- Leadership,
- Autonomy,
- Internal governance and control,
- Communication,
- Organizational culture, and
- Organizational structural

What is the relationship between strategic management and the performance of HEIs?
(University/Campus)

- Teaching and learning
- Research and Innovation
- Financial health
- Institutional sustainability
- Market position and growth

What are the problems with Strategic Management in Nepal? (At the university/Campus Level)

How best can HEIs in Nepal formulate, implement, monitor, evaluate, and control strategies?

Any other suggestions?

Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire for Regulators

1. In your opinion, are HEIs in Nepal effectively crafting feasible institutional philosophies, visions, missions, goals, and objectives that align with national and global standards?
2. To what extent are HEIs able to identify and select appropriate strategies, and implement, monitor, evaluate, and control them to meet the council's norms and accreditation standards?
3. Do you believe that the institutional philosophy, vision, mission, goals, and strategies of HEIs are aligned with the professional council's policies, plans, norms, and standards? How well do these alignments reflect current sector requirements?
4. From your perspective, are HEIs in Nepal producing graduates with the skills, knowledge, and competencies required for professional success and relevance in the current job market?
5. How would you assess the governance and autonomy of HEIs in Nepal in relation to strategic management?
6. What recommendations would you suggest for HEIs to improve strategic formulation, execution, and monitoring to meet both internal and external stakeholder expectations, including those set by the professional council?

Appendix D: Ten Year Action Plan of KU

1. The ten-year action plan approved by the KU Senate on August 14, 2012, mentioned the following strategies and targets:
2. Currently (as of August 14, 2012), the university is ranked within 4300 in the University World Ranking, within 1200 in Asia, and within 100 in South Asia. By 2022, it aims to reach within 500 in the World University Ranking and within 200 rankings in Asia as a teaching and research residential university
3. By 2019, it will be a world-class university with a global rank within the top 500 universities in the world and a university in Asia within the rank of 100
4. critically examined the aspects of physical condition; teachers and staff; enrollment capacity and production capacity; library facility and management; collaboration with foreign universities; affiliated campuses; provision of scholarships; research funding and types of research; corpus fund;
5. The value of university assets ranges from \$4 billion to \$10 billion
6. Arrange to have 200 world-class professors at the university
7. to improve research performance
8. To make the schools of the university self-reliant by providing them with financial and academic autonomy
9. Establish a board of trustees to take over the overall management of the university
10. The university needs more autonomy; the existing Senate dominates public authorities: the Chancellor-PM, Pro-Chancellor-Minister of MOEST Secretaries of Ministry of Finance and MOEST, and Honorable Member (Education) of the NPC

Source: KU, 2012

Appendix E: Mechanism of Strategic Plan Development

University	Mechanism for Strategic Plan Development	Source of Financing
TU	A steering committee and a strategic plan drafting committee have been formed.	
KU	• A foreign expert, through a UMN volunteer, facilitated the process. • A five-member strategic planning committee	• Expert costs are borne by UMN, and internal discussion costs are borne by KU. • KU resource
PU	Strategic Planning Committee	WB-funded SHEP
PokU	A three-member strategic planning team under the coordination of TU's professor	University's source
AFU	A consultant hired to craft a strategic plan & technical support from Cornell University, the Agriculture Innovation Partnership Project, and Satguru Consultancy for operational planning	The university's source for strategic planning and operational planning with USAID assistance
MWU	A six-member strategic plan drafting committee under the coordination of a university professor	University's source
CBAC	The strategic planning task is entrusted to the committee by giving it different names, such as the Strategic Planning Committee, the HERP Committee, the SAT Committee etc.	SHEP/HERP grant received from the UGC

Source: Strategic Plans of HEIs, 2020

Appendix F: Approaches to Plan Preparation of HEIs in Nepal

University	Approach
TU	TU's first strategic plan has used the approach of acquainting ideas through visits to countries such as Singapore, PR China, and Australia by strategic planning committee members as well as stakeholders' discussion within the university; the second and third plans have used stakeholders' discussion within the university as an approach to plan.
KU	KU's first plan was prepared with three workshops conducted with university stakeholders and internal stakeholder discussion, whereas the second plan was prepared by forming a strategic planning committee and extensive stakeholder discussion.
PU	Meetings of the strategic planning committee, guidance from the VC, and stakeholders' discussion within the university
PokU	Expert meetings, stakeholders' discussions within the university, and inputs from higher university authority
AFU	The strategic planning committee undertook stakeholder discussions within the university and with external stakeholders, as well as planning workshops for the strategic and operational plans involving stakeholders.
MWU	Discussions at the strategic planning steering committee, meetings of the strategic planning committee, and stakeholders' discussions within the university
CBAC	Meetings, input from the CMC, input from internal stakeholders, consultations with experts, and stakeholder discussion within the campus

