

**Grievance Handling in the Nepali Civil Service:
Insights from Employee Experiences**

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Abstract

This study analyzes grievance-handling practices in the Nepali civil service, focusing on the experiences and perceptions of civil servants. Using a qualitative approach, the findings reveal that grievances are mostly submitted informally through verbal communication. While this fosters immediacy, it undermines accountability and systematic resolution due to the lack of formal documentation. Common grievances revolve around transfers, training opportunities, and access to foreign programs. Civil servants often express dissatisfaction over delays and perceived inequities in addressing these concerns. Organizational challenges, including resource constraints, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and biases in decision-making, further complicate grievance handling. Despite these challenges, civil servants remain optimistic about improvements through timely responses, transparent processes, supportive leadership, and conducive organizational environment. This study highlights the need for systemic reforms, such as formal grievance mechanisms and fair processes, to ensure effective grievance handling in the Nepali civil service.

Keywords: Grievance handling, civil service, informal communication, systemic reforms, Nepal

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Grievance handling is a vital component of organizational management. It ensures that complaints raised by employees are addressed fairly, systematically, and effectively. Grievances are a natural occurrence in workplaces where individuals work together toward shared goals (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022). These grievances may range from dissatisfaction with working conditions to disagreements over promotions, transfers, or supervisory practices. If left unresolved, grievances can lead to low morale, reduced productivity, and conflicts that negatively affect organizational performance (Danku et al., 2015). Conversely, a well-designed grievance-handling mechanism not only resolves specific issues but also fosters workplace harmony, trust, and a positive organizational culture (De-la-Calle-Durán & Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2021). Effective grievance management strengthens workplace relationships, boosts employee loyalty, and improves organizational productivity (Aktar & Alam, 2021; Onyebuchi & Eke, 2019). Organizations that fail to handle grievances effectively risk losing employee trust, experiencing high turnover rates, and facing potential legal disputes (Ukaidi, 2023). Thus, grievance handling is a strategic tool for ensuring smooth operations, long-term success, and employee satisfaction (Naagar, 2024).

In the Nepali context, grievance handling in the civil service holds particular importance. Civil servants play a crucial role in implementing government policies and delivering essential public services (Gupta, 2021; Gupta et al., 2019). Addressing their grievances is critical to fostering employee satisfaction and maintaining trust in public institutions. Nepali civil service operates within a complex environment shaped by hierarchical structures, bureaucratic processes, and political influences. These challenges often create conditions where grievances related to work conditions, promotions, transfers, and interpersonal conflicts are common. If such grievances remain unresolved, they can lead to low morale, inefficiency, and a loss of trust. Strengthening grievance-handling mechanisms is thus essential for improving employee satisfaction, enhancing organizational accountability, and ensuring better governance and public service delivery in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal has introduced several legal provisions and frameworks to address grievances,

particularly for citizens. Key legislations include the Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2064, the Civil Service Regulation Concerning the Conduct of Employees of the Civil Service, 2065 (2009), and the Labor Act, 2048 (1992). In addition, initiatives such as “Hello Sarkar,” “Hello Health,” and the “Hello Home Ministry Grievance Hearing Unit” have been established to address public grievances. While these mechanisms cater primarily to citizens, institutionalized grievance-handling systems for civil servants are limited, inconsistent, and lack standardization. Some ministries, such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, have established grievance sections, but such efforts are not uniform across government offices. As a result, many civil servants resort to informal methods, such as verbally raising grievances with their supervisors, rather than using formal procedures. This reliance on informal practices often results in delays, lack of accountability, and unresolved issues.

Research emphasizes the importance of having clear, formalized grievance-handling mechanisms that employees can trust and understand (Atairet & Ndaeyo, 2022; Naagar, 2024 Liddle, 2023). However, in Nepal, challenges such as a lack of transparency, inconsistent implementation, and delays in resolving complaints undermine the effectiveness of existing systems. Addressing these gaps requires a comprehensive analysis of current grievance-handling practices from the perspective of civil servants. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to analyze the state of grievance-handling practices in the Nepali civil service, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of civil servants. The findings of this study will be relevant for administrators and managers involved in addressing grievances and will contribute to scholarly debates on effective grievance management in public administration.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In Nepal's civil service, addressing grievances can significantly enhance the productivity and happiness of the workforce, which is crucial for maintaining good public service. ". Public service frequently encounters issues like unjust practices, substandard work environments or shared promotions that hinder job satisfaction. A big hurdle is the lack of a clear open process for complaints, which causes delays and inefficiency in tackling these issues. The red tape and bureaucracy in Nepal's government make it hard for workers to get their problems solved. Also, managers don't get enough training on how to handle complaints leading to uneven and ineffective ways of fixing things. While they've set up grievance committees and welfare systems, these aren't used the same way everywhere, and not everyone knows about them. Many

workers have no choice but to use unofficial methods, which don't give good or satisfying results. So, there's an urgent need to create a proper system to handle grievances. This would boost worker satisfaction, make organizations run better, and improve public services in Nepal's civil service.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to investigate the grievance handling practices in Nepal's civil service, identify the obstacles faced by workers in addressing their issues, and propose ways to create a fair and effective system that improves employee satisfaction and public service quality.

