Opportunities and barriers for young rural–urban migrants transitioning from education to work in Kathmandu, Nepal

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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the opportunities and barriers encountered by young rural–urban migrants as they transition from education to work in Kathmandu, Nepal. It explores the opportunities available to both male and female youth during their transition from education to work and how these opportunities positively influenced their trajectories. On the other hand, the study also presents the barriers experienced by both male and female youth that may have negatively influenced their education-to-work transition processes. Qualitative interviews conducted with 24 participants show that parents’ choices in education, migration to Kathmandu for education or work, going abroad for studies and work, and financial resources were the main experiences of opportunities and barriers influencing their trajectories. Using comparative analysis, gender differences in opportunities and barriers were found among the participants.

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Introduction

Scholars have widely recognized that opportunities and barriers during the education to work transition play a crucial role in influencing the life trajectories of young people (Chee, 2018; Kölbl, 2013; Peng, 2020). A variety of opportunities and barriers can be found in the literature. Educational access (Ezaki, 2019; Hegna & Smette, 2017), family responsibilities (Guinée, 2014; Khurshid & Saba, 2018; Kölbl, 2013), social class (Burke et al., 2020), financial resources (Ezaki, 2019; LeVine, 2019), migration (Punch, 2014; Chee, 2018; Peng, 2020), parental and individual aspirations (Kölbl, 2013; LeVine, 2019; Peng, 2020), and social network (Nunn et al., 2014) have all been recognized as mediating factors influencing the trajectories of young people. To explore this variety of opportunities and barriers that young people face during their life trajectories, Sanders et al. (2018) have pointed out four thematic factors influencing education-to-work transition processes clustering the above individual factors as follows: relational – parent and child relations; educational – school environment and peer experience; individual – agency; and, contextual resources – neighbourhood (Sanders et al., 2018). These thematic factors will be discussed in detail.

(a) Relational – parent and child relations:

Scholars have pointed out that because one’s parents are crucial for ‘access to resources and networks’ (Sanders et al., 2018, p. 763), relational factors play an important role in the transition to adulthood, but they are ‘seldom the focus of analysis’ (Wyn et al., 2012, p. 4). Family is specifically of relevance in youth transition studies addressing how family structures, ideologies, decisions and
experiences shape young people’s trajectories (Patel, 2017). Parents’ decisions, aspirations and goals are of importance in influencing educational trajectories, career trajectories and hence in achieving adulthood. Parental support and the resources parents provide have enabled young people to overcome challenges in their life (Hardgrove et al., 2015; Patel, 2017). Intergenerational transmission of opportunities through parents improves the life trajectories of young people. According to Crespo et al. (2013), parents contribute to their children’s careers by developing their efficacy and their career aspirations. They further mentioned that parents help their children in their educational tracks, which affects their children’s perceptions of a positive future orientation. Many young people perceive parental educational aspirations in the form of support and resources that parents provide to their children (Patel, 2017; Stokes, 2012). Parents’ involvement in young people’s education has also been identified as one of the main methods to prevent school absenteeism and school drop-outs among young people (Dahal, 2019). Those young people unable to access parental support and resources are at risk and have to struggle for a successful future (Stokes et al., 2015). Parents’ choices, decisions and involvement in education have shown a close link with young people’s education-to-work transitions (Patel, 2017).

In addition, some researchers have pointed out relational aspects are driven by gendered uses of capital and resource allocations. Gender roles within the households, values and norms influence the young people’s trajectories in various ways (Gupta, 2019; Khurshid & Saba, 2018). Khurshid and Saba (2018) study of young rural Pakistani women revealed that although parents allow their young daughters to get education, these women are still ‘expected by their families and communities to continue to fulfil the domestic responsibilities seen as women’s work’ (Khurshid & Saba, 2018, p. 560). The study has highlighted parents’ relationships, support, motivations and guidance may or may not result in young people’s positive life trajectories. Thus, there is a need to further explore whether the nature of parents’ choices, involvement and support in education, as reported in the literature, provides positive outcomes for both genders in their trajectories (Guinée, 2014; Hardgrove et al., 2015; Hegna & Smette, 2017).