Source: Strategic Plan of HEIs, 2020

Appendix G: Assessment of the Current Situation of HEIs

HEIs	Description
TU	Assessed structure, enrolment, academic programs, faculty and staff, internal and external efficiency, financing in the first plan; second plan assessed establishment and objectives, TU among other universities, structure and governance, organs under TU, decentralized and autonomous organs, academic programs, enrolments, curriculum and evaluation, teaching-learning practices, examination system, HRM, library and support services, cooperation and collaboration, resources mobilization, budget and financial management, property and facility management, culture, M&E practices, EMIs, knowledge society and TU; third strategic plan mentioned historical objective, objectives, organization, key milestones and current status in terms of HEIs, student teacher ratio, enrolment graduates and financing.
TU Central Department (2), Constituent Campus (5)	Two central departments were not mentioned: Out of six selected constituent campuses, only one assessed the current performance, covering academic programs, student enrollment, human resources, financial aspects, pass percentages, and graduates.
KU	Assessed major aspects including finance, human resources, academic programs, affiliation, research and development, and teaching and learning.
PU	Narrated aspects cover legal framework, organization and management, student enrollment, quality of teaching and learning, capacity and application of ICT, library and publishing services, volume and quality of research and dissemination, volume and quality of consultancy and public services, financial management, resource rationalization and sustainability, human resource management and public relations, infrastructure and estate management, productivity of national and international linkages, capacity, gender mainstreaming, and equity.
PokU	Not mentioned
MWU	Narrated by covering educational/academic status, student enrollment, examination system, curriculum, physical aspect, economic aspect, administrative aspect, organization structure, human resource management, library, coordination, and public relations management
AFU	Not mentioned
CBAC	Out of 20 selected campuses, 8 did not mention; the other did assessments covering programs, student enrollment, pass percentage, graduate rate, financing, physical infrastructure, labs, and libraries.

Source: Strategic Plan of Universities, 2020

Appendix H: Instruments Used in Strategic Management of HEIs in Nepal

HEI	Frequency	Instrument Used
TU Central	1	SWOT
TU Constituent Campuses	8	SWOT (7), Internal Analysis (1)
TU Central Departments	2	SWOT (1), Internal Analysis (1)
KU	1	SWOT
PU	1	SWOC
PokU	1	Not mentioned
MWU	1	SWOT
AFU	1	SWOC
CBAC	20	Not mentioned (5), SWOT (14), SWOT & PESTLE (1)

Source: Strategic Plan of HEIs, 2020

Appendix I: Core Values and Norms of HEIs in Nepal

A sense of community
 Academic Excellence
 Academic Freedom
 Academic freedom and freedom of expression
 Civic involvement
 Collaboration, service, and community involvement
 Community outreach and global engagement
 Compliance with social responsibility and accountability
 Cost minimization to lead the community
 Developmental responsibility
 Diversity and respect
 Efficiency
 Embrace and nurture national languages, cultures, literature, and arts.
 Equitable opportunity
 Equity and social justice
 Excellence
 Fostering student power
 Free from discrimination of any kind.
 Freedom of thought and expression
 Good governance-oriented management
 Good governance
 Inclusive development
 Inclusiveness
 Integrity and transparency
 Innovative-ness
 Leadership
 Ownership and responsiveness
 Coordinated working style

Lifelong learning

Participation and consensus decision making

Partnership

Public accountability

Quality

Quality and excellence

Quality orientation in the teaching-learning process

Research and innovative culture

Respect for diversity

Responsibility and accountability

Social Responsibility

Student-centered learning environment

Sustainability

Teamwork

Transparency

Transparency in governance and operation

The widest possible students' access to the university

Innovation, leadership, and collaboration that foster learning through education, scholarship, research, and community service

Opportunities for an open inquiry to support the positive transformation of students, faculty, and staff, institutions, and communities

caring, compassionate, and mutually respectful communities

Diversity in all its definitions, including who we are, how we think, and what we do

Ethical behavior based on integrity, equity, accountability, and responsibility

Transparent and inclusive decision making

Stewardship of resources that promote sustainability, prosperity, and equity for all in the local and global communities

Pride in our institution, our unique qualities, and our vital role

Financial sustainability is our responsibility and fundamental to our existence.

Advance principles of environmental, economic, and social sustainability, which enrich the lives of our students, faculty, and staff and the world we live in.

Professional and ethical standards

Institutional autonomy

Public accountability

Research relevance

To develop action plans and enhance them.

Significant investment in campus

To promote campus policies and ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formation, implementation, and monitoring of educational development

To develop a responsive, participatory, and accountable system of educational governance and management,

Implementation of integrated strategies for gender equality in education to change attitudes, values, and practice

To enhance the status, morale, and professionalism of teachers,

To harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve goals

Systematic monitoring of progress towards higher education goals and strategies at the national and international levels

Appendix J: Goals Articulated by Nepali Universities

TU	KU	PU	PokU	AFU	MWU
1. Prepare the capable human resources required for the overall development of Nepal. 2. Impart quality higher education. 3. Research multiple sectors 4. Protect and develop national culture and tradition. 5. Involve in extensive, empirical, and timely research and the creation of knowledge in the fields of arts, science, technology, and vocational	1. Borden, the university's financial base 2. Develop the faculty 3. Reassess the management system. 4. Improve existing physical facilities. 5. Create new areas of excellence. 6. Continue the master building plan. 7. Analyze and schedule which programs should be deleted or added to meet national needs. 8. Expand scholarship loans and grants.	1. Access to university education 2. Quality of graduates 3. Volume and quality of research and publication 4. Quality of public service 5. Institutional capacity development 6. Institutional infrastructure and desired academic buildings	1. Build the university system into an advanced center of learning and research. 2. Produce high-level human resources equipped with skill, knowledge, personality, and human values who can meet present-day work challenges, act as change agents, and give direction for the future, 3. serve as an institution to make higher education accessible to the underprivileged section of society, 4. make a positive contribution to academic research and scholarship that will underpin and strengthen the teaching curriculum and generate knowledge, 5. build a dynamic	1. Organizational excellence 2. Excellence in teaching 3. Excellence in research and extension	1. Academic 2. Research and 3. Third mission related goals have been mentioned, but altogether twenty-four goals have been listed. However, all cannot be considered goals with SMART criteria.