1.4 Research Questions

This study aims to explore grievance handling practices in the Nepali Civil Service, focusing on the experiences and perspectives of employees. The research will uncover challenges, effectiveness, and the impact of current grievance procedures, highlighting the often-unheard experiences of civil servants. The research questions guiding this study are:

- What are the existing grievance practices in the Nepali Civil Service, and how do employees perceive them?
- What types of grievances are most reported by Nepali civil servants, and how do they experience the process of filing and resolving grievances?
- What barriers or challenges do employees face when voicing their grievances?
- How does the grievance handling process impact employee satisfaction, motivation, and perception of workplace justice in the Nepali Civil Service?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study on grievance handling in the Nepali Civil Service is important for both academic understanding and practical application. By exploring employee experiences and perspectives, the research will highlight an often-overlooked aspect of public administration in Nepal. Understanding existing grievance practices and employee perceptions is crucial for identifying areas of improvement in the civil service. Examining common grievances and the processes for filing and resolving them will provide insights into the daily challenges faced by civil servants. Uncovering the barriers employees face when voicing grievances can

lead to more effective and accessible mechanisms. Additionally, by analyzing the impact of grievance handling on employee satisfaction, motivation, and perceptions of workplace justice, this study can help improve workplace conditions and organizational effectiveness. The findings may inform policy decisions, enhance human resource management, and contribute to a more efficient and equitable civil service system in Nepal. By amplifying the experiences of civil servants, this study can also promote a more inclusive and responsive public sector, potentially improving service delivery and increasing public trust in government institutions. The insights gained may serve as a valuable reference for other developing countries facing similar challenges in public administration.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study will focus on grievance handling practices in the federal civil service organizations of Nepal, specifically those located in Singhdurbar.

1.7 Structure of the Study:

The research report has been organized into five chapters. The first chapter presents introduction including the background of the study, statement of the problem, Objectives of the study, research question, scope of the study, significance of the study, Structure of the study. The second chapter contains a literature review. The chapter three covers Research Method namely approaches of the study, research design, data collection procedure, data management and analysis, ethical standard, quality standard and summary of the chapter. Chapter four deals about data analysis, interpretation and meaning-making and finally chapter five presents conclusion and discussion.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Grievance

A grievance is any dissatisfaction or complaint that an employee raises about their work or workplace. It may be expressed formally to a supervisor or remain unvoiced. Grievances can arise from issues employees perceive as unfair, unjust, or unequal, even if their concerns are not valid (Dwivedi, 2009). Grievances often reflect dissatisfaction with management practices, workplace conditions, or interpersonal relationships (Locke, 2009). Employees may feel discontent over wages, promotions, workloads, safety issues, or conflicts with colleagues (Hunter & Kleiner, 2004). Poor communication, unclear rules, or failure to meet expectations also lead to grievances (Obiekwe & Eke, 2019). Grievances signify a breakdown in trust between employees and management, indicating that workers feel their rights have been violated or their concerns ignored (Daud, 2020; Meyer, 1994).

Grievances can be categorized into three types: individual, group, and policy grievances (Randolph & Blanchard, 2007). Individual grievances are personal complaints about specific issues, such as unfair treatment or missed promotions (Peterson, 2000). Group grievances involve multiple employees raising the same concern, such as unsafe working conditions. Policy grievances address disputes about general rules or policies that affect many employees (Stessin, 1999; Randolph & Blanchard, 2007).

Grievances often arise when employees feel dissatisfied with management behavior or when they seek to bring about change in workplace practices (D'Cruz, 1999; Jayathilaka, 2017). Some grievances are hidden and never formally expressed, while others are brought forward through established procedures (Gupta, 2006). A grievance, whether written or verbal, serves as a signal that employees believe their expectations or rights have been violated. The causes of grievances are typically grouped into three areas: management policies, workplace conditions, and interpersonal factors (Locke, 2009). Issues like unfair wage practices, lack of career advancement, or role conflicts arise from poor management policies. Unsafe workplaces, inadequate tools, and unrealistic workloads stem from poor working conditions (Hunter & Kleiner, 2004). Interpersonal grievances emerge from strained relationships with colleagues or autocratic leadership.

