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Scaling Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Schools Through Stakeholder Mapping: Teachers' Perspectives on Enablers and Barriers

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Abstract
Stakeloder engagement is crucial for driving Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) initiatives. Using Participatory Action Research, this situational analysis (SAS) study explored people, place, and things catergorised into four scaling groups: initiators, enablers, competitors, and the impacted for scaling GESI initiatives in schools and communities effectively through stakeholder engagement. The research during the participation axis phase administered a survey questionnaire to teachers, including five males and females, to analyse stakeholders responsible for promoting GESI in schools. Key findings revealed that Initiators, such as school leaders and educators, played a crucial role in driving GESI-related changes within schools. Enablers, including local community leaders and supportive teachers, were instrumental in ensuring the successful implementation and sustainability of GESI initiatives. However, challenges arose from Competitors, including senior citizens, religious practitioners, and some local leaders, whose conservative beliefs often impeded progress. The Impacted group, consisting of marginalized students, teachers, and women affected by gender inequality, was identified as the primary beneficiary of successful GESI initiatives. Despite its valuable insights, the study has a few limitations. The perspectives gathered were primarily from teachers, which may not fully capture the views of all relevant stakeholders, particularly those from marginalized groups or other community members. Additionally, the categorization of stakeholders, especially within the Competitors and Impacted groups, may lack sufficient nuance in certain contexts. The study recommends a more inclusive stakeholder engagement process that involves all groups, including Competitors, through participatory dialogue to address resistance and foster collaborative solutions. Continuous capacity-building efforts for teachers, school leaders, and policymakers are essential to ensure the sustainability of GESI initiatives. Future research should expand the analysis to include a broader range of stakeholders and account for regional variations in the implementation of GESI initiatives.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Secondary School, Social Inclusion, Stakeholder Mapping, Teachers

1. INTRODUCTION

The project *Promoting Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in Schools, Building on What Children Value and Aspire to Do and Be* is a collaborative initiative involving School of Arts, Kathmandu University (Nepal), RDRS in Bangladesh, and Samtse College of Education in Bhutan. Its primary aim was to promote GESI in schools through the lens of the Capability Approach. This approach, as articulated by Sen (1999) and Walker (2007), emphasizes equipping students with the opportunities and resources necessary to lead lives they value. By focusing on children's well-being, the approach highlighted essential indicators such as autonomy, respect, and physical and mental health. Centering on what children aspired to do and be, the project aimed to empower them to shape futures aligned with their values and aspirations.

To ensure a broader and more sustainable impact, the project integrated a scaling system to map potential stakeholders responsible for promoting GESI in schools and beyond. Drawing on the framework proposed by Price-Kelly et al. (2020), stakeholders were categorized into four key groups: Initiators, Enablers, Competitors, and Impacted. This categorization generated a comprehensive understanding of the people, places, and things influencing or influenced by scaling efforts, supporting the effective promotion of GESI in schools.

Scaling up educational innovations is widely considered as a complex process. Sabelli and Harris (2015) argue that scaling is not merely about expanding the use of a particular educational innovation but, more importantly, about improving education. However, as Krainer et al. (2019) note, such efforts often fail or achieve only limited success. McLean and Gargani (2019) explain that this is because scaling is not just about expanding a single initiative but rather about transforming interconnected systems where multiple actors, norms, and cultures shape the outcomes. Thus, Krainer et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of understanding the factors that enable successful scaling and addressing the challenges inherent in the process. For instance, Cob and Smith (2008) report that there are several factors which can foster the scaling up of educational innovations including networks, shared vision and mutual accountability. These factors that foster the scaling up of educational innovations depend on the level where innovations are expected, at the individual level of teachers, local level of schools, or at the regional or national level.

This study aimed to explore and identify effective strategies for scaling GESI initiatives in five schools in Samtse Dzongkhag (district) and their communities through stakeholder engagement. Specifically, it sought to examine the enablers, challenges, and processes involved in facilitating the successful expansion of these initiatives. Central to this exploration was the question: *How can GESI initiatives be effectively scaled in schools and communities through active stakeholder engagement, and Who/what are the people, places and things (initiators, enablers, competitors, those impacted) that affect and are affected by this process?*

To address this question, the project incorporated the four key scaling principles proposed by McLean and Gargani (2019), Justification, Optimality, Coordination, and Dynamic Evaluation. These principles guided a thoughtful, inclusive scaling process that respected cultural contexts while addressing the diverse needs of all stakeholders.