-
- institution
capable of
withstanding
changes,
6. pursue
excellence and
quality in all
aspects of the
University's
activities and
services,
7. Link the
research and
knowledge
with
productivity to
serve the
community,
especially the
weaker
section of
society.
-

Sources: AFU, 2015a; AFU, 2015 b; TU, 2018

Appendix K: VMGO & Quality and Standards of CBAC

Name of Affiliated Campuses	Institutional strategy for quality and standards	Organization of quality assurance system
Adikabi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campus	a) The institution has a strategic plan for academic and infrastructure development. B) The plan needs modification to address the objectives in the present context.	a) Internal quality monitoring cell; b) Individual departments
Babai Multiple Campus	a) The campus has developed a very specifically defined strategic vision and mission. However, these need to be compatible, consistent, and cohesive. A Strategic plan has been prepared. However, these need to be made meaningful and realistic. The action matrix needs to work out for its effective and time-bound implementation. The campus has not yet prepared its master plan. This needs to be developed with the consultation of experts and stakeholders. Vision, mission, and objectives need to be effectively communicated to stakeholders.	The organization's structure needs to be more effective. IQAAC is in place.
Balkumari College	a) The college strategic plan, working manual, and other related documents carry the VMGO of BKC. B) The institution may require revisiting its strategic plan periodically to comply with its VMGO with specific linkages to each other.	Internal quality management cell
Damak Multiple Campus	a) The vision, mission, and goals of the DMC have been mentioned in its main SSR. B) The institution has revised its strategic plan for 2016–2020. c) The plan may require regular modifications concerning meeting the goals.	IQAC
Janapriya Multiple Campuses	a) JMC has developed its 10-year strategic plan (2016-2025), stating its VMGO, as well as strategies for quality and standards. B) Faculty development, research promotion, student satisfaction, and a resourceful library are some of its major quality standards. c) The institution has to visit its strategic plan periodically to align its VMGO with each other.	IQAC recommended

		Efforts regarding the progress made are to be made visible.	
Janata Multiple Campus		The campus has developed a strategic plan for the years 2015–2020 AD, which envisions the VMGO of JMC. b) The institution may require revising its strategic plan periodically to comply with its VMGO.	IQAC
Kailali Multiple Campus		The institution has a strategic plan for academic and infrastructure development. The plan needs some modification to address the objectives in the present context. The mission and objectives are stated, but the channels of communication need to be improved.	Quality monitoring and checking unit
Lumbini Baniya Campus		a) The vision, mission, and goals of the LBC have been mentioned in its campus statute. B) The institution has revised its strategic plan for 2015–2020 AD. (C) The campus has prepared a strategic development plan for quality enhancement. The campus needs improvement, including from different stakeholders and resources.	IQAA Committee
Madhayabindu Campus	Multiple	a) The vision, mission, and goals of the DMC have been mentioned in its main SSR. B) The institution has revised its strategic plan for 2016–2020 AD. c) The plan may require regular modifications to meet the goals.	IQAA Committee
Mahakabi Devekota Multiple Campus		a) The vision, mission, and goals of the MDC have been mentioned in its strategic plan. B) The institution may need to revise its strategic plan to comply with its VMGO.	IQAC

Makawanpur Campus	Multiple	a) The vision, mission, and goals of the LBC have been mentioned in its campus statute. b) The institution has revised its strategic plan for 2016–2020 AD. C) The campus has prepared a strategic development plan that includes a plan for quality enhancement with the participation of different stakeholders.	IQAC
Rupendehi Campus		a) The vision, mission, and goals of the campus have been mentioned in its strategic plan. B) The plan may require modification to meet the goals and objectives of the institution.	IQAC and Student Quality Circle
Sahid Smiriti Campus	Multiple	-	
Saptagandhaki Campuses	Multiple	a) The vision, mission, and goals of the campus have been mentioned in its main document or statute. b) The campus has prepared a strategic development plan that includes a plan for quality enhancement. The campus needs to mobilize different stakeholders and resources.	IQAC
Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus		SGBC has developed its 5-year institutional strategic plan (2016–2021 AD). Its VMGO are well supported by strategies and a plan of action. B) The targeted timeline defined in the strategic plan needs to be followed and properly reported.	IQAC and Quality Circle
Sindhuli Multiple Campus		The institution has a strategic plan for academic and infrastructure development. The coherence and linkage between VMGO should be established.	IQAA Committee
Sukuna Multiple Campus		The institution has a strategic plan for academic and infrastructure development. The objective should be made more specific to fulfill the goals. It needs modifications to match the logical order of the hierarchy of objectives.	IQAA Committee
Tikapur Multiple Campus		VMGO are defined. The strategic plan is in operation, followed by an action plan, but it needs approval from the university authority.	IQAA Committee

Triyuga Campus	Janata	Multiple	a) The vision, mission, and goals of the campus have been mentioned in its main SSR. The institution has revised its strategic plan for 2016–2020 AD. The plan may require regular modifications to meet the goals.	IQAA Committee

Appendix L: Table of Contents of the Strategic Plan of Universities in Nepal

TU	KU	PU	PokU	MWU	AFU
1. Historical overview 2. Objectives of the university 3. Organization of the university 4. Key milestones of the university 5. Current status of the university 6. Key issues and challenges of Tribhuvan university 7. Operation context of university 8. Vision 2030 9. Mission 10. Core values 11. SWOT analysis 12. Strategies and actions 13. Implementation of strategies	1. Vision, mission and signature features 2. Expansion plan 3. Human resource development and management 4. Infrastructure and service development 5. Financial resource management and mobilization 6. External engagement 7. Research, innovation and publication 8. Adoption of technology 9. Brand visibility and impact	1. Overview 2. Analysis of university operations and the external environment 3. SWOC analysis 4. Vision 5. Mission 6. Goals 7. Values & Norms 8. Objectives 9. Strategies & target 10. Financial framework 11. Monitoring & evaluation system 12. Strategic outcomes	1. Introduction 2. Vision 3. Mission 4. Goals 5. The existing state of physical facilities and academic programs 6. Strategies 7. Implementation of strategies 8. Conclusion	1. Introduction 2. Significance of the strategic plan 3. Midwestern University: A historical overview 4. SWOT analysis 5. Twenty-Year strategic vision, mission & goals 6. vision, mission & goals 7. Emerging issues and priorities 8. Strategic plan 9. Policies, strategies, implementation agencies, performance metrics, the time frame 10. Guidelines for implementation of the twenty-year strategic plan 9. Expected outcomes after twenty-year 10. M & E	1. Introduction 2. Agriculture & Forestry University 3. The strategic plan 4. Vision 5. Mission 6. Core values 7. Strength, challenges & opportunities 8. Goals, objectives, and actions 9. Excellence in teaching 10. Excellence in research 11. Excellence in extension 12. Support system 13. Welfare practice 14. Sustainability strategies 15. Implementation of the strategic plan 16. Monitoring & evaluation