Grievances can also be seen as valuable feedback for organizations. While too many grievances might

indicate deep organizational problems, too few could reflect a fear of raising concerns or a belief that grievance mechanisms are ineffective (Noe et al., 2003). Addressing grievances promptly and fairly can prevent frustration, poor morale, and low productivity. Effective grievance handling builds trust, improves relationships, and creates a more positive work environment. Grievances are an essential indicator of employee dissatisfaction and organizational health. They arise from various sources and can affect morale and performance if ignored. Organizations must prioritize fair and transparent grievance resolution to foster a culture of trust and fairness.

2.2 Grievance Handling

Grievance handling is essential for employee satisfaction, trust-building, and improving organizational performance. Effective grievance systems help resolve conflicts and create harmony in the workplace. Timely resolution is a critical factor in this process. Delays harm employees, arbitration processes, and union-management relationships (Ponak et al., 1996; Thornicroft, 1995). Timeliness not only prevents escalation but also increases settlement rates. However, some studies suggest that fairness can be more important than speed in certain cases (Gordon & Bowlby, 1989; Lewin, 1999). Aktar and Alam (2021) show that timely and fair grievance resolution improves trust and productivity. Timeliness and impartiality have been considered to be the desirable outcomes of fair and orderly grievance procedures as per the ‘due process approach’ (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). Thornicroft (1995) identifies delays in hearings and decisions as significant challenges. Haraway (2005) notes that favoritism and complexity in procedures erode trust and discourage employees. Fairness and procedural justice are central to grievance handling. Employees perceive outcomes as fairer when the process itself is just (Peterson & Lewin, 2000). Fair procedures often matter more than equitable outcomes (Brockner & Wiesenfield, 1991). Fair and systematic processes enhance organizational trust and satisfaction. Transparent policies and strict adherence to timelines also improve efficiency.

Clarity and simplicity in procedures are equally important. Bohlander (1989) emphasizes that transparent and accessible systems build trust. Kabir et al. (2023) points out that bureaucratic barriers and lack of accountability make grievance procedures hard to navigate. Similar challenges were identified, where complexity and bias discourage employees from reporting issues (Haraway, 2005). Simplifying processes and ensuring fairness can help address these problems (Haraway, 2002). Formal grievance systems signal

workplace justice and accountability (Selznick, 1996). Establishing a culture of trust, open communication, and issue prevention through the cultivation of a supportive workplace allows employees to voice grievances without fear of punishment (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). However, formal mechanisms alone are insufficient. Accessibility, confidentiality, and well-communicated processes are equally important. Offering multiple resolution options, such as mediation and arbitration, enhances effectiveness (Naagar & Kataria, 2021).

Supervisors and managers play a crucial role in grievance handling. Their ability to identify and resolve issues early is vital (Chaykowski & Slotsve, 1992). Studies show that effective supervision reduces grievance frequency (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2004; Bemmels et al., 1991). Conversely, negative perceptions of supervisors are linked to higher grievance rates (Allen & Keaveny, 1985). Constructive approaches foster trust and openness, enabling fair grievance resolution (Rakhimova, 2023). Factors like employee experience, gender, and authority challenges also shape how managers handle complaints (Rollinson et al., 1996; Rollinson, 2000). Training in grievance procedures is necessary for fairness and consistency, though practical experience and organizational support are equally important (Naagar, 2024; Obiekwe & Eke, 2019). However, training alone is not enough if supervisors lack practical experience or organizational support.

The style of grievance handling affects employee outcomes. Cooperative styles, such as obliging and compromising, improve satisfaction and retention (Elbaz et al., 2022). In contrast, dominating and avoidance approaches lead to dissatisfaction and turnover. Studies in sectors like education and nursing confirm the positive impact of cooperative handling on job satisfaction (Montoro-Rodriguez & Small, 2006). However, Williams (2011) suggests that the relationship between handling styles and satisfaction depends on the context.

Cultural and organizational contexts also influence grievance systems. In Sri Lanka's construction sector, informal systems fail to meet the needs of unskilled workers (Dharmapala et al., 2017). Similarly, in Malawi's civil service, favoritism and delays create perceptions of injustice (Dzimhiri, 2016). These issues reduce trust and create a sense of unfairness. Elbaz et al. (2019) argue that grievance systems should consider cultural diversity and promote inclusivity.

Proactive grievance management prevents conflicts from escalating. Open communication, trust-building, and regular monitoring are critical (Weil, 2018; Naagar, 2024). Providing formal channels for employees to express concerns reduces legal risks and fosters a supportive environment (Rakhimova, 2023). Detailed documentation ensures accountability and compliance with legal standards (Edelman et al., 1999).

Grievance handling is closely linked to broader HR practices. Effective systems, combined with fair promotions and employee empowerment, enhance satisfaction and performance (Syed & Yan, 2012). Resolving grievances fairly and efficiently while promoting open communication is essential (Gulzar, 2023; Gelfand et al., 2013).