By integrating the Capability Approach, stakeholder mapping, and scaling principles, the project adopted a holistic and sustainable strategy for fostering inclusive change. This approach ensured that GESI promotion was not only an aspirational goal but also a shared responsibility, driving meaningful transformation in schools and communities.

1.1. Literature Review

The promotion of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in educational settings has become a significant focus of global educational policies and initiatives. This review examines key theories and frameworks that have been foundational in driving GESI efforts, particularly in schools, and the role of stakeholder engagement in scaling such initiatives. Specifically, it explores the Capability Approach, the concept of stakeholder mapping for scaling, and the guiding principles for scaling social innovations, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the successful implementation and sustainability of GESI initiatives.

1.1.1. The Capability Approach to Education

The Capability Approach of Sen (1999) and Walker (2007) has played a significant role in shaping education policies aimed at promoting equity and inclusion. This approach highlights the importance of providing individuals with opportunities and resources necessary for leading lives that they value. In the context of education, the Capability Approach focuses on building students' capabilities to choose and achieve the lives that they aspire to lead, considering factors such as autonomy, respect, physical and mental health, and overall well-being. By placing children at the center, this framework aligns with GESI goals, as it emphasises the importance of respecting diverse aspirations, values, and identities, thereby empowering students to shape their futures in meaningful ways.

1.1.2. Stakeholder Engagement in Scaling GESI Initiatives

Scaling GESI initiatives requires careful attention to the engagement of various stakeholders, whose support and involvement are critical for ensuring broad and sustainable impact. The scaling framework proposed by Price-Kelly et al. (2020) categorizes stakeholders into four key groups: Initiators, Enablers, Competitors, and Impacted. Understanding the roles and relationships between these stakeholder groups is vital for the effective scaling of GESI initiatives in schools and communities.

1. **Initiators**: Initiators are foundational stakeholders that trigger the scaling process. These include innovators, researchers, funders, and those providing necessary support. They are crucial for setting the initial conditions for scaling by offering expertise, financial resources, and ensuring that the initiative aligns with educational priorities and cultural context. The willingness of the community and the availability of specific infrastructure are also essential components for initiating GESI efforts.

2. **Enablers**: Enablers facilitate scaling by providing the necessary support systems. This category includes service providers, policymakers, distributors, and cultural norms and practices that support the scaling process. Government policies and regulatory frameworks play a central role in creating the conditions for GESI initiatives to thrive, while community support and market dynamics can further amplify their impact.

3. **Competitors**: Competitors present challenges to scaling efforts. These may include competing initiatives, alternative solutions, or ingrained cultural and social norms that resist change. In the case of GESI, these obstacles can include traditional gender roles, deep rooted educational practices, and cultural resistance to equality and inclusion. Addressing these challenges requires careful negotiation of competing interests and strategies for overcoming resistance to change.

4. **Impacted**: The impacted stakeholders are those who directly experience the outcomes of scaling efforts. In the context of GESI, these stakeholders include students, teachers, parents, and communities. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of these stakeholders is critical for assessing the effectiveness of scaling initiatives. Impacted stakeholders also play a role in shaping the success of the initiatives, as their engagement and feedback are necessary for continuous improvement and sustainability of the initiative.

1.1.3. Scaling Principles for GESI Initiatives

To guide the scaling of GESI initiatives and ensure they achieve sustainable and inclusive outcomes, the study draws on four key scaling principles proposed by McLean and Gargani (2019). These principles are essential for navigating the complexities of scaling social innovations, such as GESI, in educational contexts.