Source: TU, 2019; KU, 2022; PU, 2015; PokU, 2018; MWU, 2016; AFU, 2013

Appendix M: Aspects of Strategies of Universities in Nepal

Aspects	TU	KU	PU	PokU	MWU	AFU
Academic	Programs and Curriculum Examination and grading; Calendar of operations; Admission; Quality control and accreditation	Expansion of student enrollment and programs	Quality of graduates and access to university education	Strengthening the existing program; New programs; Curriculum and Evaluation; Quality assurance	Academic programs, examination system, quality assurance	Excellence in teaching
Research and development	Research and development	Research, Innovation, and publication	Volume and quality of research and publications	Research and publication	Research and Publication priorities	Excellence in research
Extension/Third mission	-	-	Quality of public service	-	-	Excellence in extension
Affiliation	Affiliation	-	Outreach, networking, and partnership	Collaboration and affiliation	Affiliation	-
Human resource	Personnel administration	Human resource development and management	-	Human resource management	Human resource management	Welfare practices
Finance	Financial management	Financial resource management and mobilization	-	Financial resource	Managing financial resources	-
Governance and management	Status of the university as a central university Organization design and administration Leadership	-	-	Structural arrangement Leadership and management; Institute building	Structure and Governance: Building up Institutional Culture -	Support system -
	Logistics and maintenance	-	Institutional capacity building	-	-	-

Information and communication	Information management and decision support systems	Adoptions of technology		Information and communication technology		
Infrastructure	-	Infrastructure and service development	Institutional infrastructure and the desired academic building	Infrastructure development and property management	Infrastructure development, library, and Laboratory management Utilization of facilities and land	-
Partnership	-	External engagement	-	Partnership with other stakeholders	Collaboration with universities and other organizations	-
-	-	Brand visibility and impact	-	-	Student welfare	-
-	-		-	-	Building up institutional culture	-

Appendix N: Aspects of Strategies of TU Constituent Campuses

PN Campus	Ayurved Campus	Public Adm.	Mahendra Campus	Mahendra R. Campus	CTC	Central Department of Bio-Technology
Structural setting of the Deemed university Partnership strategy	Build & expand the infrastructure capacities	Institutional management based upon strategic plan	Academic	Physical facilities & infrastructures	Academic	CDES as central of excellence for postgraduate and higher studies
International strategy	Strengthen & upscale the existing education, research, health care services	Financial and budgetary structure and sustainability	Infrastructure	Academic programs	Infrastructure	Establish a Model lab
Research & publication	Interlink, coordinate and collaborate	Quality assurance system		Pedagogy & instructional environment		Innovative national and international research projects
Physical infrastructure development		Human resource dev. System		Human resource dev.		
Academic programs		Infrastructure and other facilities		Library & online resources		
Quality assurance		Student services		Research, Innovation & use of ICT		
Human resource management		Grievance handling		Governance & management		
Financing strategy		Relationship with institutions within country		Student welfare		
Information & communication technology		Networking with other universities		Resource & sustainability scheme		
Student related activities		Program development				
Accessibility of higher education for underprivileged section of society		Program management & administration				
		Program performance				

Appendix O: Aspects of Strategies of CBAC

ABMC	BMC	BC	DMC	HKMC	JPMC	JMC	KMC	LBC	MBMC
Academic program/quality	Quality assurance & accreditation	Reform in teaching & learning	Institutional development (management)	Academic	Supra structure	Management institutional development	Physical infrastructure development	Mechanism for EMIS	Develop & maintain high quality academic programs
Research	Quality improvement	Reform in enrollment and support of students	Infrastructure development	Infrastructure development	Partnership strategy	Educational development	Faculty development	Research, development & publication	Create & expand opportunities for community participation
Community engagement	Infrastructure development	Skill development program for faculty	Educational quality development & professional development		Institutional relationship	Physical facilities development	Academic excellence	Renovation, construction & procurement	Increase access to quality education for deprived and minority groups
Academic programs	Fiscal stability	Facilities and development of administrative provision	Research, consultancy & extension		Research & publication	Sustainable financial development	Academic autonomy	Internal quality control mechanism	Produce outstanding, qualified and energetic graduates
Faculty & staff	Equity establishment	Infrastructure and construction work, counseling, placement, and tracer study	Publication & documentation		Faculty development	Research, publication & documentation	Program extension	Campus autonomy	Promote the academic program as per demand of changing preference
Internationalization	Program extension	Bringing in new programs	Extracurricular activities		Physical infrastructure	Governance	Institutional capacity	Good governance	Increase ethics and social

					e development		development	& social responsibility	responsibility
Climate of inclusion	Community connection/involvement	Reform in extra activities	Good governance		Academic programs		Student welfare and extra-curricular activities	Program extension and enhancement of co-curricular aspect	Infrastructure development
Support of ABC	e-library	External relations	Management of economic sources		Quality assurance		Campus community linkage	Strengthening management	Quality enhancement
			Gender equity and inclusiveness		Human resource development		Financial resource development & management	Health & environment	Program expansion
					Financial strategy				
					Re-accreditation				