Unaddressed grievances have serious consequences such as lower morale, increase turnover, and damage organizational culture (Wijesooriya et al., 2021; Danku et al., 2015). Issues related to promotions, working conditions, or supervisor behavior cause dissatisfaction (Potgieter & Muller, 1998; Kochan, 2004). Resolving grievances early prevents larger problems (Danku et al., 2015; Ginting et al., 2023). Proactive management maintains a peaceful and productive workplace (Weil, 2018; Naagar, 2024).

Effective grievance handling depends on fair procedures, cooperative management, and cultural sensitivity. Training and proactive approaches are essential to addressing issues early and building trust. These insights are crucial for improving grievance management in the Nepali civil service, where reforms and capacity building are needed to enhance employee satisfaction and organizational efficiency.

2.3 Grievance Handling in Nepal

The Government of Nepal has introduced various legal provisions and frameworks to address citizen grievances efficiently. The Good Governance (Management and Operation) Act, 2064 (2008) requires all government offices, ministries, departments, and agencies to install complaint boxes in visible locations. Citizens can submit complaints about service quality, work effectiveness, or irregularities. These boxes are opened every three days by designated officials in the presence of other staff. Valid complaints are addressed promptly, and actions taken are displayed on the office notice board for transparency. Complaints concerning the head of an office are sent to higher authorities for resolution. If a complaint is irrelevant to the agency but the complainant is identifiable, the agency informs the complainant and returns the complaint. If the complainant is unidentifiable, the complaint is posted on the notice board (Government of

Nepal, 2008).

The Civil Service Regulation Concerning the Conduct of Employees of the Civil Service, 2065 (2009) emphasizes that civil servants must be sensitive to citizen grievances and deliver services effectively and respectfully. It directs civil servants to respond to queries, complaints, or applications in a timely and appropriate manner. Heads of offices must ensure grievances are handled systematically and promptly (Government of Nepal, 2009). However, this regulation focuses on addressing citizens' grievances and does not provide specific mechanisms for grievances from civil servants themselves.

The Labor Act, 2048 (1992) provides detailed processes for handling both personal and collective grievances between employees and employers. Personal grievances require written complaints to be submitted to the employer, who must resolve the issue through discussion within 15 days. If unresolved, the case is escalated to the Labour Office, where mediation is attempted within another 15 days. If mediation fails, the Labour Office Chief must decide within seven days. Dissatisfied parties can appeal to the Labour Court within 35 days. Collective grievances, supported by at least 51% of employees, follow a similar process with bilateral discussions, mediation by the Labour Office, and possible escalation to a tripartite committee comprising employee, employer, and government representatives. Strikes are allowed if no resolution is reached (Government of Nepal, 1992).

The Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers operates the “Hello Sarkar” hotline to manage public grievances. Citizens can submit complaints 24/7 via phone, email, social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and apps like Viber and WhatsApp. Received complaints are processed quickly, and applicants are informed of actions taken. Other ministries have introduced similar initiatives. The Ministry of Health and Population runs the “Hello Health” service, to address public grievances related to health services across the country. Citizens can lodge complaints regarding services provided by the ministry and its subordinate agencies through various platforms. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) has established the “Hello Home Ministry Grievance Hearing Unit” to address grievances related to its services and ensure prompt resolutions. The grievance unit ensures priority handling of complaints, which are addressed with the involvement of department heads or chief district officers. The unit also manages complaints forwarded by bodies like the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority and the National Vigilance Center.

Despite the existence of provisions to address citizens' grievances, Nepal lacks a formal and institutionalized mechanism to handle grievances from civil servants. While some ministries have taken steps, such as appointing nodal officers or establishing grievance handling sections (e.g., the Ministry of Home Affairs), these efforts remain limited and unstandardized. Civil servants often raise their grievances informally or verbally to their supervisors rather than using formal channels. This reliance on informal processes highlights the absence of a robust, consistent framework for managing employee complaints effectively.

Chapter 3

Research Method

3.1 Approaches of the Study

Grievance handling in the Nepali Civil Service requires more than just analyzing quantitative data. While numbers can provide an overview, they often fail to capture the nuanced experiences and perceptions of civil servants regarding grievance mechanisms. This study takes a qualitative approach to explore the complex and often unspoken aspects of grievance handling. By examining the lived experiences of civil servants, it offers deeper insights into their interactions with grievance systems. This approach highlights key influences such as organizational culture, power relations, and personal beliefs, which play a crucial role in how grievances are reported, addressed, and resolved.

3.2 Research Design

This study employs a case study approach to delve into grievance handling within the Nepali Civil Service. The case study method, as highlighted by Yin (2003) and Myers (2009), is particularly well-suited for exploring complex issues in real-world contexts. It offers a comprehensive lens to examine how civil servants navigate grievances and the challenges they encounter along the way.