(b) Educational – school environment and peer experience:

Educational opportunities and barriers often have been identified by researchers to have great influence on young people’s trajectories, whether in relation to the transition from school to higher education or from education to work (Dahal, 2019; Ezaki, 2019). Often, young people and their parents strongly believe that an individual’s education will uplift the social and economic position of the family in society. School environment and peer experiences have received considerable research attention in influencing the trajectories of young people (Sanders et al., 2018). A positive school environment, including encouraging teachers’ behaviour and attitudes (Sanders et al., 2016), class inclusion (Nilsson Folke, 2017) and access to preferred school or educational tracks (Chee, 2018) has been observed as playing an important role in young people’s trajectories. Positive peer relationships and school environment lead to greater educational and occupational outcomes. Researchers have found that peer relationships that support young people during their school years have helped them to continue their educational trajectories (Uslu & Gizir, 2017; Wentzel, 2017). When young people experience a lack of proper schooling, lack of proper curriculum, exclusion at school and by teachers, and bullying at an early age, this influences their educational and occupational outcomes. Lack of proper school environment and lack of peer relationships may perpetuate unsuccessful trajectories of young people (Sanders et al., 2018).

(c) Individual – agency:

In the literature on individual agency, self-direction, individual choices and decisions are found to be the factors having an immense impact on an individual’s educational and occupational trajectories (Hardgrove et al., 2015; Peng, 2020). Although young people often mention that they decide on their
own future careers, they also acknowledge that they work hard to fulfil the educational aspirations that their parents have for them (Kölbel, 2013). Individual financial access has been one of the major barriers or enablers (providing access to resources and opportunities such as basic or higher education) in an individual’s life. Thus, social and institutional structures influence young people’s decisions, and individual choices are embedded within these provided opportunities and constraints.

(d) Contextual resources – neighbourhood:

For an individual, barriers to educational and occupational trajectories can be balanced or negotiated with the contextual resources available (Dahal, 2019; Peng, 2020; Sanders et al., 2018). Unsafe neighbourhoods increase the risk of unemployment, foster hopelessness and offer fewer opportunities for career advancement. Young people from these neighbourhoods often feel that they do not have the resources in their communities and regions, and find it difficult to achieve successful educational and career outcomes. Risky neighbourhoods also reduce the educational and occupational aspirations among youth (Peterson, 2011; Sanders et al., 2016). The contextual factors may act as a barrier or enabler (if the neighbourhood is safe and progressive) for young people’s education to work trajectories.

The aim of this article was to provide a better understanding of the opportunities and barriers faced by young, rural–urban migrants during their education-to-work transition in Nepal from the perspective of young people themselves. The four thematic factors proposed by Sanders et al. (2018) as discussed above provide a nuanced framework to explore the experiences of young people. Insights from this research can help to develop support structures that are effective in countering the differentiated barriers of young people, especially for those young rural–urban migrants who are socio-economically at risk while making their transition from education to work and whose trajectories may not reflect traditional pathways. The first research question for this paper is as follows: What opportunities and barriers influence the education-to-work transition of young rural–urban migrants?

Gendered opportunities and barriers in transition from education to work in Nepal

In a developing country like Nepal traditional gendered divisions of labour continue to limit women to reproductive roles and responsibilities while men are viewed as the main breadwinners in the family. Historically, women are required to adhere to gendered family responsibilities and activities such as household chores, obedience towards parents and others, self-sacrifice and to exhibit behaviour considered to be conducive to maintaining family harmony (LeVine, 2019). These social inequalities – including the inequalities between men and women as discriminatory values and norms against girls and women – are deeply rooted in the culture and social practices of Nepal. A son is viewed as the means of economic support for his parents until death, while a daughter is looked on as a financial burden whose labour will be transferred to her husband’s family (Hatlebakk, 2012; LeVine, 2019). The traditional view of girls as someone else’s property still influences attempts at giving Nepalese girls the same educational opportunities as boys (Gupta, 2019; Ulle, 2010). While the statistics reveal increasing literacy rates for women, and progressive transformation of the traditional society into a modern one, the Nepalese society still shows social hindrances that challenge the ideal of equal opportunities for females.