Aspects of Strategies of CBAC (Continued)

Aspects of Strategies of CBRE (continued)																					
MDMC		MMC		RC		SSMC		SMC		SGBC		SMC		TMC		LBC		JMC			
Develop marketable (academic)		HR		Excellence in academic programs		Establish a management information system		Increase student enrollment and pass percentage		Program extension		Quality for QAA from UGC		HRD		Infrastructure development		Mechanism for EMIS		Institutional strengthening & expansion of service area	
Access to marginalized students		Attract and graduate higher quality students		Improvement in student enrollment and preparation of quality outcome		Financial sustained organization		Physical/infrastructure development		Enhance the excellence in education		Academic		Quality improvement		Research, development & publication		Expansion, development of academic programs & quality enhancement		HRD and inclusiveness	
Impart research based education		Develop the campus as a regional research institution		Extension of program and faculties		Produce market demanding manpower		Faculty development		Enhance the excellence in research development		Community participation		Fiscal sustainability		Construction & renovation		Research, publication & documentation		Expansion of access & enhancement of welfare to students	
Integrate teaching, learning, evaluation, research with CT		Integrate modern technology with teaching, learning, research and other activities		Establishment of quality assurance and accreditation cell		Establish a research culture within the campus		Institutional autonomy/quality reform		Develop the harmonious relationship with the community		Equity		Equity establishment		Internal quality control mechanism		Research, publication & documentation		Expansion of access & enhancement of welfare to students	
Prepare culturally aware, socially responsible & practical citizens		Enhance the physical facilities and improve the environment of the campus		Setting up HRM programs		Be a deemed university exercising autonomy		Library reform – virtual library reform				Management & governance		Program growth		Counseling, placement & tracer study		Expansion of access & enhancement of welfare to students			
MDC as a self-sustained institution		Promote external relations and improve the		Infrastructure development				Teaching methodology reform						Community connection/involvement		Good governance & social		Development & expansion			

image of the campus	and maintenance		responsibilities	of physical infrastructure
	Re-engineering the existing organizational structures	Institutional accreditation	Program extension & enhancement of curricular activities	Sustainable financial source identification on management
	Collaboration and networking with other institutions	Scholarship & fee waivers	Strengthen the management	Participation of stakeholders and linkage
			Health & environment	Library and ICT management

Annex P: Summary of Components of Strategic Plans of HEIs in Nepal

S.N.	Name of HEI	Vision	Mission	Core Values	Goals	Objectives	Strategies	Strategies Actions	Implementation Plan	M&E Plan	Tools	Financing Framework	Time Frame	Planning Cycle
1	TU	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	NA	2020-30	3rd
1.1	IOM	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	Yes	2014-19	First
1.2	IOF	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1.3	IOST	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	Yes	2014-18	First
1.4	IOE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	NA	2013-17	First
1.5	IAAS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	NA	2013-18	First
1.6	FOE	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
1.7	FOM	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	Yes	2013-18	First
1.8	FOL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	SWOT	NA	2014-18	First
1.9	FHSS	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SWOL	Yes	2022-24	Third
1.10	PN	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	NA	2016-20	First
1.11	CTC	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	Yes	2016-21	Third
1.12	Ayurveda	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SWOT	Yes	2012-16	Second
1.13	PAC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	SWOT	NA	2017-21	Second
1.14	MRC	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SWOT	Yes	2017-21	Second
1.15	MRMC													
1.16	CDBT	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	Yes	2017-21	First
2	KU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	SWOT	NA	2022-27	Second
2.1	KUSOMS													
2.2	KUSOED	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes					2017-27	2nd
2.3	KUSOS	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					2018-23	2nd
2.4	KUSOE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes						2nd
2.5	KUSOM	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					2013-17	2nd
2.6	KUSOL	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes						1st
2.7	KUSOA	NA	NA	NA				NA						2nd
3	PU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SWOC	Yes	2015-19	First
4	PokU	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	NA	Yes	2018-23	Fourth
5	AFU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NA	SWOT	NA	2023-32	Second
6	MWU	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	SWOL	Yes	2022-24	Third

Source: Strategic plans of HEIs of Nepal, 2022

Appendix Q: External Agencies Involved in M&E and Controlling HEIs

Agency	Focus	Frequency	Remarks
MOEST/GoN	Issue based	As and when necessary	
Auditor	Financial matters	Annual basis	Sometimes, it indicates adhering to plan documents.
Professional Councils	Minimum norms and standards set forth	Annual basis	Also ask VMGO of the HEI.
QAA at UGC	Quality criteria and benchmarks	LOI, pre-visit, PRT, post-visit, follow-up	Strategic plan; VMGO of the HEI; master plan
UGC	Grant related	As per need	Progress report, audit report

