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Perceptions and Practices of Educational Leadership in Community Schools of Kathmandu Metropolitan City

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Article Info	Abstract
	The purpose of study is to explore the perceptions and practices of educational leadership in community school of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The study employed a qualitative case study research design to conduct an empirical investigation, involving the participation of head teachers, assistant head teachers, and teachers from community schools. This study examines how instructional strategies, teacher motivation, and engagement are improved in community schools through the use of educational leadership. This study identifies key leadership practices and techniques that foster a productive learning environment through qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. The verbal data were collected, transcribed, categorized, and organized into themes. The results indicate that success cannot be achieved by one person alone; collaborative teamwork is essential. Educational leadership should act as a facilitator, fostering effective partnerships with stakeholders. Growth and development cannot occur without motivation, and educational leadership must build trust and unity among stakeholders. Educational leadership should emphasize praise, respect for parents, and cooperation to strengthen partnerships among teachers, students, and parents. The study emphasizes the role of leadership in creating holistic learning environments that emphasize community engagement. When promoting harmony, accountability, and the use of distributed and transformative leadership, community schools can encourage student progress. The study highlights various leadership philosophies, the influence of social and cultural contexts, and strategies to enhance academic achievement. The findings offer insights to inform educational policy and leadership development programs.

Introduction

A significant phenomenon in human civilization is leadership. It is often acknowledged that good schools require strong leadership. Hence, school leadership plays a critical role in determining the quality of education worldwide (Bush, 2021). School leaders are essential for enhancing student learning and improving education quality. Effective principal leadership enhances school organization, teaching, and student outcomes. Key practices include setting and communicating the school's mission, establishing high performance expectations, clarifying roles, and promoting professional development. Principals articulate a clear vision, set high teaching standards, and communicate instructional goals to staff.

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in school improvement initiatives, particularly in creating a strong teaching and learning environment. Their responsibilities have expanded beyond managing daily operations to include serving as instructional leaders. As the primary figures who inspire, motivate, and support teachers and students, head teachers are uniquely positioned to initiate and sustain improvements in both academic performance and overall school success (Thapa, 2020). Educational leadership is distinct from teaching, requiring specific preparation (Bush, 2008) argues that leaders deserve proper training to fulfill their duties, and students and staff have the right to be in institutions managed by competent leaders.

The need for ongoing improvements in Nepal's community schools, highlighting the vital role of committed head teachers. These leaders must navigate challenges, drive change, and enhance the teaching-learning process

to boost student achievement. The findings offer insights into effective leadership models in low-income countries, emphasizing the dedication of successful head teachers despite financial constraints (Khanal et al., 2023). Educational leadership has been researched in connection with several educational changes, especially those aimed at improving student academic achievement. Effective school leadership is widely dispersed throughout the system, improves pupil achievement, collaborates with others, and has a beneficial influence on organizational performance.

The principals employed diverse leadership strategies and proactively pursued reforms. Key factors for success included strong interest, collaboration, banning political activities in schools, being approachable to parents, recruiting quality teachers, and implementing innovative programs (Khanal et al., 2020). School leadership has evolved from hierarchical to collaborative strategies, but a hybrid approach is currently seen in schools. The study reveals that leadership strategies significantly influence students' perceptions of leadership and their attitude towards education. Students are critical of leadership and express dissatisfaction due to feeling unheard, unrecognized, and unacknowledged. They seek a more active role in school leadership, and overall, their school experience is unsatisfactory (Cabraal, 2022).

School principals are more concerned with administrative tasks than with promoting instruction and learning within the institution. According to instructional leadership, by guaranteeing teacher responsibility, the principal should be able to establish school cultures that promote students' advancement (Shrestha, 2021). Poor examination results, with only 47.87% passing SEE and 52.15% passing Class 12, highlight insufficient investment in education. The current funding fails to provide quality education or improve outcomes. While society and social media are focused on blaming teachers, schools, and the government, quality education depends on the coordinated efforts and investment of all stakeholders, including students, families, teachers, and the state. Responsibility for poor results cannot be placed on a single party. The coordination of all related factors is the responsibility of educational leadership and this type of problems are directly and indirectly related to school's head teacher (Devkota, 2024).