As a way to reduce the gap in literacy rates between males and females, the Nepalese government has introduced a number of different policies in recent years. The School Sector Reform Programme (SSRP) 2009–2015, a continuation of the Education for All (EFA) programme launched in the 1980s, reinforced the impetus put on the role that education is to play in uplifting the status of women in society (Bista et al., 2019). The SSRP restructured the country’s school education system (Ezaki, 2019) up to a higher secondary level, and was especially aimed at transforming the status of
women and girls. Such social change was to be achieved by removing barriers to education for women, and, as a result, easing access to employment opportunities for them.

The effects of these nationwide policies were noticeable; the Nepal Living Standard Survey 2010–2011 (NLSS–III) revealed that the country’s overall literacy rate had increased to 66% from 55% (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2011). Still, the literacy rate in males were recorded as 72.2% as opposed to 51.4% in females. United Nations Development Programme, (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2012) also mentioned the net enrolment rate in primary education had increased from 64% in 1990 to 89% by 2011. A recent dataset of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) revealed that the net enrolment of young people in primary education had increased to 95.3% with 94.7% for girls and 95.9% for boys ((UNESCO), 2020).

In secondary education the educational equality policies have been less successful in 2015–16. The net enrolment rate of young people at the secondary level is at 61.87%. In total, 70% of young people drop out of school before they reach secondary level (Teach for Nepal, 2017). Recent studies have highlighted how a number of factors such as economics, gender inequality, early marriages and the remoteness of given regions – influence school drop-out rates for young people (Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 2011; LeVine, 2019; Gupta, 2019). Although the policies and reforms have been introduced to redress the educational needs and access for education for young people, Nepal still struggles to create a conducive environment and provide equal opportunities for all with regards to gender (Ezaki, 2019; Neupane, 2017). Gupta (2019) found that almost all girls from poor families are still deprived of education and parents pay more attention to marrying off their daughters than to their education due to lack of financial resources. But if the family is not poor, and the parents understand the importance of education in uplifting the socioeconomic status then there is a chance of young people remaining in school and completing higher education. As certain changes in Nepal can be observed, such as access to education for all and increased overall literacy, a second research question is added to the first one: how do opportunities and barriers differ among the young rural–urban migrants in terms of gender?

**Methodology**

This article is based on research that forms part of a larger PhD project on rural–urban migrant youth education to work transitions in Kathmandu, Nepal. In the framework of that project, a year-long longitudinal study was conducted with 24 research participants (12 male and 12 female) in Kathmandu from April 2018 to February 2019. This article focuses on understanding the opportunities and barriers influencing young people’s education to work trajectories. Kathmandu, as the capital and most developed urban centre in Nepal, attracts a large rural migrant population who come to the city in search of higher education and employment. This makes it a suitable location for the study of young people’s education-to-work transitions.

The research participants were all between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. The informants possessed at least a School Leaving Certificate (SLC) which is up to Grade 10, obtained at a mix of both private- and public-school education. They all worked at a call centre. A call centre is described as a centralized office used for the purpose of receiving and transmitting a large volume of requests by telephone (see Shrestha & Sharma, 2013). The participants belonged to diverse caste and ethnic groups and were from different rural parts of Nepal. This made the call centre an interesting place for study. The interviews were held in a safe location, mostly in a public one preferred by the participants themselves (e.g. meeting and working areas in cafes or local eateries at the time when inflows of people were low). The open-ended interviews lasted for approximately two hours.

Life (hi)story interview was the vital source of data collection in the research, as it provided the opportunity to explore ‘thick’ lived experiences (Atkinson, 1998), but it also contained some challenges. On the one hand, personal narratives provide insightful stories of social inequalities, differences in power and authority (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). On the other hand some stories are
compromised as is it not always possible to express everyday lived experiences in words (Bagnoli, 2009). Therefore, a timeline-mapping exercise was employed together with the life (hi)story interviews. Multiple methods help to facilitate the ability of the participants to express themselves and share their experiences accurately as possible. This study used the timeline-mapping exercise as guided by Kolar et al. (2015) together with life (history) interviews to understand the diverse and complex experiences of young people and to analyse the opportunities and barriers that the participants encountered in their lives.