Source: Author's illustration, 2022

Appendix R: Pass Percentage of CBAC

Name of Affiliated Campuses	Pass percentages/Year								
	013/14	014/15	015/16	016/17	017/18	018/19	019/20	020/21	021/22
Adikabi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campuses	23	21.59	18.29	27.76	36.51	26.42	22.54	39.83	32.82
Babai Multiple Campus	13.69	15.89	21.63	23.03	25.76	30.49	29.88	24.22	25.25
Balkumari College	22.14	21.15	26.07	19.53	27.13	31.27	22.27	31.01	28.61
Damak Multiple Campus	27.2	22.85	32.33	37.3	38.5	22.81	21.13	42.15	37.72
Janapriya Multiple Campuses	28.65	29.12	29.88	27.26	16.01	27.14	17.96	25.21	23.18
Janata Multiple Campus	15.46	18.17	22.99	21.1	18.54	23.49	22.09	26.25	21.67
JS Murarka Campus	29.45	21.05	15.89	24.48	24.32	8.14	7.97	47.74	40.96
Kailali Multiple Campus	16.18	20.41	30.36	26.37	23.9	29.41	26.02	29.39	23.23
Lumbini Banijya Campus	24.8	25.28	35.04	34.04	27.08	32.16	25.34	28.65	26.76
Madhayabindu Multiple Campus	17.96	22.06	28.69	30.62	23.58	28.57	27.50	23.52	31.38
Mahakabi Devekota Multiple Campus	25.34	24.39	24.34	25.94	29.3	31.19	29.31	34.62	24.96
Makawanpur Multiple Campus	23.44	24.02	24.93	21.93	23.79	33.22	26.72	32.02	28.82
Rupendehi Campus	13.1	16.57	21.97	19.92	17.69	14.11	13.31	23.11	19.21
Sahid Smiriti Multiple Campus	14.16	15.93	21.55	20.56	18.22	21.03	12.39	21.89	20.39
Saptagandhaki Multiple Campus	20.14	24.61	26.43	24.19	25.37	23.9	21.81	33.71	30.46
Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	20.86	19.92	23.53	22.66	23.08	27.18	26.51	31.69	30.46
Sindhuli Multiple Campus	10.82	20.48	29.01	23.57	27.9	21.56	19.81	51.59	48.10
Sukuna Multiple Campus	29.98	24.21	29.91	29.67	28.56	32.04	30.74	47.16	33.74
Tikapur Multiple Campus	17.32	17.11	19.7	19.82	22.79	21.92	21.54	33.17	30.12
Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus	16.67	15.32	27.64	26.71	23.37	25.54	21.20	31.85	29.67

Appendix S: No of Graduates of Sampled CBAC

Name of Affiliated Campuses	No of graduates				
	014/15	015/16	016/17	017/18	018/19
Adikabi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campuses	89	119	108	150	
Babai Multiple Campus	123	67	104	109	152
Balkumari College	133		106	87	124
Damak Multiple Campus	98	152	175	192	133
Janapriya Multiple Campus	148	209	158	168	167
Janata Multiple Campus	130	142	154	171	151
JS Murarka Campus	152	129	150	112	71
Kailali Multiple Campus	446	665	617	398	695
Lumbini Banijya Campus	226	167	146	334	418*
Madhayabindu Multiple Campus	108	124	116	118	111*
Mahakabi Devekota Multiple Campus		54	41	55	21
Makawanpur Multiple Campus	182	322	189	243	260*
Rupendehi Campus	28	32	61	29	28
Sahid Smiriti Multiple Campus	241	245	257	289	318
Saptagandhaki Multiple Campuses	197	214	151	136	139*
Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	97	133	143	156	70*
Sindhuli Multiple Campus	89	107	84	40	43
Sukuna Multiple Campus	163	192	262	226	246
Tikapur Multiple Campus	177	238	146	138	119
Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus	198	201	221	211	56

Appendix T: Journals Published by Universities in Nepal

HEIs	Name of the Journal	Type
AFU	Journal of Agriculture and Forestry University	Peer Reviewed
	Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal	Peer Reviewed
	Journal of Education and Research	Peer Reviewed
	Kathmandu University Journal of Science, Engineering, and Technology (KUSET)	Peer Reviewed
KU	Nepal Tourism and Development Review (NTDR)	Peer Reviewed
	Polysemy: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Scholarship	Peer Reviewed
	Kathmandu University Medical Journal (KUMJ)	Magazine
	Forum for Interdisciplinary Discourse	KU Insider
PokU	KU Insider	
	The Journal of Business and Management	Peer Reviewed
MWU	Journal of Health and Allied Sciences	Peer Reviewed
	NA	NA
PU	Birat Journal of Health Sciences	Peer Reviewed
Ayurveda Campus	Journal of Ayurveda Campus	Peer Reviewed
Central Campus of Technology, TU	Himalayan Journal of Science and Technology	Peer Reviewed
Central Department of Biotechnology, TU	CTC Bulletin and Food Waves	General
Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal		Peer Reviewed
Mahendra Ratna Multiple Campus, Illam	1. Shikshak Journal 2. Pragya Ratna	Peer Reviewed Peer Reviewed
Padma Kanya Multiple Campus	NA	
Prithvi Narayan Campus	Journal of English and Cultural Studies (MJECS)	Peer Reviewed
Public Administration Campus	1. Prithvi Journal of Research and Innovation 2. Prithvi Academic Journal	Peer Reviewed
Aadikavi Bhanubhakta Campus	SJPG Journal	Peer Reviewed
Babai Multiple Campus	Journal of Aadikavi	Peer Reviewed
Balkumari College	NA	
Damak Multiple Campus	Journal of Balkumari College	Peer Reviewed
J.S. Murarka Multiple Campus	Damak Campus Journal	General
Janapriya Multiple Campus	Research Journal	Peer Reviewed
Janta Multiple Campus	1. Janapriya Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies 2. Journal of Tourism and Adventures	Peer Reviewed Peer Reviewed
Kailali Multiple Campus	NA	
Lumbini Baniya Campus	KMC Journal	Peer Reviewed
Madhyabindu Multiple Campus	1. The Lumbini Journal of Business and Statistics 2. The Lumbini Journal of English and Literature	Peer Reviewed Peer Reviewed
Mahakavi Devkota Campus	MMC Journal	Peer Reviewed
Makawanpur Multiple Campus	The Devkota Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies	General
Rupandahi Campus	1. Interdisciplinary Discourse 2. The International Research Journal of MMC	Peer Reviewed Peer Reviewed
	Rupandehi Campus Journal	Peer Reviewed