School development is the process through which educational institutions improve teaching quality, create a conducive learning environment, and maximize student outcomes. Achieving this requires strong leadership, skilled teachers, and active parental involvement. Effective schools rely heavily on their head teachers, who, as chief executives, oversee both academic and non-academic staff. However, despite evolving methods, policies, and objectives, community schools in Nepal are often criticized for being ineffective and failing to deliver high-quality education (Rai, 2019). Students have struggled to meet basic learning standards, with most completing less than 50% of the curriculum in each subject. In grade ten, the majority were unable to perform higher-order thinking tasks (Education Review Office, 2020). It can be argued that issues in teaching strategies, remedial actions, and leadership roles should be addressed by head teachers. Therefore, educational leadership is crucial for overall improvement in education.

This study highlights the critical role of school leaders in shaping the teaching and learning environment. Principals must set direction, build a positive culture, and boost staff motivation to drive improvement. The research suggests leaders should first transform their own practices, guided by context, before leading change, emphasizing the importance of empathetic and experience-driven leadership (Panta, 2022). I agree that strong head teachers benefit schools by providing clear direction and vision. They set priorities, focus staff on what matters, and prevent distractions that do not significantly impact students' academic performance. Effective head teachers can elevate classroom work and student standards through mental clarity, purpose, and awareness, maximizing their staff's potential. Thus, the study has focused on exploring the roles and responsibilities of educational leadership in order to improve the teaching-learning environment in community schools.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the perceptions and practices of educational leadership in community school of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The study aims to address the following questions:

How do head teachers perceive their roles as educational leaders in community schools?

What leadership practices do head teachers use to improve the teaching and learning environment in schools?

Review of Literature

Effective leadership practices are vital for student achievement. School leaders are increasingly expected to

create a conducive learning environment. The conclusion is that principals' behaviors enhance performance through classroom supervision, goal-setting, directing, teamwork, collaboration, continuous monitoring of student progress, and supporting teacher autonomy (Tedla & Kilango, 2022). Educational leadership is a dynamic and multifaceted field that demands a deep understanding of educational theory, practice, and the specific needs of the school community. Effective leaders adapt to changing circumstances and continuously strive to improve their schools for the benefit of all students.

In educational leadership, the principals used multiple frames of leadership and were proactive towards reforms. High levels of interest, collaboration, prohibition of political activities inside the school, approachability for parents, recruitment of high-quality teachers and innovative programs proved to be critical for success (Khanal et al., 2020). School heads significantly impact the educational environment through information-sharing, social connections, mentoring, and fostering progress. This study examined the relationship between school heads' leadership practices and teachers' performance. School heads frequently demonstrated effective leadership in planning, organizing, regulating, directing, and unifying, resulting in very satisfactory teaching quality (Aquino et al., 2021).

Educational leadership is essential to the development of the educational system. Head teacher leadership positively impacts teacher leadership and learning organizations. As a key driver of learning, principal leadership enhances various indicators, including implementing the school's vision, ensuring learning quality, fostering productive dialogue, integrating innovative ideas, and promoting school growth (Hidayat & Patras, 2023). Instructional leadership promotes teacher development, job satisfaction, student achievement, and overall school environment improvement. The study found that school principals support creativity, innovation, and new skills in the classroom, praising teachers who enhance student learning through creativity. They also hold meetings with teachers to discuss student performance and address teacher concerns (Dahal, 2020b).

New principals' qualities and behaviors shape teacher perceptions, influenced by the school's leadership history, the principal's origin, and teacher expectations. These perceptions impact teacher well-being, capacity, morale, and professional development. Successful principal transitions depend on actions and their perceptions, fostering optimism and transformative change, benefiting the school community (Moreno, 2024). It emphasizes the impact of sociocultural structures that are created by the values and beliefs of society. For Nepali heads of schools, spiritual qualities such as humility, compassion, and connectivity are recognized as contextual knowledge. The study fills a vacuum in the existing research on school leadership in Nepal and offers useful advice for students' future career paths (Dhakal et al., 2023). The principals emphasized the importance of interpreting school contexts, moving away from traditional approaches, critically adapting global educational research, and enhancing stakeholder participation in decision-making processes.

Transformational leadership by headmasters is crucial for the success of community schools in Nepal. Key behaviors include coordination, open discussions, financial transparency, respect for all staff, motivation, fairness, problem-solving, adherence to policies, cooperation, and recognition. These practices have significantly contributed to the transformation and development of these schools (Dhungana, 2020)school management committee (SMC. The transformational leadership, emphasizing empowerment and collaboration, was predominant. Effective communication and transparency were key to building trust. Ethical, adaptive leadership was essential for addressing evolving educational paradigms. Diverse leadership styles positively impacted student outcomes, shaped by cultural nuances within the trust's context. The research highlighted the need for innovative and inclusive leadership in education, offering insights for policy and training development (Dholkawala, 2023). Educational leadership is a complex and evolving concept that is crucial in guiding the direction and success of educational institutions.