The author first explained to the research participants what the life (history) interview and timeline mapping exercise methods were about. White A3 paper sheets and coloured pens and pencils were provided to draw a line (which the participants were asked to assume as their life trajectory) and map the meaningful events starting from birth on the paper. The participants were asked to narrate their stories and at the same time insert those events they talked about on the paper. These timeline-mapping exercises were helpful for the research participants in clarifying events and thinking of minute details that happened in their lives as shown in Figure 1.

![Timeline-mapping exercise conducted with research participant John.](image)

Evaluating these timeline-mapping exercises with the codes developed helped to explore the various opportunities and barriers the young participants experienced in their lives. The data analysis began with an open-coding analytical process as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) and followed the five-step of constantly compared analysis procedure of Boeije (2002) for qualitative interviews. The five steps are: 1) comparison within a single interview; 2) comparison between interviews within the same group; 3) comparison of interviews from different groups; 4) comparison of the pairs at the level of the couple; and, 5) comparing couples. Out of these five steps, steps 2 and 3 guided the comparison process, especially to uncover gender differences.

Experiences such as ‘family connections’ and ‘challenges and problems of various relationships’ were part of exploring the research question for this study. The analysis involved comparing the experiences within the groups. For the male participants ‘challenges and problems of various relationships’ did not appear as a significant experience of barriers in their education to work trajectories. But codes such as ‘financial resources’ emerged as the main barrier whereas ‘moving to Kathmandu’ and ‘going abroad for work and studies’ inductively emerged as an opportunity for
them. ‘Migration to Kathmandu’ was identified as an experience of opportunity for young female participants while making their transition, whereas ‘parents’ choices in education’ appeared both as an opportunity and as a barrier, especially in combination with financial resources.

Then the next step of constantly comparing involved analysing the different perspectives among the participants sharing the same experiences or different experiences, for example, ‘parents’ choices in education’ (Boeije, 2002), identifying to what extent these experiences were making an impact in their life trajectories and in what ways. The two steps of constantly comparing analysis methods applied for this study enabled a deeper insight and understanding of the data. In order to protect research participants’ identities, pseudonyms (their own chosen ones) were assigned to them.

**Results**

**Opportunities for young people**

This section explores the experiences of opportunities articulated by the young people that positively influenced their trajectories. Three themes emerged as experiences of opportunities among young people during their life courses: parents’ choices in education, migration to Kathmandu and going abroad for work and studies. In this study, parents’ choices in education were observed having a positive impact on young people in combination with the financial resources the parents availed. This will be discussed in the section below:

**Parents’ choices in education as supportive**

Most young people in this study shared their experiences of parental influence in relation to higher secondary education and how it influenced their trajectories positively. Most participants, specifically young females, revealed that their parents’ choices in education turned out to be helpful in shaping their future, in terms of both navigating suitable career choices and accessing appropriate educational resources. Twenty-year-old Anna, born in Janakpur, a sub-metropolitan city in the south bordering India, shared that for her the best thing that had happened in her life was moving to Kathmandu. When her parents made the move to Kathmandu, she was given the opportunity to study at Dayanand Anglo Vedic (DAV), a famous private school in the capital city, for which her parents had to avail the necessary financial resources. Although she lived very briefly in Pokhara, another major urban centre in Nepal, prior to her higher education, Anna still believed that it was her schooling in Kathmandu that marked the most important transition in her life.

‘My parents are very supportive, they never forced me to do anything […] but like late nights and all they do not allow […] I told my parents that I would like to take management studies in secondary school and they were like […] they did not say you have to be a doctor or an engineer or something like that […]’

Rose, 21, is from Bandipur, a town located between Kathmandu and Pokhara added:

‘My mother and my father both used to say that I had to study, and I should be economically independent. My mother inspired me to do better in my studies […] She took a lot of pride in the fact that I was the first one in the family to go for a study in the city, and she motivated me to do well and to make my family proud.’