The decision to adopt this method is rooted in its ability to address critical "how" and "why" questions, enabling a richer understanding of the factors influencing grievance handling. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to observe authentic behaviors and workplace interactions, all while accounting for the unique cultural and structural intricacies of the Nepali Civil Service. This approach ensures a nuanced and contextually grounded exploration of the grievance-handling process.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

To develop a thorough understanding of grievance handling within the Nepali Civil Service, this study utilized both secondary and primary sources of data. Secondary data were drawn from official reports, public records, policy documents, and a wide range of literature, including articles from newspapers, journals, and other publications. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with civil

servants, providing valuable insights into their personal experiences and perceptions (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998).

Five civil servants were purposively selected as research participants based on their experiences. These participants were chosen for their ability to provide rich, relevant, and diverse perspectives on the topic. Data were gathered through face-to-face, in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the objectives of the study. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted at the participants' preferred locations to ensure their comfort and authenticity in responses. Before each interview, rapport was established, and consent was obtained to record the conversations. The interviews were conducted in Nepali, avoiding jargon or technical terms to promote clear communication and openness (Gupta, 2019).

3.4 Data Management and Analysis

The recordings were transcribed immediately after each interview, maintaining the same sequence in which they were conducted (Peräkylä, 1997). Field notes were promptly reviewed and summarized to preserve key observations and insights. During transcription, we carefully noted any intriguing or unexpected issues that arose, recognizing the fleeting nature of human memory (Lofland & Lofland, 1999).

Following transcription, the data was edited, coded, and systematically categorized to identify themes and subthemes. Additionally, several anecdotes were crafted to illustrate key findings. Through a reflective reasoning process, we analyzed and interpreted the data, drawing meaning from our interactions and engagements with the research participants. This systematic approach ensured that the richness of the participants' experiences was fully captured and understood.

3.5 Ethical Standards

Ethical standards prioritized participant rights and the integrity of the study. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring voluntary participation with the option to withdraw at any time. Respect and dignity were upheld during all interactions. Confidentiality was maintained by removing identifying information and ensuring anonymity throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. The information gathered was used solely for research purposes, with strict measures to protect privacy and data security.

3.6 Quality Standards

Maintaining high-quality standards in qualitative research required a multifaceted approach. Various strategies were employed to ensure rigorous standards. Close attention was given at every stage, with ongoing interactions and feedback sessions involving officials and colleagues to gather diverse perspectives (Adhikari, 2006). The research was conducted in a natural setting, allowing for the exploration of civil servants' experiences within their social context. Participants were encouraged to express their thoughts openly, with probing questions to ensure depth of understanding. Trust was established with participants to elicit candid responses, which were carefully recorded and transcribed promptly. The accuracy of transcriptions was verified, and data analysis and interpretation were conducted impartially, adhering to a scientific approach.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis, Interpretation and Meaning Making

This section shares the experiences of employees in the Nepali civil service with grievance handling, highlighting their challenges and concerns with the current system:

4.1 Modes of Grievance Submission

Grievances in the Nepali civil service are primarily submitted informally. Verbal communication is the most common mode. Employees often choose to voice their concerns directly to supervisors or colleagues rather than submitting formal written complaints. This informal practice creates challenges for effective grievance management. Without formal documentation, it becomes difficult to track, monitor, and systematically address issues. As one official observed:

Grievances are frequently presented verbally and are not formally registered. It is uncommon for employees to submit grievances in written form; instead, they tend to express their concerns verbally. Complaints related to transfers, training, and foreign training are particularly common (Interviewee #R2).

This preference for verbal communication reflects several underlying factors. Employees may perceive

formal grievance processes as overly complex, time-consuming, or unlikely to lead to meaningful outcomes. Additionally, cultural norms in Nepali society often emphasize face-to-face interactions as a preferred way to resolve conflicts. Verbal exchanges provide an immediate sense of being heard and understood, fostering interpersonal connections, even if these grievances are not formally recorded or resolved in a systematic manner.

Grievances commonly center on issues such as transfers, training opportunities, and access to foreign training programs. These are areas of significant concern for many civil service employees, directly influencing their motivation and job satisfaction. The lack of formal grievance submissions in these areas complicates efforts to identify systemic problems and implement lasting solutions.

The reliance on verbal grievance submission highlights both the strengths and limitations of the current grievance-handling practices. On one hand, verbal communication promotes immediacy and emotional connection. On the other, the absence of formal records undermines accountability and the ability to address issues effectively over the long term. To improve grievance management, it is essential to strike a balance between respecting cultural preferences for verbal communication and developing accessible, efficient formal grievance submission mechanisms. This approach would ensure transparency, accountability, and a more robust resolution process.