1. **Justification**: Justification encourages that scaling is governed for, and by, those who will be impacted by scaling. This principle emphasizes the need for "judicious scaling," starting with the fundamental question of why scaling is necessary and who decides when and how to scale. This must be supported by technical evidence demonstrating that the scaling has resulted in positive outcomes that out-weigh any negative impacts. These positive outcomes should include a detailed description of the values created, specifying who benefits, ultimately informing the decision to scale. Thus, it underscores the importance of balancing the promise of effectiveness with the risks of unintended consequences (OpenAI, 2024). For example, scaling decisions should consider ethical considerations, such as the potential impact on marginalized groups. Likewise, scaling must be justified by clear evidence of its potential benefits, and scaling decisions should involve a broad range of stakeholders, especially those directly affected by the intervention (OpenAI, 2024).

2. **Optimality**: The principle of optimality states that the scale should be optimized rather than maximized. This principle stresses the importance of making trade-offs and considering the long-term sustainability of the initiative balancing the dimensions of magnitude, variety, equity, and sustainability. The four dimensions emphasize:

Magnitude: It often refers to the extent of an intervention's impact, which may include the average size or quality of its impacts; its benefit or harm on a given population; and the value of these impacts as assessed by stakeholders.

Variety: It often refers to the range of impacts that an initiative or research can have, which may include effects on health, economic, social, wellbeing, the environment, and education.

Sustainability: It often concerns the lasting of an impact and the factors that sustain an initiative over time. For example, policy support and support from the influential groups such as those that are key decision makers.

Equity: It identifies the benefits and potential harm that different sub-groups may experience as a result of the research. For example, specific sub-groups, such as those defined by gender, religion, or class, may experience impacts differently. Various factors, including social norms, economic conditions, and institutional structures, influence these differences.

In the context of GESI, it calls for scaling efforts that are sustainable and tailored to the specific needs and capacities of the communities involved, rather than attempting to implement a one-size-fits-all solution.

3. **Coordination**: Coordination involves planning and adapting to ensure effective collaboration among the various actors involved in scaling impact. This principle reminds researchers that scaling is a complex process, requiring well coordinated efforts from all involved stakeholders. Accordingly, coordinating a scaling journey requires a deeper understanding of the system in which one operates, while recognizing that unintended impacts may arise, demanding an on-going monitoring. This includes, for example, the understanding and integration of contextual factors such as gender dynamics and their roles when coordinating with various actors of the scaling effort.

4. **Dynamic Evaluation**: Scaling is an innovation/initiative that drives dynamic change and requires iterative evaluation. This evaluation approach is a stance, not a method, adopted before, during, and after scaling. It uses tailored learning strategies to assess the magnitude, variety, equity, and sustainability of impacts across multiple levels of scale. Rather than focusing solely on the innovation's impact, dynamic evaluation examines the holistic effects of scaling. It involves a strategic selection of tools, enabling rapid learning cycles, guided by the judgment of those within the scaling system. In the context of GESI initiatives, dynamic evaluation will help identify which strategies and interventions are most effective, allowing for ongoing improvements and adaptations to ensure long-term impact.

In summary, the promotion of GESI in schools requires a comprehensive approach that integrates the Capability approach, stakeholder mapping, and guiding principles for scaling. By involving multiple stakeholders and integrating the scaling principles, GESI initiatives can be scaled effectively in schools and communities. However, successful scaling also depends on addressing the enablers and competitors identified by stakeholders, ensuring that efforts are inclusive, sustainable, and tailored to local contexts. This literature review highlights the importance of a strategic and multi-stakeholder approach to scaling GESI initiatives, providing valuable insights for future research and practice in this area.

1.1.4. Importance of Scaling: Factors Promoting and Constraining Scaling Efforts of Educational Innovations

Scaling is essential in both business and education to ensure the sustainability of innovations. Many studies illustrate how scaling approaches have advanced educational reforms. A notable case is the scaling of online education in the United States. Moloney and Oakley (2010) examined trends in online enrolment, highlighting universities that succeeded or struggled to expand online education. For instance, the State University of New York (SUNY) launched the SUNY Learning Network (SLN) in 1995 with eight online classes. Today, SLN is a national leader in online education, offering 85 online certificate and degree programs. Similarly, the Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC), which includes 71 public and private colleges in Illinois, saw a 60% increase in online enrolment from 2003 to 2004.