Often parents believe that the lack of educational opportunities that they encountered during their own trajectories should not be the case for their children. This encourages them to support their children in receiving a good education and having a successful career. For Anna, studying at a school in Pokhara did not hold the same value as being at DAV. Her comments show that being able to go to a good private school was an advantage and a privilege. A private-school in Nepal is especially advantageous when entering the labour market (Thapa, 2015). There is a widespread culture among those who can afford it to send their children to private schools in order to make them better prepared for entering the labour market (Joshi, 2019). This indicates that financial resources along with parental support are equally important in determining young people’s educational trajectories.
For Rose, her parents were her biggest inspirations and she believed their decision would lead to positive results. The narratives of Anna and Rose imply that in their respective life (hi)stories, their educational decisions were influenced and positively supported by their parents and financial resources were made available to support those decisions. Moreover, their motivation matched their parents’ visions for the futures of their daughters. This indicates that these young women and their parents viewed education as a financial investment that would yield social and economic benefits in the long term.

The experience of 25-year-old Keith from Sankharpur village in Sarlahi, a district in the southern region of Nepal, was slightly different:

'I left school multiple times [...] they did not scold me or pushed me to go to school [...] They told me if I am not interested in school then I can do something else [here he means doing diploma courses or taking technical training [...]'.

Although Keith did talk about his parents’ support during his educational trajectories, the parental intervention in his education did not mirror that of Rose and Anna. Keith’s parents did not push him to follow either the traditional career routes or the educational stream they felt suitable for him. Instead, they were supportive of him pursuing vocational training. Male participants shared experiences of subtle parental support in their educational trajectories. This indicates that they could pursue their own path while their parents would support them throughout.

Migration to Kathmandu

Migration to Kathmandu emerged as another experience of opportunity. People have been migrating to Kathmandu in search of work for years, but since the implementation of different educational programmes in Nepal, young people’s migration to Kathmandu has become one of the common practices observed. Migration for education has become vital to many families to acquire economic and social mobility. These practices are only partly linked to the aspirations both families and young people have for their future career and outcomes. For many participants migrating to Kathmandu enabled them to access both education and work opportunities. Twenty-four-year-old John from Surkhet, a district that lies to the west of Kathmandu, said:

'At that time we did not have other faculties in our school [during higher secondary education] so I was bound to take education as a subject [...] but work and studies were both important for me … Therefore, I made sure that I travel to Kathmandu [...] Later I also found a job at a call centre …’

Anna explained:

'I feel my time at DAV [a private school in Kathmandu] helped to mould me into the person that I am now. I feel like that [...] when I was in school in Pokhara, I was shy and academically weak, but in DAV I was happy with my academic achievements [...]’

The limited access to facilities and resources available to the young people in their region of origin compel young people to migrate to Kathmandu to continue their education and find relevant work. The ability to move and obtain access to education highlights one of the aspects of middle-class privileges in Nepal. Many research participants expressed that being able to migrate to Kathmandu enabled them to access higher education or a job. Some research participants migrated to Kathmandu out of their own choice, which provided them with new opportunities, offering them a chance to access educational facilities. While for others, migrating to Kathmandu was a necessity: for higher education and work.

Going abroad for studies and work

In a similar vein, migrating abroad for studies and work is also one of the factors that provide evidence of expanding privileges and aspirations in contemporary Nepal. The perception of available resources and opportunities with regards to education and work that could be achieved by going
abroad was shared by some participants who had travelled abroad for studies and work at different stages in their lives.

‘Like when you complete [higher secondary] education then you think […] I need a job, job, job […] I ended up meeting a friend who was back from Malaysia […]. It all sounded good […]. So I also thought I should go to Malaysia for work […].’ [Keith, 25]

These situations of migration to Kathmandu and abroad both could be interpreted alternatively – not just as experience of opportunities, but also as life experiences of young people that shaped their education and work trajectories (which will be discussed extensively in an upcoming paper).