School principals prioritize administrative tasks over promoting instruction, focusing on exam results and memorization rather than knowledge-based learning. Instructional leadership, however, advocates for creating school cultures that support student progress by ensuring teacher accountability. The study found that instructional leadership is seen and practiced as providing guidance, focusing on curriculum, and monitoring student progress. (Shrestha, 2021).

The principal's leadership is crucial for supporting teaching and learning, but how teachers experience and enact this leadership remains unclear. Teachers perceive "Creating a school mission" as the most practiced dimension of instructional leadership, while "Managing the instructional program" is the least practiced.

Principals frequently monitor and evaluate teaching, with a focus on professional development (Gift Muyunda, 2022). Principals frequently monitor and evaluate teaching, with a focus on professional development. There is a need for principals to receive training in instructional leadership, particularly in managing instructional programs. Teacher perceptions of principals' instructional leadership do not significantly differ by gender or subject taught but do vary by academic qualification. It is recommended that principals receive training in innovative methods to engage teachers and make lessons more interesting. Additionally, principals should motivate teachers with incentives, such as awards, for bringing innovation to the school (Dahal, 2020a)

High school head teachers in Nepal use leadership strategies to promote equity and inclusivity amid socio-economic and structural disparities. The study highlights persistent educational inequalities due to caste, gender, economic, and social biases. Transformative leadership practices, such as equal treatment, culturally responsive activities, and empowerment initiatives, are crucial in addressing these gaps. These insights can guide policymakers, educators, and leaders in fostering equitable education. (Dhakal, 2024). Student performance in Nepal's community secondary schools has generally been poor, with some exceptions. This disparity has fueled the growth of private schools, posing challenges for community schools and their head teachers. Head teachers in higher-performing schools are more proactive in leadership, motivating stakeholders, and driving continuous improvement (Singh & Allison, 2016).

Assistant heads and teachers perceive instructional leadership as guiding the teaching and learning process, ensuring the availability of resources, and enhancing teachers' capacity. Additionally, it found that they practice this leadership by supervising lesson planning, providing resources, promoting program development, and occasionally observing classroom teaching (Logation et al., 2022). Redefining educational policies and practices in Nepal, emphasizing the importance of trust, collaboration, a positive school climate, and principals' engagement with the local community, parents, and organizations during the pandemic. Principals took on roles as digital coordinators and digital pedagogical leaders, enhancing communication and supporting teachers' use of technology (Kafa, 2023). Educational leadership involves a blend of visionary thinking and practical action, creating an environment where students and teachers thrive. Effective leaders balance these perceptions and practices to meet the evolving demands of education.

Research Methods

Understanding the link between educational leadership and a conducive teaching and learning environment is essential for improving efficiency in community schools. This study employed a qualitative research approach and a case study method to empirically examine the issue, involving the participation of head teachers from community schools. There are 89 community schools in the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC). The total number of teachers working in the community schools of KMC is 2055 Served as the study's population (KMC, 2024).The study is based on multiple realities. Data were collected through unstructured and open-ended questions from primary sources, including two head teachers, two assistant head teachers, and two teachers from two community schools. All participants involved in educational leadership were interviewed and observed during the data collection process. A purposive sampling method was applied to obtain precise and comprehensive information from the participants. The process of analyzing qualitative data is linear rather than step-by-step, with data collection and analysis happening at the same time (Bougie & Sekaran, 2019). To identify the major themes, analyze them, and create a final report, the study employed thematic analysis of the data. The data was coded, condensed, and provided for analysis by the researcher.

Theories of Educational Leadership

Educational leadership theories provide frameworks for understanding how leaders in educational settings can effectively guide and influence schools, teachers, and students. In this study, I have used transformational and distributed leadership theories:

Transformational Leadership Theory

The success of transformational leadership may be related to its focus on follower development and intrinsic motivation, which meets the needs of modern workplaces that need to be motivated and equipped to succeed in uncertain times. The major factors of transformational leadership are: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2016). It focuses on inspiring and motivating teachers and students to achieve their highest potential. Transformational leaders create a vision

for the school and encourage others to work towards it. Transformational leadership by head teachers is crucial to the success of community secondary schools. Key practices include effective coordination, transparency, respect for staff opinions, motivation, fairness, problem-solving, policy adherence, and collective decision-making (Dhungana, 2020)school management committee (SMC. The goal of transformational leadership in education is to inspire and motivate educators and learners to reach their full potential.