Saptagandaki Multiple Camps	The Saptagandaki Journal	Peer Reviewed
Shaheed Smriti Multiple Campus	Sahid	General
Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	1. Siddhartha Journal 2. The Academic Journal of the Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	General
Sindhuli Multiple Campus	The journal of Sindhuli Multiple Campus	General
Sukuna Multiple Campus	NA	NA
Tikapur Multiple Campus	TMC journal	General
Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus	1. Triyuga Academic Journal 2. Pragynik Dhwni	Peer Reviewed General

Appendix U: Program Portfolio of Universities in Nepal

University	Institute/Faculty/School	No. of Programs Offered
TU (317)	Engineering	45
	Medicine	67
	Science and Technology	37
	Agriculture and Animal Sciences	20
	Forestry	11
	Humanities and Social Sciences	70
	Education	36
	Law	5
	Management	26
	Law	4
	Engineering	21
	Management	12
KU (214)	Science	19
	Medical Science	75
	Arts	19
	Education	30
	Education	4
	Engineering	13
	Science and Technology	15
PU (71)	Management	13
	Humanities and Social Sciences	14
	Medicine	7
	Law	5
	Management	13
PokU (62)	Humanities and Social Sciences	8
	Science and Technology	24
	Health Sciences	17

	Agriculture	5
AFU (11)	Animal Science, Veterinary Science, and Fisheries	4
	Forestry	2
	Education	13
	Engineering	5
	Humanities and Social Sciences	19
MWU (50)	Science and Technology	3
	Management	8
	Law	1
	Agriculture	1

Appendix V: Programs at TU Constituent Campuses/Department

S.N	Campus/central government	A new program introduced in the last five years	Program Portfolio (2019)
1	Ayurveda Campus	MD (Kaya Chikisha-2)	BAMS (40), MD (Kaya Chikisha-2)
2	Central Campus of Technology	B.Sc. (Nutrition and Dietetics), M.Sc. (Microbiology)	BSc. BSc. (Nutrition & Dietetics), BSc. Food Technology, M.Sc. (Microbiology)
3	Central Department of Biotechnology, TU	-	M.Sc. in Biotechnology
4	Mahendra Ranta Multiple Campus, Illam		B. Ed., BA, BBS
5	Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal	B.Ed., M.Ed.	B.Ed., M.Ed.
6	Mechi Multiple Campus	BBA, BCA, B.Sc. (CSIT), BSW B.Sc.-CSIT, BPA, MPA,	BA, BBS, BSc. IT, BBA, BIM, MBS M.Ed., MSc. (Chemistry), MSc.
7	Prithvi Narayan Campus	BBA, Med Eco, M.Sc. (Microbiology, Chemistry, Geology)	(Physics), BSc. IT, B.Ed. BA, LLB, BBS, BSc. BBA, BPA, MBS, M.Ed.
8	Public Administration Campus, Balkhu	BPA	MPA, BPA

Appendix W: Programs at CBAC

S.N	Campus/central government	A new program introduced in the last five years	Program Portfolio (2019)
1	Aadikavi Bhanubhakta Campus	BBA, B.Ed. (ICT), M.Ed. (EPM)	BA., BBS, BBA, B.Ed., B.Ed. Science, BICTE, MA (Sociology), MBS, M.Ed. (EPM, Nepali, English)
2	Babai Multiple Campus	MBS, BSW, M.Ed.	
3	Balkumari College	BBA, BIM, and B.Ed. (ICT)	MBA-FM, MBBS, BBS, BHM, BBA, BIM, B.Ed., BICTE, M.Ed., B. Sc. (Microbiology & Environmental Science)
4	Damak Multiple Campus	BCA, BBA, BSW, MBS, MA, M.Ed.	BBS, BBA, BA, BCA, BSC (Environmental Science, Physics, Chemistry, Botany, and Mathematics), B.Ed., MBS, M.A.
5	J.S. Murarka Multiple Campus	MBS, MA in Sociology, B.Ed. (ICTE), M.Ed. (Health, EPM)	BA, MA (Sociology), B.Ed., M. Ed. (English), BBS, MBS, B. SC.,
6	Janapriya Multiple Campus	Bachelor in Mountain Tourism Management (Academic Autonomy), MBA in Hospitality Management, BIM	BBS, B.Ed., BA, B.Sc. (Environmental Science, Microbiology, and Physics), BBA, BBM, BMTM, MBS, BIM, MBA in Hospitality Management
7	Janta Multiple Campus, Itahari		BA, BBS, B.Ed., M.Ed., MBS, +2 all
8	Kaiali Multiple Campus	MBA-E, B.Sc., BBA, BBM, BSW, MA (English, Nepali, Economics, and RD)	
9	Lumbini Banijya Campus	BBA-FA, MBA-BF, BBM-A, BMS, and MBS-F	MBS, MBA-Banking & Finance, BBS, BBM, BBM-Applied, BBA-FA, MBS-Finance, BMS
10	Madhyabindu Multiple Campus	BBA, MBS, MED (Semester, Hotel Management)	BBA, BBS, B.Ed., BA, MBS, M. Ed.
11	Mahakavi Devkota Campus	BBA.	BBS, BBA, B.Ed., BA
12	Makawanpur Multiple Campus	BBA/BBM/M. ED	BA, MA, BBS, BBM, BBA, MBS, B.Sc., B. Ed. (1 and 4 years), M.Ed.
13	Rupandhehi Campus	-	BBS, BA
14	Saptagandaki Multiple Campus		BSC, BIM, BCA, BBA, BA, B.Ed., M. Ed., MA (RD), MBS, +2 All stream
16	Shaheed Smriti Multiple Campus	Bachelor in Financial Administration (Academic Autonomous Program) and BSc.	BBS, BA, B.Ed. (1 & 4), BBM, B.SC., MBS, M.Ed., MA
15	Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	M.Ed. (English and Nepali)	BBS, B.Ed., MBS, M.Ed. (English and Nepali).
17	Sindhuli Multiple Campus	BBA	BBS, BA, B.Ed. MBS, MA (Sociology & Anthropology), M.Ed. (Nepali, Population, EPM)
18	Sukuna Multiple Campus	BBA	BBA, B. Ed. (ICT) BBS, B.Ed., B.Ed. (1 Year) BA, B.Sc., MBS, M.Ed. (English, Math, Nepali, Population, Health, EPM, Curriculum & Evaluation)
19	Tikapur Multiple Colleges	B.Sc. (Agriculture), BBA, BBM, MBM, MA (Sociology)	BSC. Agriculture, BBS, B.Ed., BA, BBA, BBM, MBM, MBS, MA (Sociology), M.Ed.
20	Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus	MBS, BSW, MA (Rural Development and Sociology), B.Ed. (ICT)	BBS, B.Ed., BA, BSW, BICT Ed., MBS, M. Ed. (Nepali, Curriculum, English), MA (Rural Development and Sociology)