Contrary to Keith, for Ansu, a 25-year-old woman born and brought up in Biratnagar, a medium-sized city situated to the east of Nepal, the experience of going abroad was different. At the age of five, she went to study in a school in Darjeeling, India. She mentioned that even though she did not want to go to Darjeeling for her studies, her parents insisted that she do so. However, she noted that getting an education abroad has been an opportunity, she returned to her family home in Biratnagar after a couple of years.

‘My father went to work in Dubai and my mother was alone with my two younger sisters and a brother […] I came back before I could finish my 10th grade exams […] I was happy to come back, but sad that I had to repeat the class again […].’

**Barriers for young people**

All young people encounter both opportunities and barriers while navigating their pathways from education to work; however, different mediating factors shape the extent to which such opportunities and barriers are felt. All participants indicated constellations of barriers during life trajectories. Two themes were identified as major barriers that held them back in successfully transitioning from education to work or pursuing their interests. Although parents’ interventions influence the trajectories of young people positively, the findings also reveal that parents’ choices and intervention can turn into a barrier. The other barrier that young people experienced was lack of financial resources.

**Parents’ choices in education – as barrier**

Natasha, 25, born in Dhangadi, a sub-metropolitan city in a far-western region, sat for her SLC exam at the age of 15. After her SLC, she expressed her desire to become a staff nurse. However, her parents forced her to study Management, because they wanted her to join something that was ‘secured’ and guaranteed.

Natasha said:

‘Eventually my aim was to become a staff nurse […]. But after my SLC exam, when I mentioned studying Nursing again, they told me that there were too many people studying Nursing and that I should study Management instead. I ended up taking Commerce at the higher secondary level […]. Though I did not feel like studying, I still managed to pass […].’

During the interview, Natasha mentioned how she lost interest in her studies because she had not been allowed to pursue what she really wanted to. She believed that she could have excelled in Nursing. Instead, her academic grades began to suffer and she became increasingly disillusioned. These statements show an element of pressure being felt by Natasha to succeed, following the pathways her parents envisioned for her. Parental aspirations and expectations for their children’s academic success and achievements are directly linked with how their children value those outcomes for themselves.

In contrast to Natasha, Mimica, 18-year-old at the time of the interview, came from Panchthar district, a remote hilly region situated in the east of Nepal. She was an only child, and her mother had passed away when she was six or seven. After her SLC exam, Mimica decided to go to Jhapa, the closest city to Panchthar, but her father – who had remarried and had a son from his second
marriage – was not happy with her moving away. He insisted she either stay at home with her stepmother or get married. Her father mentioned the future of his son, Mimica’s half-brother, when expressing his discontent with her decision to move.

‘He said that he also needed to think about the future of his son, my brother [...]. But I decided that I would travel to Kathmandu, and I would earn money to cover my own expenses and pursue my studies on my own [...].’

This quote reveals the continuing tension between a changing society and the embedded patriarchy within that society, which welcomes the birth of a daughter but still gives priority to the son’s future. In the case of male participants, parents had traditional gendered role expectations of their sons. They were supposed to choose independently what they aspired to study or do in their lives. Jayson, a 24-year-old from Jhapa, a district that lies in the far-east of Nepal, shared that his parents were very supportive of whatever he wanted to do in his life:

‘They never questioned me [...] my parents often told me to just study [...] study anything but study [...] I chose to study Engineering [...] now I am in a call centre [...].’

Narratives of male participants showed that the lack of direct parental interventions in their education enabled them to continue to pursue their own path. On the contrary, in Natasha’s and Mimica’s case their individual choices were not on a par with their parents’ desire for different reasons. Natasha’s parents wanted her to pursue something that was a more traditional or ‘secured’ path towards a career whereas for Mimica, her father did not approve of her moving away from the family home forcing her to arrange resources for her studies by herself.