Key factors contributing to the success of these initiatives include:

1. Comprehensive program development focused on complete degree programs.
2. High-quality instruction delivered by the same professors as on-campus courses.
3. Student support services comparable to those for on-campus students.
4. Faculty training and ongoing support for online instructors.
5. Institutional support, such as dedicated units for student attention and technology-enhanced learning.
6. Financial models including e-tuition, technology fees, and reinvestment in program scaling.
7. Targeted marketing initiatives for optimal enrolment.
8. Robust technology infrastructure to support online education.

Despite these successes, some universities have faced challenges scaling their online programs. For example, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), an early leader in online education, struggled to scale its offerings due to factors such as a lack of institutional vision to serve off-campus students, faculty resistance to change, high development costs, limited infrastructure, and state funding cuts.

In a small exploratory study on scaling educational innovations, teachers identified competence and relative advantage as critical for success. Challenges were primarily associated to students' and teachers' competencies, highlighting the the Ministry's support for initiatives such as competence-oriented teaching (Krainer et al., 2019).

A case study on scaling a research-based curriculum and professional development (PPCPD) innovation across 13 pilot sites identified key factors for successful scaling and sustainability. Carlson et al. (2024) associated the innovation's success to local site initiators valuing the project's learning goals and receiving support or neutrality from administrators. Additionally, initial professional development sessions, led by Pathways developers, engaging local leaders and instructors effectively, contributed to a strong understanding of the project's objectives. Furthermore, ongoing professional development, including annual training sessions and weekly support, reinforced this effort while data-driven comparisons of student outcomes between existing programs and the Pathways project strengthened stakeholder buy-in. Collaborative efforts to adapt the program to local contexts further supported scaling. While these factors supported scaling initiatives, in contrast, discontinuation of weekly professional development at two project sites had the opposite effect, leading to increased student complaints and withdrawal of administrative support for the PPCPD (Carlson et al., 2024).

Foote et al. (2016), in their study on enabling and challenging factors in institutional reform, reveal that the most common enabling influences include documenting and leveraging evidence of local success, administrative support, interaction with external scale up users, and securing funding. Conversely, the challenges were largely associated with the absence of these enabling factors, such as difficulties in obtaining funding, limited space, and a lack of administrative and faculty support for reform.

Fulgence (2024), in her study on scaling education innovations in Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia, highlights key features of scaling, including the involvement of higher education institutions as researchers, teacher education institutions as mentors, and capacity building for teachers and education leaders. It also emphasizes the importance of structured pedagogy and government engagement across the countries. In addition, the findings support the broader scaling of the innovation and its adoption into policy. Furthermore, the results contribute to the development of a scaling strategy designed to enhance the innovation's apaeal to governments and potential users.

2. METHODOLOGY

The project adopted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework structured into three main phases: the Participation Axis, the Knowledge Development Axis, and the Action Axis.

The Participation Axis focused on understanding the current status of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in schools. The Knowledge Axis will involve developing the Children's Valued Educational Capabilities (CVEC) framework and GESI tools based on findings from the Situational Analysis Study (SAS) and using these tools to gather baseline data to support GESI initiatives in schools. The Action Axis will leverage the baseline data to design interventions and activities, engaging relevant stakeholders to establish appropriate and sustainable GESI practices in schools.

2.1. Research Site and Data Collection

This situational analysis study focused on the first axis (Participation Axis), where data were collected from 10 teachers (5 male and 5 female) across 5 schools in Samtse Dzongkhag. The schools were selected considering its location, diverse background, socio-economic status, and the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the region.

A survey tool was administered to teachers to identify potential stakeholders within a scaling system, categorizing them into initiators, enablers, competitors, and those impacted. The survey questionnaire included several key components: (i) assessing the inclusion of capability indicators in the curriculum, categorized by grade level, (ii) evaluating students' awareness of the inclusion of these capability indicators in the curriculum (grade-wise), (iii) scoring the importance of capability indicators in promoting GESI in schools, (iv) mapping educational stakeholders involved in GESI initiatives, (v) conducting school mapping to understand the infrastructure and policies supporting GESI, and (vi) gathering examples of GESI initiatives currently being implemented in schools. The survey was aimed at capturing teachers' perspectives on the stakeholders responsible for promoting and scaling GESI initiatives within the school system.

