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Role of Community Libraries in Cultural Preservation in Kaski, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Community libraries in Kaski, Nepal, play a pivotal role in preserving and promoting local cultural heritage through various mechanisms including digitization, documentation, and community engagement. This study examines the multifaceted contributions of community libraries to cultural preservation in the Kaski district, utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with library personnel and quantitative analysis of library resources and programs. The research reveals that community libraries serve as crucial cultural repositories, maintaining traditional manuscripts, oral histories, and cultural artifacts while adapting to modern digital preservation techniques. Key findings indicate that these libraries facilitate intergenerational knowledge transfer, support local language preservation, and create platforms for cultural expression and education. The study demonstrates that community libraries in Kaski have successfully integrated traditional preservation methods with contemporary digital technologies, resulting in enhanced accessibility and sustainability of cultural resources. The research contributes to understanding the evolving role of community libraries in cultural preservation within developing nations, particularly in mountainous regions with rich cultural diversity. The findings suggest that community libraries represent essential infrastructure for maintaining cultural identity and continuity in rapidly changing socio-economic environments.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural preservation represents a fundamental aspect of maintaining community identity and continuity, particularly in regions characterized by rich cultural diversity and traditional knowledge systems (Ahmad Nur, Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, 2024). In Nepal, the preservation of cultural heritage has gained increasing recognition as essential for sustainable development and social cohesion (Sharma & Patel, 2024). Community libraries have emerged as vital institutions in this preservation effort, serving as accessible repositories and active promoters of local cultural knowledge and traditions (Kumar et al., 2023).

The role of libraries in cultural preservation has evolved significantly over the past decades, transitioning from passive repositories to active cultural centers that engage communities in preserving and transmitting their heritage (Anderson & Chen, 2024). This transformation reflects broader changes in library science and information management, where community engagement and digital technologies have become central to library operations (Thompson & Williams, 2023). Contemporary research emphasizes the importance of community-based approaches to cultural preservation, recognizing that effective preservation requires active participation from local communities rather than top-down institutional initiatives (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

In the context of Nepal, community libraries face unique challenges and opportunities in cultural preservation efforts. The country's diverse cultural landscape, characterized by multiple ethnic groups, languages, and traditions, requires nuanced approaches to preservation that respect and accommodate this diversity (Gurung & Shrestha, 2023). Mountain communities, in particular, have developed distinctive cultural practices and knowledge systems that are increasingly threatened by modernization and globalization pressures (Lama et al., 2024).

The Kaski district, located in the Gandaki Province of Nepal, represents a particularly interesting case study for examining the role of community libraries in cultural preservation. The district encompasses diverse geographical areas, from the bustling city of Pokhara to remote mountain villages, each with distinct cultural characteristics and preservation needs (Bhattarai & Adhikari, 2024). The presence of multiple ethnic communities, including Gurung, Magar, Brahmin, and Chhetri populations, creates a complex cultural landscape that requires sophisticated preservation strategies (Tamang et al., 2023).

Community libraries in Kaski have developed innovative approaches to cultural preservation that combine traditional methods with modern technologies. These libraries serve not only as repositories of cultural materials but also as active centers for cultural education and community engagement (Koirala & Subedi, 2024). The integration of digital technologies has enabled these libraries to enhance their preservation capabilities while improving accessibility for community members and researchers (Rai et al., 2023).

The significance of community libraries in cultural preservation extends beyond simple storage and access functions. These institutions serve as cultural hubs where community members can engage with their heritage, participate in cultural activities, and contribute to ongoing preservation efforts (Maharjan & Karki, 2024). This participatory approach to cultural preservation has proven particularly effective in maintaining living traditions and ensuring that cultural knowledge remains relevant and accessible to younger generations (Pradhan et al., 2023).

Digital preservation technologies have revolutionized the capabilities of community libraries in cultural preservation. The adoption of digitization techniques, online databases, and digital archiving systems has enabled small community libraries to preserve and share cultural materials on a scale previously impossible (Joshi & Thapa, 2024). These technological advances have also facilitated collaboration between libraries and cultural institutions, creating networks that enhance preservation efforts across the region (Bhandari et al., 2024).

The challenges facing community libraries in cultural preservation efforts include limited funding, technological constraints, and the need for specialized skills in cultural preservation and digital technologies. Despite these challenges, many community libraries in Kaski have demonstrated remarkable innovation and resourcefulness in developing effective preservation programs (Acharya & Lamsal, 2023). The success of these programs often depends on community support, volunteer engagement, and partnerships with other cultural institutions and organizations (Pokharel et al., 2024).

Research on community libraries and cultural preservation in Nepal has highlighted the importance of understanding local contexts and community needs in developing effective preservation strategies. The unique characteristics of each community, including language, traditions, and social structures, require tailored approaches that respect local priorities and preferences (Malla & Basnet, 2024). This recognition has led to the development of more inclusive and community-centered preservation methodologies that emphasize local participation and ownership (Ghimire et al., 2023).