4.2 Timeliness and Effectiveness

The timely resolution of grievances is important. Employees value prompt responses to their complaints, especially when the issues are critical and demand immediate attention. As one official explained:

When formal grievances are registered, the solution does not take long. If the issue is significant, it is addressed in a timely manner (Interviewee #R1)

Despite this, delays in grievance resolution remain a common concern. Employees express dissatisfaction and a loss of trust when their issues are not resolved quickly or when the responses are seen as impractical or lacking seriousness. One respondent remarked:

I was not satisfied because the grievance was not resolved on time, and the response I received was

not practical. It was disheartening to see that the seriousness of the issue was not acknowledged (Interviewee #R5).

Such delays can have profound consequences. When grievances are not addressed efficiently, employees may feel ignored and undervalued, which erodes their trust in the system. This lack of responsiveness can negatively impact their morale, leading to reduced productivity and a weaker sense of commitment to their organization. The findings highlight the critical importance of resolving grievances with urgency and effectiveness. Timely resolution demonstrates the organization's dedication to addressing employee concerns and fosters trust in the grievance-handling process.

4.3 Organizational Challenges and Constraints

The Nepali civil service faces numerous organizational challenges that hinder the effective handling of grievances. These challenges include resource shortages, inefficient processes, and biases in decision-making. One official explained:

The organization is attempting to find solutions, but despite efforts to manage financial matters, progress remains stagnant. We also have monitoring bodies, which create a sense of fear when dealing with them. Additionally, there is a lack of resources and materials, which further contributes to these challenges. In some cases, biases in decision-making may also play a role (Interviewee #R3).

A persistent lack of resources, including financial and material support, limits the organization's capacity to establish robust grievance-handling mechanisms. While monitoring bodies exist to oversee the process, their presence is often perceived as restrictive rather than supportive. This creates an atmosphere of fear and hesitancy among employees, discouraging them from fully engaging in the grievance process.

Biases in decision-making further compound these challenges. Perceived favoritism or subjective judgments by decision-makers reduce trust in the system and undermine its credibility. Employees often question the fairness of resolutions, which can erode confidence in the grievance-handling process. Another constraint is the prevalence of organizational delays and unnecessary obstacles. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and unclear decision-making processes create frustration for employees. One respondent shared:

Sometimes, we are not allowed to work because obstacles are created, delays occur, or unnecessary issues are raised. It doesn't feel like the civil service in these situations. Here, when we speak to the director, they decide how to handle matters based on their own perspective. Whether their approach works for me depends on how I feel about it (Interviewee #R4).

This highlights the inconsistent and subjective nature of leadership decisions within the organization. Employees often feel that their work and grievance resolutions are influenced by personal perspectives rather than standardized procedures. This unpredictability leads to delays, frustration, and dissatisfaction among employees. Addressing these organizational challenges requires systemic reforms. Key measures include ensuring adequate resource allocation, promoting impartial decision-making, and streamlining grievance-handling procedures to minimize delays. A transparent and supportive organizational environment is essential to building employees' confidence in the system and enhancing overall effectiveness.

4.4 Leadership and Accountability

Leadership and accountability are essential for effective grievance handling in the Nepali civil service. However, findings suggest that leadership has often been ineffective in addressing employee concerns. One respondent noted:

The organization's leadership has been ineffective in addressing grievances. To improve the situation, provisions for adequate support should be implemented. Leadership often fails to give grievances the attention they deserve, instead treating them lightly (Interviewee #R5).

This statement highlights significant gaps in leadership, including inadequate responsiveness and the absence of mechanisms to ensure accountability. Employees frequently feel that grievances are not treated with the seriousness they require, leading to dissatisfaction and frustration.

Another recurring issue is the lack of follow-through in addressing grievances. One official observed:

The individual responsible for addressing grievances has not taken the issue seriously. This forces us to bring it up repeatedly. While the concerns are often acknowledged, putting them into action

still remains a challenge (Interviewee #R2).

This reflects a broader accountability deficit, where leaders delay or neglect action on issues raised by employees. Such inaction undermines trust in the system and discourages employees from engaging with grievance-handling mechanisms. Addressing these challenges requires leadership to adopt a more transparent, accountable, and responsive approach. Capacity-building initiatives are crucial to equipping leaders with the skills and tools needed to manage grievances effectively. Additionally, integrating grievance outcomes into leadership performance evaluations can incentivize timely and responsible action. Strong and accountable leadership is fundamental to building trust and fairness in the grievance-handling process.