2.2. Data Analysis

The data from stakeholder mapping were analysed using the scaling system approach, which categorized stakeholders into three main domains: People, Place, and Things. Separate tables were created to classify these stakeholders into four categories: Initiators, Enablers, Competitors, and Impacted. This systematic scaling approach facilitated a smooth analysis and interpretation of the data. To provide a holistic perspective, the data sets collected from male and female teachers were merged, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the stakeholders responsible for promoting GESI in schools.

Ethical research procedures were ensured by obtaining prior approval from the schools and participants, who were selected fairly based on the subjects they taught. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained to protect participants' identities. Additionally, efforts were made to minimize bias and include diverse perspectives, enhancing the inclusivity and reliability of the findings.

3. RESULTS

This section presents the stakeholder mapping data, categorized into three distinct groups: People, Places, and Things.

3.1. Mapping of Educational Stakeholders for Promoting GESI in schools

Table 1 outlines various places that teachers' recognized as Initiators, Competitors, Enablers, and Users/Beneficiaries for promoting GESI in schools. Teachers report that these groups play distinct roles in shaping GESI initiatives, particularly in education and social systems. For example, they identified Schools, colleges, and universities including Samtse College of Education, and the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) as responsible for implementing GESI principles within educational environments while the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) can drive policy changes, focusing on gender equality and inclusive education. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) such as RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women) can actively promote GESI through technical assistance, advocacy, and community-based projects. While MoESD and the community act as primary enablers, setting educational policies and cultural norms that integrate GESI into schools and colleges, they might also help create an environment that allows GESI projects to flourish by offering institutional support, advocacy, and stakeholder engagement.

Organizations such as Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) and a few NGOs (like the Loden Foundation) and RENEW may compete for similar resources, influence, or outcomes related to GESI projects. They may also represent government institutions that could prioritize traditional roles, sometimes conflicting with progressive GESI measures.

The users and beneficiaries of these GESI initiatives include: i) Schools and colleges, which benefit from policies and programs that promote inclusion and equality and 2) The community, particularly marginalized groups (e.g., women, children, vulnerable populations), which directly benefits from more inclusive, equal, and equitable education and social services. This shows that various agencies work together, sometimes in competition, to advance GESI goals, with key enablers supporting the beneficiaries of these initiatives.

Table 1. Mapping of Educational Stakeholders (Places)

Places	
Initiators	*Competitors*
Schools	NGOs (Loden Foundations)
Samtse College of Education	Royal Bhutan Police (RBP)
Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD)	Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women (RENEW)
Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)	National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)
Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)	
RENEW	
Local Community	
Enablers	*Users/Beneficiaries*
MoESD	School, Colleges, MoESD
	Community

Table 2 categorizes key individuals identified by teachers as central to promoting GESI initiatives in schools into four groups: Initiators, Competitors, Enablers, and those Impacted.

Teachers view Initiators as school leaders, teachers, parents, and local leaders who actively implement and support GESI policies to create inclusive environments in schools. They also identified principals, teachers, student leaders, and community figures as Enablers, working to promote inclusion and ensure the smooth execution of GESI-related initiatives. However, Competitors, such as local leaders, religious figures, and individuals with conservative views, may present obstacles to the success of GESI efforts in schools.

According to the teachers, the Impacted group primarily includes students, teachers, and the general public, who benefit from the focus on equality, inclusion, and supportive learning environments.

Overall, the table reinforces the roles and interactions of these groups in either advancing or challenging GESI initiatives, highlighting the importance of collaboration to achieve equality and inclusion.