Appendix X: Number of Students of Sample CBAC

Name of Affiliated Campuses	Number of Students/Year								
	013/14	014/15	015/16	016/17	017/18	018/19	019/20	020/21	021/22
Adikabi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campuses	939	1042	864	807	901	874	935		966
Babai Multiple Campus	1256	1185	768	719	857	442	892	1089	1039
Balkumari College	2141	1934	1768	1746	1554	1284	1743	1106	1059
Damak Multiple Campus	1478	1212	1200	1193	1587	1803	1863	1943	1747
Hari Khetan Campus	1452	1473	1556	1691	2011	2066	2277	1813	1743
Janapriya Multiple Campus	2186	1948	1688	1602	2103	1987	2014	2404	2321
Janata Multiple Campus	1760	1352				1067	1044	1349	1577
JS Murarka Campus	6014	5725	4436	4124	4897	4712	5151	5331	4078
Kailali Multiple Campus	2141	2160	2323	2594	2903	2569	2889	2119	1521
Lumbini Banijya Campus	980	866	847	810	1018	909	875	897	752
Madhayabindu Multiple Campus	367	369	341	347	430	464	436	676	641
Mahakabi Devekota Multiple Campus	2799	2677	2270	2157	2665	2478	2980	2080	1867
Makawanpur Multiple Campus	458	362	305	246	277	263	378	411	406
Rupendehi Campus	1907	1532	1169	1302	1569	1041	1484	1005	917
Sahid Smiriti Multiple Campus	1236	1620	1262	1328	1301	1403	1736	1406	1182
Saptagandhaki Multiple Campus	1683	1358	1279	1156	1443	1241	1526	1259	1182
Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	776	415	362	454	681	621	543	533	447
Sindhuli Multiple Campus	1647	1495	1324	1365	1593	1337	1423	1495	1654
Sukuna Multiple Campus	2107	2186	1667	1490	1615	1640	1727	1610	2083
Tikapur Multiple Campus	1008	829	702	715	937	882	829	829	856
Total	34,335	31,740	26,131	25,846	30,342	29,083	31,916	29,355	28,038

Appendix Y: [Webometrics Data for Universities \(January 2021\)](#)

Univer sity	National Rank	World rank	Continent Rank	Impact factor	Openness	Excellence
KU	1	3280	1053	6566	2958	3455
TU	2	3384	109	7566	5963	1873
PokU	4	5211	183	12351	4665	4934
AFU	10	13723	15792	5132	6683	15792
PU	19	19124	28825	5963	5442	28825
MWU	21	20086	19673	5963	6683	19673

<https://www.webometrics.info/en/Asia/Nepal%20>

Appendix Z: Financial Performance of Sampled CBAC

S. N	Name of Affiliated Campuses	Net Worth	Debt	Debt to Net Worth	Cash/Bank Balance
1	Adikabi Bhanubhakta Multiple Campus	58,869.00	19,327.00	0.33	23,488.00
2	Babai Multiple Campus	1.00	1.00	1.00	-
3	Balkumari College	253,771.00	7,078.00	0.03	20,980.00
4	Damak Multiple Campus	123,545.00	32,856.00	0.27	26,691.00
5	JS murarka	46,065.00	1.00	0.00	46,065.00
6	Janapriya Multiple Campus	177,631.00	20,146.00	0.11	47,200.00
7	Janata Multiple Campus	115,624.00	16,389.00	0.14	23,969.00
8	Kailali Multiple Campus	490,509.00	5,986.00	0.01	137,612.00
9	Lumbini Banijya Campus	259,326.00	23,875.00	0.09	264,653.00
10	Madhayabindu Multiple Campus	130,200.00	2,082.00	0.02	29,691.00
11	Mahakabi Devekota Multiple Campus	48,082.00	15,317.00	0.32	2,171.00
12	Makawanpur Multiple Campus	72,518.00	45,053.00	0.62	43,790.00
13	Rupendehi Campus	13,600.00	9,620.00	0.71	1,859.00
14	Sahid Smiriti Multiple Campus	64,826.00	42,425.00	0.65	27,816.00
15	Saptagandhaki Multiple Campus	93,920.00	21,769.00	0.23	45,064.00
16	Siddhartha Gautam Buddha Campus	33,104.00	6,284.00	0.19	13,792.00
17	Sindhuli Multiple Campus	1.00	1.00	1.00	
18	Sukuna Multiple Campus	149,038.00	16,884.00	0.11	58,624.00
19	Tikapur Multiple Campus	204,414.00	27,185.00	0.13	39,730.00
20	Triyuga Janata Multiple Campus	50,482.00	7,982.00	0.16	3,279.00
		2,385,526.00	320,261.00	0.13	856,474.00