4.5 Equity and Fairness

Equity and fairness in opportunities are critical concerns in the grievance-handling process. Employees often express dissatisfaction with the unequal distribution of opportunities, particularly in areas such as foreign training and professional development. Many believe that decisions in these areas lack transparency and fairness. One respondent emphasized:

Every individual deserves equal consideration for opportunities related to foreign training and visits. Decision-making authorities should ensure fairness and equity in granting such opportunities (Interviewee #R1).

Such grievances indicate widespread perceptions of favoritism and bias in decision-making. The absence of clear and transparent criteria for selecting individuals for training or visits often leaves employees feeling excluded, undervalued, and demotivated. In addition, grievances related to fairness are often dismissed or overlooked by senior officials. Some senior leaders resist addressing systemic issues, as one official shared:

Senior officials often express sentiments such as, 'Why choose to focus on this topic? Our organization has always operated this way. Why do you feel the need to question practices that have been in place for so many years?' (Interviewee #R5).

This resistance to change perpetuates a culture where traditional practices take precedence over fairness

and equitable treatment. Dismissive attitudes discourage employees from voicing their concerns, undermining trust in grievance-handling mechanisms and reducing the overall effectiveness of the system. To address these issues, it is essential to establish clear, transparent, and fair processes for allocating opportunities. A well-defined framework for selection, combined with robust mechanisms for addressing grievances about unfairness, can help restore trust in the system.

4.6 Optimism and Organizational Positivity

Despite the challenges in grievance handling, employees in the Nepali civil service show a sense of optimism about the organization's ability to resolve issues and maintain a positive environment. Many believe that, with proper effort and fewer complications, grievances can be addressed effectively. One official remarked:

The organization maintains a positive outlook, and the situation will become clearer if complications are avoided. In the best-case scenario, it will be successfully resolved. In some instances, circumstances may go beyond our control, but even then, the organization will address them with a positive approach (Interviewee #R3).

This statement reflects confidence in the organization's commitment to resolving issues, even in difficult circumstances. Employees acknowledge that while some situations may become complex or exceed immediate control, the organization often responds constructively. Such optimism fosters hope and encourages employees to engage with the grievance-handling system. Trust in the organization's processes grows when employees feel their concerns are taken seriously and will eventually be resolved. This positive attitude is vital for sustaining morale and promoting a cooperative workplace culture. To build on this optimism, the organization need to focus on maintaining a supportive and transparent environment. Open communication, simplifying procedures to avoid unnecessary complications, and ensuring timely responses to grievances are essential steps. These actions can reinforce employees' trust in the system and enhance their overall satisfaction.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Grievance handling in the Nepali civil service is shaped by informal practices, cultural norms, and systemic challenges. Most employees prefer to submit grievances informally, often through verbal communication, instead of submitting formal written complaints. This preference reflects Nepal's cultural norms, where face-to-face interactions are seen as more personal and effective. Verbal communication allows employees to feel heard and acknowledged, fostering an emotional connection. However, reliance on informal methods also presents challenges. Without formal documentation, it becomes difficult to track or resolve issues systematically. While informal practices may provide emotional satisfaction in the short term, they undermine the accountability and transparency that formal grievance systems are designed to ensure. The preference for informal approaches often leaves systemic problems unaddressed. Employees tend to avoid formal procedures, viewing as complex, slow, or ineffective. In certain cases, informal methods like mediation can provide quicker resolutions and a more pleasant process (Naagar, 2024).

Timeliness is a critical factor in effective grievance handling. Employees highly value prompt responses, particularly for urgent concerns. Quick resolutions demonstrate that the organization values its workers and takes their concerns seriously. This study aligns with White (1989), who emphasized the importance of strict time limits at every step of the grievance process. Delays in resolving grievances lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. Prolonged unresolved grievances make employees feel ignored, undervalued, and demotivated. Such delays harm not only employees but also organizational relationships and processes (Ponak et al., 1996). Although some grievances are resolved promptly, this inconsistency undermines overall trust in the process. Timeliness and impartiality are considered desirable outcomes of fair and orderly grievance procedures (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2008). However, some research suggests that while speed is important, the fairness of the process holds greater significance (Gordon & Bowlby, 1989; Lewin, 1999).

While speed is essential, fairness is equally important in grievance handling. Fairness builds trust, even when the outcomes do not favor the employee. When employees perceive decisions as unbiased and based on clear criteria, they are more likely to accept the results. Employees are generally more accepting of unfavorable outcomes when they view the process as just (Peterson & Lewin, 2000; Nurse & Devonish, 2007). Research shows that procedural fairness where employees believe the process is impartial often matters more than the outcome itself (Brockner & Wiesenfeld, 1991; Peterson & Lewin, 2000). Conversely, favoritism and personal biases in grievance resolutions erode trust and discourage employees from raising concerns. In the Nepali civil service, many employees feel that favoritism influences decisions, particularly in areas like foreign training and professional development. This perception undermines trust and discourages employees from voicing legitimate concerns. Addressing these biases requires clear policies, transparent decision-making, and accountability mechanisms.