Similar to Mimica, Shreepa was unable to pursue the field of study she desired at higher secondary level – as her parents were averse to the idea of her travelling to Kathmandu alone. As a result, she was compelled to enrol in a Management programme. This soon made her lose interest in her studies. Although she managed to complete her higher secondary education, she was not keen on pursuing her undergraduate studies – even if it meant better job opportunities in future. During the course of the interview, she kept on holding her parents responsible for her lack of motivation since she believed that they had restricted her from pursuing what she really wanted to study.

‘I am still angry with my parents. They did not let me study what I was interested in [...]. Often they try to tell me that I should work hard and focus on my studies, but I tell them it is not what I was interested in. Then I failed in some subjects [...]. My parents told me: we feel bad that we did not let you study what you wanted to [...]’

The dynamics of parent–child often change at different stages of an individual’s life, but the tensions remain. It is noteworthy that parents’ choices and attitudes towards female education in this group felt more constrained. The young female participants experienced a type of ‘bounded agency’ (Evans, 2007), where their aspirations and voice were constrained by the actions of their parents. The level of parental interventions in education as the young people have shared partly supports the notion of ‘structured’ trajectories (Ezaki, 2019). Although the young female participants had access to education in some form, most of them did not get to exercise their choices and decisions in the family compared to the male participants – describing it as the biggest barriers in their trajectories.

**Financial resources**

The decision to continue education for a few research participants represented a particular barrier: financial resources. The challenge was not only to fulfil their social expectations for their families, but also to pursue the education that could strengthen their economic footing. Changing social and economic circumstances had put young people in difficult positions. A few research participants shared that they had experienced financial constraints limiting their options when it came to transitioning from education to work.

Twenty-five-year-old SamBerry from Jhapa, a district in the far west of Nepal reflected:
'I still remember ... my father asked me several times if I would like to study in a private college [...] I knew that he could afford it but I did not want to put him in that stress ... after I got enrolled in a government college, he asked me if I was happy with my decisions or would still prefer a private college.'

A similar story was shared by another young participant Ray, 25 years old, from Palungtaar, Gorkha, a district in the western part of Nepal. He shared how he started working young to support his parents and fulfill his educational dreams:

'I was good in studies since I was a kid [...] We have a retail shop and my father works in his farms [...] We are actually fine financially [...] but covering school expenses for all the children was a bit difficult [...] So I started working as well, but my parents said you have to study too [...] So I started to combine both work and education.'

With little financial support from his parents, Ray was able to complete his schooling. For parents and young people, school education and educational status is a way towards socio-economic success. Young people, especially males, often face responsibility for supporting their families financially (Bista, 1991). There is, however, a difference between those who contribute financially as and when they can, and those who see financial contribution as a core responsibility. The research findings suggest that for most male participants it was the former.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the paper was to explore what opportunities and barriers influence the education to work transition of young rural–urban migrants in Kathmandu guided by two questions: 1) What opportunities and barriers influence the education to work transition of young rural–urban migrants?; 2) How do opportunities and barriers differ among the young rural–urban migrants in terms of gender? To answer these questions qualitative life history interviews were conducted with 24 young rural–urban migrants in Kathmandu, Nepal. In this study the findings demonstrate that young people with rural–urban backgrounds encountered a complex mixture of relational and contextual opportunities and barriers as they make their transition from education to work such as parents’ choices in education, migration to Kathmandu or abroad for study and work and financial resources. This shows that the relational, educational, individual and contextual factors as discussed by Sanders et al. (2018) did not all appear equally in this research study as will be explained. Following the second research question, gender differences in both opportunities and barriers were observed in this research study.

Although the number of research participants in the study was limited and the perspectives of parents, educators and policy makers were not included, the narratives of the research participants give insight in the opportunities and barriers young people face according to themselves. The findings demonstrate the methodological importance of exploring young rural–urban migrants’ lived experiences together with a time-line mapping exercises to understand their perception of opportunities and barriers in their education to work transition. Life (hi)story interviews along with constant comparisons to analyse the data in this research study were useful in capturing the multiple lived realities of both male and female. This can be seen as the limitations of this study, but focusing solely on the opportunities and barriers that young people face in their own voice is justifiable because young rural–urban migrants are socio-economically at risk while making their transition from education to work and their trajectories may not reflect traditional pathways. The factors identified as opportunities and barriers for youth with rural–urban background are discussed below, with special attention to gender differences, thus covering the two research questions.