Table 2. People

People	
Initiators	*Competitors*
Principals	Teachers
Vice Principals	Religious Head/practitioners
Teachers	Local Leaders
Local Leaders	Parents and Guardians
Parents	Senior citizens
	Students
Enablers	*Impacted*
Principals	General Public
Vice Principals	People experiencing GESI issues
Local Leaders (Gups, Mangmis, Tshogpas)	Students
Teachers	Teachers
Parents	Staffs
Dzongkhag Education Officers (DEOs)	Parents
	Children
	Women

Table 3 reflects teachers' categorization of various things related to promoting GESI in schools, focusing on Initiators, Competitors, Enablers, and those Impacted. While some categories are not fully detailed, it highlights the importance of policies and programs as key enablers for advancing GESI, while

inadequate infrastructure and facilities are seen as potential barriers that may obstruct its effective promotion in schools and beyond.

Table 3. Things

Things	
Initiators	*Competitors*
Not specified	Infrastructure/resources
	Facilities
Enablers	*Impacted*
School Policy	Not specified
GE-LGBT programme	
SEN policy	

4. DISCUSSION

This study explored the key stakeholders influencing the promotion of GESI initiatives in schools by mapping stakeholders across four categories: Initiators, Enablers, Competitors, and Impacted. The findings and implications of this study suggest that strategic and multi stakeholder approach can result in driving GESI initiatives. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into how different stakeholders contribute to or challenge the success of GESI initiatives and offer a framework for optimizing efforts to scale GESI in the education sector.

Initiators: The stakeholder mapping showed that school leaders, teachers, parents, and local leaders are crucial in driving GESI-related changes. Their active involvement, supported by educational institutions such as SCE and RUB, forms the foundation for scaling efforts. This aligns with Fulgence (2024), which emphasizes the role of educational institutions in transformative change. MoESD, along with NGOs like RENEW, is essential in aligning their policies and initiatives with GESI goals. Carlson et al. (2024) assert that the success of scaling an innovation is linked to local site initiators valuing the project's learning goals and receiving support or neutrality from administrators. This highlights the indispensable need for building robust, collaborative local and national networks of key stakeholders and institutions to effectively scale GESI initiatives. Such networks form the backbone for fostering ownership, accountability, and collective action among diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, and community organizations. They enable the continuous transformation of GESI principles into actionable strategies that address structural barriers, such as discriminatory norms and systemic inequities. A key purpose of this study is to tackle issues like discriminatory norms, violence, harassment, exploitation, and exclusion, thereby creating safe and inclusive school learning environments. Achieving these goals requires active involvement and commitment from all stakeholders. Without their engagement, GESI-targeted initiatives risk stagnating, falling short of their objectives, and losing momentum.

Engaging stakeholders ensures that initiatives are contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and tailored to the unique challenges faced by schools and communities. It further enhances the sustainability of these programs by embedding GESI practices within the broader educational environment. Neglecting this critical aspect could impede progress and perpetuate existing inequalities, diminishing the potential for meaningful and lasting change. Therefore, forging strong partnerships and fostering shared commitment among all stakeholders is paramount to advancing the transformative potential of GESI initiatives at both local and national levels.

In the context of this study, a robust network has been established at multiple levels to support GESI initiatives. At the local level, this network comprises teachers and principals, while at the national level, it involves policymakers, curriculum specialists, gender specialists, district education officers, and institutions such as MoESD, UNICEF, the Centre for School Curriculum Development (CSCD), and the Women and Children Division (WCD). These networks are pivotal for ensuring that GESI strategies are not only developed but also effectively implemented across the education system.

Teachers, in particular, stress the importance of scaling GESI initiatives to promote equitable learning opportunities. This perspective correlates with McLean and Gargani's (2020) principle of Justification, which underscores the importance of addressing foundational questions such as "Why scale?" and "Who decides?" in any scaling effort. The active involvement of educators, local leaders, and institutions such as MoESD, NGOs, and schools ensures that scaling efforts are aligned with local and national priorities. This alignment facilitates a culturally sensitive and sustainable implementation process, ensuring that the benefits of GESI initiatives reach the intended beneficiaries.

To institutionalize GESI principles effectively, stakeholders must engage in collaborative discussions addressing policy integration, curriculum development, and capacity-building initiatives. Platforms such as GESI clubs in schools can serve as catalysts for fostering inclusive environments, enhancing student engagement, and supporting the long-term sustainability of these initiatives. Additionally, the creation of feedback loops between local and national stakeholders can further refine strategies, ensuring that they remain dynamic and responsive to emerging challenges.

