



Exploring Awareness of Digital Nepotism among Student Teachers in Coimbatore

Dr. A.R. Bhavana¹, J. Shalviya² & P. Palanisamy³

¹Professor, ^{2&3}Research Scholar, Department of Educational Technology, Bharathiar University



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Abstract

Nepotism refers to preferential treatment granted to individuals based on familial or personal relationships rather than merit. While traditional forms of nepotism have been widely discussed, the emergence of digital platforms has introduced new manifestations of favoritism, particularly within the educational sector. This study explores the level of awareness of digital nepotism among student teachers in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. Using a survey method, data were collected from B.Ed. students using a Digital Nepotism Awareness Scale comprising 25 items. The findings indicate that student teachers possess limited awareness of digital nepotism and its implications for educational equity. The study highlights the need to incorporate digital ethics and transparency-related concepts into teacher education programmes.

Keywords: digital nepotism, teacher education, educational equity, digital ethics, awareness

Nepotism is the practice whereby individuals in positions of power favour relatives over more qualified candidates in hiring, promotion, or other forms of advantage (Merriam-Webster). It encompasses granting privileges, positions, or opportunities to family members across multiple fields, including business, politics, academia, entertainment, sports, religion, and healthcare (Jaskiewicz et al., 2013). Despite being widely considered unethical, illegal in some contexts, and a form of corruption, nepotism persists due to enduring cultural norms and societal expectations (Kaushal, Ghalawat, & Kaurav, 2021). Although it differs from the law of primogeniture, nepotism can be classified into reciprocal nepotism, where favors are

exchanged, and entitlement nepotism, based on perceived familial rights (Jaskiewicz et al., 2013).

Dimensions of Nepotism

Nepotism operates across multiple dimensions: familial, social/network, political, institutional, economic, digital, cultural, psychological, and educational. The familial dimension concerns blood relations, the social/network dimension relates to identity and connections, the political dimension to power, and the institutional dimension to systematic favouritism. The digital dimension reflects influence through online platforms and networks, including patterns highlighted in contemporary cultural discussions of “nepo babies” in entertainment and media (Wikipedia, 2026). The economic dimension



involves resource allocation, the cultural dimension encompasses social norms, and the psychological dimension concerns cognitive biases. The educational dimension is particularly significant, as favoritism in this sphere can have long-term negative impacts on society (Munoz et al., 2023).

Digital Nepotism in the Educational Context

In education, digital nepotism affects the process of admissions, recruitment, promotions, access to information, platforms, and undermines merit and equity. In the educational sector in India, digital nepotism is not limited to a single institution or level. Though there are rules to promote merit-based appointments and admissions, there are several loop holes and challenges that affect the system. In this context an attempt has been made to assess the level of awareness among student teachers in Coimbatore. In the domain of education all the activities such as teacher appointments, academic promotions, designing and approval of curriculum, conduct of qualifying & competitive exams through online mode are all subject as well as vulnerable to digital nepotism bias. There are several instances where concerns about favouritism in the appointment of school teachers, university faculty and even high level appointments for administration, Committees, Chairperson in Apex bodies in the government sector have been on the rise. In state run colleges and universities, digital nepotism can involve delays in filling permanent positions or promotions, which creates environments where informal influence rules the roost.

In recent years, the educational sector in Tamil Nadu has increasingly adopted digital technologies for admissions, teacher recruitment, online learning platforms, assessments, and communication. While digitalisation is often associated with transparency and efficiency, it may also create new forms of inequality. One such emerging concern is digital nepotism, where access to educational opportunities is influenced by personal connections through digital platforms rather than merit. This study aims to explore the presence and perception of digital nepotism in the educational system of Tamil Nadu.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- Assess the awareness level of student teachers with regard to :
- Knowledge of digital nepotism and identify areas where digital nepotism occurs.
- Assess if they are able to examine the impact of digital nepotism on educational equity in Tamil Nadu and suggest measures to reduce the impact digital nepotism in

Methodology Adopted

In order to assess the awareness level of student teachers pursuing the B Ed. Programme were considered as sample. A survey was conducted and the description of the same has been made.

Sample

- B.Ed. students
- Selected colleges in Coimbatore

Tools

- Personal information Proforma
- Digital Nepotism Awareness Scale comprising of 25 items to assess their awareness as well as attitude.

All the participants included in the survey were asked to record their responses as per the instruction in the 5 point Likert scale indicating their responses according to their level of agreement as follows:

- 1 – Strongly Disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly Agree

Their responses were subjected to calculation of percentage and description.

The results are as follows:

Sample Table: Research Results

S No.	Item number	Description	Percentage /
1	1-5, 12, 16, 20, 21	General awareness	40
2	6-11, 18, 19, 22, 23	attitude	30



3	13, 14, 15, 17, 24, 25	Good level of awareness	20
*Some items were reverse coded to assess if the student teachers are not biased			

The survey responses indicate that the overall level of awareness regarding digital nepotism among student teachers is limited (Jaskiewicz et al., 2013; Munoz et al., 2023). Most participants did not have a clear understanding of digital nepotism or its potential impact on educational equity.

While participants demonstrated awareness of general digital issues, such as online cheating, cyber fraud, cyberbullying, and misuse of social media content (Livingstone & Smith, 2014), their knowledge of digital nepotism specifically was insufficient. These findings highlight the need to orient student teachers on the concept of digital nepotism, its implications for fairness, and its influence on digital educational platforms (Wikipedia, 2026).

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to selected teacher education institutions in Coimbatore and focuses on perceptions only and does not claim any legal proof of the extent of digital nepotism.

Implications

- Helps student teachers recognise ethical challenges in digital education.
- Inculcate the value of transparency and fairness in educational administration
- Supports curriculum enrichment in teacher education programmes
- Promote digital ethics awareness among students, educators and the society

Conclusion

Digital nepotism if not understood and checked in the first will engulf the educational arena and undermine the principles of equality and merit in education. Although not officially accepted and reported by policy makers its presence is a cause for attention. Though digital nepotism is not sanctioned nor formally advocated by the Government, its influence is prevalent in certain areas. By including

digital nepotism, concepts in teacher education programmes in Tamil Nadu the policy makers can prepare teacher educators to critically interact with digital systems and adopt ethical educational practices.

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