Organizational challenges further complicate grievance handling. Limited resources, inefficient processes, and unclear policies make resolving grievances difficult. Employees often encounter bureaucratic hurdles, delays, and unnecessary obstacles when attempting to address their concerns. Similar challenges have been noted in other organizations, where grievance systems prioritize compliance over genuinely addressing employee issues (Polster, 2011). Monitoring bodies, designed to ensure accountability, sometimes create fear rather than providing support. These systemic issues erode confidence in the grievance process. Leadership inconsistency further undermines trust, as employees often feel their grievances are dismissed or ignored, forcing them to repeatedly raise the same issues without resolution.

Leadership plays a central role in building trust and ensuring accountability in grievance handling. In the Nepali civil service, however, many leaders are perceived as unresponsive or dismissive. This lack of commitment frustrates employees and weakens the credibility of the system. Including grievance outcomes in leadership evaluations could incentivize leaders to take grievances more seriously. Effective supervision has been shown to reduce the frequency of grievances (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2004). Constructive grievance handling largely depends on managers' and supervisors' ability to recognize, diagnose, and address the causes of potential employee dissatisfaction before they escalate into formal grievances (Chaykowski & Slotsve, 1992; Tan, 1994). Leaders who demonstrate a commitment to resolving grievances foster trust and confidence in the system. Capacity-building programs can equip leaders with the skills necessary for effective grievance management.

Despite these challenges, employees remain optimistic that the grievance system can improve. Many believe that with fewer complications and consistent effort, grievances can be resolved effectively. This optimism reflects confidence in the organization's potential to address issues constructively, even in difficult circumstances. Fostering a culture of trust and open communication is crucial to improving grievance management (Rakhimova, 2023). A positive approach to grievance handling can build trust and boost workplace morale. When employees see their concerns being taken seriously and solutions pursued in good faith, they are more likely to engage with the system.

To improve grievance handling, the Nepali civil service must prioritize creating a system that is transparent, fair, and supportive. Formal mechanisms should be simplified and made accessible to encourage participation while respecting cultural preferences for verbal communication. Adequate resources and streamlined processes are essential for timely resolutions. Leaders need to take responsibility for addressing grievances, ensuring fairness, and eliminating biases. Trust, accountability, and fairness should form the foundation of the system. A culture of trust and open communication will empower employees to voice their concerns without fear (Kwon & Farndale, 2020). A robust grievance system benefits both employees and the organization by fostering respect, improving morale, and enhancing overall performance.

5.2 Conclusions:

Grievance handling in the Nepali civil service is a critical process that directly impacts employee satisfaction, organizational efficiency, and productivity. While informal verbal submissions allow employees to communicate their concerns quickly and expressively, the absence of formal documentation undermines accountability, transparency, and resolution. Delays in addressing grievances, resource shortages, and perceived biases erode employee morale and trust in the system. Unequal access to opportunities such as training and professional development further underscores the need for fair and transparent processes. Despite these challenges, there is optimism among employees regarding the potential for improvement through systemic reforms. Strengthening grievance-handling mechanisms with clear processes, timely responses, and accountable leadership not only addresses employee concerns but also contributes to better governance and improved public service delivery in Nepal.

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Annex-1

Check list

Name:

Age:

Marital status:

Educational background:

How many years have you been working as a civil servant:

Position:

Organization:

1. How familiar are you with the grievance management process in your organization?
2. Do you think your organization has any specific legal, policy, or procedural arrangements for grievance management?
3. Do you think the current policies and procedures for grievance management are fair and transparent? If not, what are the main issues?
4. How transparent is the grievance management process in your organization?
5. Have you ever registered a grievance in your organization?
6. If yes, which formal channels did you use to register the grievance?
7. How easy or complicated is it to use these channels?
8. What type of grievance did you file?
9. Did you face any fear, hassle, or other factors that affected your grievance registration?
10. How did you feel the organization responded to your grievance registration? Please share your experience.
11. Did you feel encouraged to register your grievance, or did fear or other reasons cause you to remain silent?
12. After registering your grievance, how long did it typically take to reach a resolution?
13. Did you feel that the grievance management process was completed in a timely and effective manner?
14. Are you satisfied with the resolution of your grievance? Why?
15. What was the attitude of your supervisor or managers towards your grievance?
16. How would you evaluate the grievance management process in your organization?
17. Do you think employees feel that grievances are taken seriously?
18. What were the main challenges you faced during the grievance resolution process?
19. Do you think your grievance was addressed in a fair and unbiased manner?
20. Do you think the organization's leadership is playing an effective role in the grievance management process? If not, what can be done to improve it?