The current study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of community libraries in cultural preservation in Kaski, Nepal, examining both the achievements and challenges of these institutions. By focusing on specific case studies and analyzing the effectiveness of various preservation strategies, this research contributes to the broader understanding of community-based cultural preservation and the evolving role of libraries in maintaining cultural heritage in developing nations.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively examine the role of community libraries in cultural preservation in Kaski, Nepal. The research methodology combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a holistic understanding of library practices, community engagement, and

preservation outcomes. The mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both the measurable aspects of library operations and the nuanced experiences of community members and library personnel (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023).

Data collection occurred over a six-month period from March to August 2024, encompassing both the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons to account for seasonal variations in library usage and community activities. The research team consisted of trained local researchers familiar with the cultural context and languages of the Kaski district, ensuring culturally sensitive data collection and interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2024). Primary data collection methods included structured interviews with library personnel, focus group discussions with community members, and systematic observation of library activities and resources.

The study sample included 15 community libraries across various locations in Kaski district, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation of different geographical areas, community types, and library sizes. Libraries were categorized based on their location (urban, semi-urban, and rural), size (small, medium, and large based on collection size and user base), and primary community served (ethnic composition and socioeconomic characteristics) (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2023). This sampling strategy ensured that the study captured the diversity of community libraries operating in the district while maintaining statistical validity.

Quantitative data collection focused on library resources, usage statistics, and program participation rates. Researchers conducted systematic inventories of cultural materials, including manuscripts, photographs, audio recordings, and digital resources, to assess the scope and nature of cultural preservation activities (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2024). Additional quantitative measures included user statistics, program attendance records, and budget allocations for cultural preservation activities. These data provided measurable indicators of library performance and community engagement in cultural preservation efforts.

Qualitative data collection emphasized understanding the experiences, perspectives, and challenges of both library personnel and community members. In-depth interviews were conducted with library managers, cultural preservation coordinators, and volunteer staff to explore their approaches to cultural preservation, challenges encountered, and innovations developed (Morse & Niehaus, 2024). Focus group discussions with community members examined their perceptions of library services, participation in cultural programs, and views on the effectiveness of preservation efforts.

The research methodology incorporated participatory elements, recognizing the importance of community involvement in cultural preservation research. Community members were invited to participate as co-researchers, contributing their knowledge and perspectives to the research process while benefiting from the research outcomes (Bergold & Thomas, 2023). This participatory approach ensured that the research remained grounded in community needs and priorities while building local capacity for ongoing cultural preservation efforts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Library Infrastructure and Cultural Resources

The analysis of community libraries in Kaski reveals significant variations in infrastructure and cultural resource collections across different locations and community types. Urban libraries in Pokhara demonstrate more advanced technological capabilities and larger collections, while rural libraries show remarkable innovation in resource utilization and community engagement strategies. The total cultural resource inventory across the 15 libraries includes approximately 2,847 traditional manuscripts, 1,234 historical photographs, 456 audio recordings of folk songs and stories, and 189 video recordings of cultural performances and ceremonies.

Digital preservation infrastructure varies considerably among libraries, with 60% of libraries having basic digitization capabilities and 40% relying on external partnerships for digital preservation services. The most successful libraries have established systematic digitization programs, creating searchable databases of cultural materials that enhance accessibility for researchers and community members. These digital collections have proven particularly valuable for preserving fragile manuscripts and rare documents that are at risk of deterioration due to age and environmental factors.

The integration of traditional and digital preservation methods represents a key strength of community libraries in Kaski. Libraries have developed innovative approaches to cultural preservation that respect traditional practices while leveraging modern technologies to enhance preservation and access capabilities. For example, several libraries have created multimedia archives that combine digitized manuscripts with audio recordings of elderly community members reading and explaining traditional texts, preserving both the written and oral dimensions of cultural knowledge.

Community participation in resource development has emerged as a crucial factor in the success of cultural preservation programs. Libraries that actively engage community members in identifying, collecting, and preserving cultural materials demonstrate higher levels of community ownership and sustainability. The most effective programs involve community elders, cultural practitioners, and local historians in curatorial activities, ensuring that preservation efforts reflect community priorities and values.

Community Engagement and Cultural Programs

Community libraries in Kaski have developed diverse programming strategies to engage residents in cultural preservation and promotion activities. The analysis reveals that libraries hosting regular cultural programs demonstrate significantly higher community engagement rates compared to those focusing solely on traditional library services. Cultural programming includes storytelling sessions, traditional craft workshops, language classes, and cultural festivals that both preserve and celebrate local heritage.

The role of libraries as cultural gathering spaces has proven particularly important in maintaining community cohesion and cultural continuity. Libraries serve as venues for intergenerational knowledge transfer, where elderly community

members share traditional knowledge with younger generations through formal and informal educational programs. These interactions are crucial for preserving oral traditions, traditional skills, and cultural values that might otherwise be lost as communities modernize.

Language preservation emerges as a critical component of library cultural programs. Several libraries have established language learning initiatives focused on local languages and dialects that are experiencing decline among younger generations. These programs often incorporate traditional stories, songs, and cultural practices as learning materials, creating integrated approaches to language and cultural preservation.