**Parents’ choices in education**

The narratives of the young people show the influence of parents on the decision to study and sometimes also on their educational tracks. This is in line with the studies conducted by Sanders et al. (2018), Hardgrove et al. (2015), and Patel (2017) who emphasize on the roles of family relations in the
young peoples’ trajectories. For both young females and males, parents’ choices regarding educational options showed to have major influences on their education to work transition. But there seems to be a difference between male and female. The findings suggest that some female participants had positive supportive experiences as a result of their parents’ choices in educational options, whereas for others they had a negative impact. On the contrary, the findings from male participants show that their parents chose a more relaxed and supportive approach in their endeavours. This suggests that individual choices and decisions are embedded in the opportunities and constraints provided by the parents which are often under-examined by youth scholars.

Also scholars (Bista, 1991; Ulle, 2010) have pointed out that males have a different role in the families than females. In context of Nepal, there is a culture of privileging sons over daughters according to the gender roles within the society. This study shows the consequences of these different roles in the attitude of the parents towards education for males and females. For the young people, this can work out as both an opportunity and or a barrier. In the case of Natasha, her parents wanted her to choose a different educational field even though she wanted to study Nursing. In the case of Jayson, his parents wanted him to just study – with no stated preferences for a specific educational trajectory. This indicates that parents were more intervening in the educational trajectories of females than in case of males.

Migration to Kathmandu and abroad for work and studies
In this paragraph, two factors: migration to Kathmandu and abroad for work and studies are combined. Even though their subsequent experiences and achievements were varied, all research participants moved from their respective villages to Kathmandu in the hope of better opportunities. The findings revealed that young people who moved to the city out of their own choice in search of a better life demonstrated positive experiences. Most of the respondents mentioned how moving to the city, or being allowed to move, marked an important transition in their lives and opened up opportunities for them in education and, later, in their careers too. Migration studies often focus on the characteristics of migration as negative. Similarly, migration abroad for studies and work have been portrayed as way to overcome financial barriers and secure future. However, in this research study migration to Kathmandu for these young people have shown a positive impact in their education to work trajectories. In case of Ansu, her family was in support of her moving to India and later to Kathmandu for better educational and work opportunities. This indicates that rather than conceptualizing migration and abroad for study and work as a result of lack of facilities and financial resources available – we must reimage it as an opportunity in young peoples’ trajectories.

Financial resources
The participants in this study revealed that financial resources or the lack thereof, for some, mainly for males, were the main barriers in the life trajectories. Economic resources are obviously important in creating a structured pathway. For the male participants they become a driving force. For example, Ray could not afford to just study as he had his responsibilities, which were a significant barrier. These barriers were pivotal in taking the decision to combine education with work and at the same time migrate to Kathmandu so that he could balance both their education and work. Thus, these barriers provided the young male participants with a purpose and a direction in their lives – suggesting the relational, educational, individual and contextual factors are more interlinked. For the male participants in this study, their experience of opportunities and barriers were mainly migrating to Kathmandu, or going abroad for studies and work and financial resources. However, in the narratives of the female participants, financial resources did not emerge as experiences of barriers but rather as opportunity in their trajectories. In Anna’s case, financial resources not only gave her the opportunity to migrate to Kathmandu but also access to private schools and better education. This shows that in the context of Nepal, gender-family dynamics have changed in regards to girls access to schools than the traditional society, however, gender discrimination still persists in terms of equal access to resources.
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Ethics approval

The study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics committee of University of Groningen (RUG).

Consent to participate

The study used standard consent form with details of the project and its purpose. Consent forms were sent to the participants prior to the interview.

Consent for publication

Approval for the publication was taken from the participants in the consent form.

Availability of data and material/Code availability

The codes were generated manually. Data and codes will be made available upon request.

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