Enablers: Policies, regulatory frameworks, and community support systems, such as the SEN policy and GE-LGBT initiatives, play a key role in providing structural and cultural support for inclusion. The findings align with existing theories on the role of stakeholders in scaling educational innovations (McLean & Gargani, 2020). They reinforce the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to scaling GESI initiatives, highlighting the importance of engaging stakeholders at multiple levels from local teachers and principals to national policymakers and NGOs. The study also supports the argument that successful scaling requires both structural support (from policies and regulations) and cultural adaptation (ensuring local context alignment).

However, the study challenges the assumption that scaling can always be maximized in traditional ways, as McLean and Gargani (2019) caution against over-scaling without considering the local context and trade-offs. In the case of GESI initiatives, optimizing scale with a focus on marginalized groups is crucial for their long-term success and sustainability. This is in line with McLean and Gargani's (2020) Principle of Coordination, which emphasizes the need for synchronized efforts to drive successful implementation. Furthermore, collaboration among all stakeholders is vital for adapting the program to local contexts. Such adaptations have proven essential for scaling success, as indicated by Carlson (2024). In this study, the capacity-building initiative interventions extend beyond the school setting. Therefore, the engagement of local leaders is crucial, as they will serve as key links for translating GESI initiatives within the communities, ultimately contributing to the creation of safe and equitable school environments.

Competitors: The results categorize stakeholders such as senior citizens, local leaders, religious practitioners, and certain teachers (with their stereotypical beliefs) under the "Competitors" category, likely due to their conservative views, which can pose challenges to GESI initiatives. These individuals may resist change due to deeply ingrained cultural norms, conflicting priorities, or issues related to resource allocation. In such cases, raising awareness, organizing awareness campaigns, and offering GESI-focused capacity training could help shift beliefs and perspectives, encouraging greater acceptance of these initiatives.

Similarly, in the "Place" category, NGOs such as NCWC and RENEW, which share overlapping objectives, may inadvertently compete for influence or resources, potentially hindering progress toward GESI goals. While both organizations have played pivotal roles in advancing GESI in Bhutan, participants categorized them as competitors. One possible explanation is that these organizations might develop programs perceived as more impactful in promoting GESI, creating an indirect sense of competition. Additionally, the categorization may stem from a lack of awareness among teacher participants regarding the initiatives and contributions of these organizations. This highlights the critical need to enhance teachers' competence, which, according to Krainer et al. (2019), is essential for scaling up innovations. As McLean and Gargani (2020) note, coordinating diverse perspectives and ensuring the active participation of stakeholders, particularly those directly impacted by an innovation, is crucial. Neglecting to involve these stakeholders could hinder the advancement of GESI initiatives.

Furthermore, teachers categorized the lack of facilities and capital as competitors under the "Things" category, noting that the absence of these resources could enable other institutions with more capital to develop programs and marketing strategies that might surpass efforts to scale GESI initiatives. The absence

of such enabling factors, such as difficulties in securing funding, limited space, and a lack of faculty and student support for reform, was also highlighted in the study by Foote et al. (2016) on enabling and challenging factors in institutional reform.

Impacted: The impacted group includes students, teachers, and marginalized groups, such as women and children, who are positioned to benefit the most from GESI initiatives. Addressing gender inequalities and discriminatory practices is a central concern, as emphasized by McLean and Gargani (2019). The study reinforces the importance of focusing on gender-insensitive and socially disconnected areas to ensure the initiatives' success.

One limitation of the study lies in the inability to engage stakeholders early in the process, which may have affected the identification of challenges and the development of potential solutions. The study's sample size and scope were also limited, primarily relying on teachers' perspectives, which may not fully represent the views of all relevant stakeholders, particularly those from marginalized groups or other community members. Additionally, the stakeholder mapping, while valuable, may lack sufficient nuance in categorizing the Competitors and Impacted groups, as context-specific variations could have influenced the challenges faced by these groups in different settings.