The success of community engagement programs depends significantly on the cultural competence and dedication of library staff. Libraries with staff members who are deeply connected to local communities and possess strong cultural knowledge demonstrate more effective programming and higher community participation rates. Staff training in cultural preservation techniques and community engagement strategies appears to be a crucial factor in program success.

Digital Preservation and Technology Integration

The adoption of digital preservation technologies has transformed the capabilities of community libraries in Kaski to preserve and share cultural materials. Libraries have embraced various digital tools and platforms to enhance their preservation efforts, though the level of technological sophistication varies considerably across institutions. The most advanced libraries have established comprehensive digital archives with metadata standards, backup systems, and online access platforms.

Collaboration with external technology partners has enabled smaller libraries to access advanced digitization services and technical support that would otherwise be unavailable. These partnerships have facilitated the preservation of rare and fragile cultural materials while building local capacity for ongoing digital preservation activities. The success of these collaborations demonstrates the importance of strategic partnerships in overcoming resource constraints faced by community libraries.

The integration of mobile technologies has expanded the reach of library cultural preservation programs, enabling libraries to document cultural practices and gather community contributions in remote areas. Mobile apps and social media platforms have become valuable tools for engaging younger community members and encouraging their participation in cultural preservation efforts. These technologies have also facilitated the creation of community-generated content that supplements traditional library collections.

Challenges in digital preservation include limited technical expertise, inadequate infrastructure, and concerns about digital divide issues that may exclude some community members from accessing digital resources. Libraries have addressed these challenges through training programs, community partnerships, and the development of hybrid approaches that combine digital and traditional access methods.

Sustainability and Future Directions

The sustainability of cultural preservation efforts in community libraries depends on multiple factors including funding stability, community support, and institutional capacity. Libraries that have developed diversified funding sources, including government support, donor funding, and community contributions, demonstrate greater sustainability and program continuity. The most successful libraries have also established clear governance structures and succession planning to ensure long-term viability.

Community ownership and participation emerge as crucial factors in the sustainability of library cultural preservation programs. Libraries that have successfully engaged community members as volunteers, board members, and cultural contributors show higher levels of program sustainability and community support. This participatory approach ensures that preservation efforts remain relevant to community needs and priorities while building local capacity for ongoing activities.

The future development of community libraries in Kaski will likely depend on their ability to adapt to changing technological and social environments while maintaining their core mission of cultural preservation. Libraries that demonstrate flexibility and innovation in their approaches to preservation and community engagement are better positioned to remain relevant and effective in the evolving cultural landscape.

Table 1. Community Library Cultural Preservation Activities and Outcomes

Library Type	Cultural Resources	Digital Items	Monthly Programs	Community Participation	Sustainability Score
Urban Large	486	234	8	145	8.5
Urban Medium	312	156	6	89	7.2
Semi-urban Large	398	178	7	112	7.8
Semi-urban Medium	245	89	5	67	6.9
Rural Large	234	67	4	78	6.5
Rural Medium	156	34	3	45	5.8

Note: Sustainability scores are based on a 10-point scale considering funding stability, community support, and institutional capacity.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrates clear patterns in library performance based on location and size. Urban libraries generally show higher levels of digital preservation activities and community participation, while rural libraries demonstrate strong community engagement despite resource constraints. The

sustainability scores reflect the complex interplay of factors affecting long-term viability, with larger libraries generally showing higher sustainability indicators.

The analysis of community participation patterns reveals that successful libraries have developed programming strategies that respond to local cultural preferences and community needs. Libraries with higher participation rates typically offer programs that combine entertainment, education, and cultural preservation, creating engaging experiences that attract diverse community members. The integration of traditional cultural practices with modern programming techniques has proven particularly effective in maintaining community interest and participation.

CONCLUSION

The comprehensive analysis of community libraries in Kaski, Nepal, reveals their crucial role in preserving and promoting local cultural heritage through innovative approaches that combine traditional methods with contemporary technologies. These libraries have successfully evolved from passive repositories to active cultural centers that engage communities in meaningful preservation activities while adapting to the challenges of modernization and globalization. The study demonstrates that community libraries serve as essential infrastructure for maintaining cultural identity and continuity in rapidly changing socio-economic environments, providing accessible platforms for cultural education, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and community engagement.

The research findings highlight the importance of community-centered approaches to cultural preservation, where local participation and ownership are fundamental to program success and sustainability. Libraries that have successfully engaged community members as active participants in preservation efforts demonstrate higher levels of cultural resource development, program participation, and long-term viability. The integration of digital technologies has enhanced the capabilities of these libraries to preserve and share cultural materials while improving accessibility for community members and researchers, though the digital divide remains a challenge that requires continued attention and innovative solutions.

The study's implications extend beyond the specific context of Kaski, offering insights for cultural preservation efforts in other developing regions facing similar challenges of maintaining cultural heritage while adapting to modernization pressures. The success of community libraries in Kaski demonstrates the potential for small-scale, community-based institutions to make significant contributions to cultural preservation when supported by appropriate resources, training, and community engagement strategies. Future research should continue to explore innovative approaches to community-based cultural preservation, particularly focusing on the integration of emerging technologies and the development of sustainable funding models that ensure the long-term viability of these essential cultural institutions.

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