In conclusion, to effectively scale up an initiative, the study emphasizes the need for ongoing, dynamic evaluation. Continuously questioning and reassessing how scaling efforts can enhance impact in new contexts over time is essential, particularly when the goal is to optimize scale rather than maximize it. Insights from dynamic evaluation will be crucial for refining GESI scaling strategies, such as the need to build stakeholders' capacity and competence to scale GESI initiatives. Furthermore, it will contribute to making innovations at scale more appealing to governments and potential users, as highlighted by Fulgence (2024). Overall, McLean and Gargani (2019) put forward that scaling impact involves a coordinated effort to achieve a collection of outcomes at an optimal scale, ensuring that it is both morally justified and ethically acceptable.

5. CONCLUSION, LIMITATION, AND RECOMMENDATION

The study highlights the critical role of the scaling framework in promoting GESI in schools and beyond, with specific focus on stakeholder engagement. Through a comprehensive participatory action research conducted in five schools of Samste district, the study delved into the intricate dynamics associated with the involvement of key stakeholders in advancing GESI initiatives. The findings indicate the importance of including relevant and influential groups of people and institutions that would take the GESI initiative forward by classifying them into Initiators, Enablers, Competitors, and Impacted groups. For promoting GESI initiatives, Initiators, such as school leaders, teachers, and local community leaders are crucial while Enablers, including policies, regulatory frameworks, and community support, provide essential structural and cultural support. However, the presence of Competitors, such as conservative beliefs and competing organizations, poses significant challenges that must be confronted to ensure that GESI initiatives advance effectively. Moreover, the Impacted group, which includes marginalized students, teachers, and community members, must be at the core of these efforts to ensure that the benefits of GESI initiatives reach those who are most affected.

The study emphasises that a collaborative, inclusive, and contextually sensitive approach engaging all relevant stakeholders is vital for the successful scaling and sustainability of GESI initiatives in educational settings. By directly addressing the research gap pertaining to stakeholder engagement approaches within the domain of GESI, this study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical implementation in the field.

5.1. Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is the inability to adopt a more holistic perspective of the stakeholders, as these were mainly gathered from teachers. While teachers are a critical part of the educational environment, their views may not fully reflect the diversity of perspectives across various

schools and communities. The other shortcomings is that categorization of stakeholders, particularly in the "Competitors" and "Impacted" groups, lacks specificity, possibly leading to drawbacks when addressing subtle challenges. For example, the resistence from certain groups including religious practitioners or local leaders, may be more complex to understand within the study's scope. Further, the study failed to consider regional differences or the varying resources and support systems available across different schools, which may affect how GESI initiatives are implemented and received.

5.2. Recommendations

This study recommends several enabling conditions (e.g. relevant stakeholder engagement, frequent interaction and collaboration, supportive policy regulations, and presence of resources) in driving GESI initiatives in schools and beyond. For example, the voices of the competitors should be included to mitigate resistance and foster shared understandings and measures for driving GESI initiatives.

Future studies can delve into exploring the social and cultural factors to better understand the challenges and opportunities within diverse communities. This may require involvement of broader stakeholder perspectives including students, parents, community leaders, and policymakers to capture a more holistic view of the opportunities and challenges driving GESI initiatives.

Further, the findings of this study have practical implications for policymakers and practitioners engaged in advancing GESI initiatives. By recognising the inherent complexities of GESI and the interconnectedness of social and cultural challenges, the study advocates for capacity building efforts to advance GESI in schools and beyond. Thus, relevant stakeholders including policy makers, leaders, teachers, and students responsible for advancing GESI initiatives must be provided with workshops and training so they are equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to spread GESI initiatives effectively. Additionally, in order to ensure a broad and inclusive approach to promoting GESI within and beyond schools, capacity-building efforts should also extend to local communities. Overall, the study recommends collaborative and holistic approaches to driving GESI initiatives.

By addressing these recommendations, GESI initiatives can be more effectively tailored to local contexts, better engaging all stakeholders and ensuring that these critical efforts can be sustained and scaled in a way that maximizes their impact.

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