Distribute Leadership Theory

Dispersed leadership has emerged as a substitute for traditional school leadership, even if each style of leadership has advantages and disadvantages of its own and is appropriate in different organizational circumstances. In contrast to other types of leadership, distributed leadership is more focused on the collaborative and interconnected practice of leadership than it is on the duties and responsibilities of those holding official leadership positions (Sol, 2021). Distributed leadership (DL), which is understood as a collective social process arising via the interactions of various actors, has so gained popularity in the field of educational leadership. Specifically, in the context of decentralizing education systems, the idea and practice of DL have seen a sharp rise in school management. It focuses on the idea that leadership is not confined to a single individual, such as the head teacher or principal, but is instead shared among multiple members of the school community. This approach recognizes that leadership responsibilities can be distributed across various roles, including teachers, staff, and even students, depending on their expertise and the situation at hand.

Results and Findings

The study results include findings derived from interviews and observations of the sample units, along with their interpretations. Head teachers and other participants were questioned about their perceptions of educational leadership in community schools during the interviews, and they responded as follows:

> Educational leadership extends beyond a job title, focusing on fostering cooperation and creating a productive environment through resilience and teamwork. Leaders must navigate challenges, understanding that good and bad can coexist. Educational leadership ensures neutrality, avoiding prejudice or discrimination among staff. The head teacher plays a crucial role in cultivating a positive teaching and learning environment, engaging in dialogue with teachers and students, and meeting the expectations of society, educators, parents, and students. Additionally, the head teacher collaborates with the School Management Committee (SMC), secures resources, and builds relationships with government and non-government organizations. Leading in education is a challenging effort (Aringalko goloma hata halnu jasto ho).

This perspective underscores the complexity of the head teacher's role, especially in navigating political differences within the school and community. The head teacher must remain politically neutral, fostering an environment of open communication and trust with the School Management Committee (SMC). Effective educational leadership involves integrating various aspects, including ICT, economic, social, cultural, and managerial responsibilities, along with engaging parents and teachers. The head teacher's role is challenging, likened to untangling a twisted necklace, where preconceived notions often fall short. Educational leadership is a very challenging work (Yo ta euta bhishana kama rahechha). It's really hard to put things together (Yo ta euta kadako mala rahechha).

> As a head teacher, I view my school as my home and educational leadership as a family. My priority is the students' welfare, aiming to help them grow into better individuals through understanding, inspiration, and nurturing. However, challenges arise, and not all stakeholders are attentive. The role demands wearing many hats—parent, teacher, planner, security guard, and student—making it a highly demanding profession. Though it may not seem prestigious, head teaching involves multiple responsibilities, often confining me within the school. The students are like my own children; their successes bring me joy, and their setbacks bring me sorrow. Being a head teacher is not easy; it requires immense vision and commitment.

Today, educational leadership is seen more as a facilitator than a supervisor. It involves coordinating and promoting various aspects of education through administrative accountability. Educational leadership

encompasses managing resources, updating infrastructure, addressing student behavior, clarifying staff roles, and handling administrative challenges. Effective leadership goes beyond theory, requiring attention to individual behaviors, current needs, technology, and all aspects of school management. It must align with legal standards, social norms, and regulations, making it dynamic. The ultimate goal is to create a conducive teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students. The teamwork is essence of educational leadership. Thus, teamwork is essential for educational leadership to succeed.

Being a head teacher is a demanding role that blends responsibilities similar to those of a parent, teacher, planner, security guard, and student. It requires vision, commitment, discipline, and a deep sense of accountability, fairness, and selflessness—reflecting the essence of social justice in educational leadership. Effective leaders foster collaboration and teamwork, recognizing that success cannot be achieved alone. Today, educational leadership is more facilitative, focusing on collaboration and coordination rather than just administration. Threatening teachers and students weakens teamwork. Educational leadership should emphasize praise, respect, and cooperation, fostering strong partnerships among teachers, students, and parents. Progress is achieved through cooperation and learning from past mistakes. Our students excel due to quality instruction and leadership that prioritizes their needs and assigns duties collaboratively, enhancing operations and team spirit.

During the interviews, head teachers and other participants were asked about their educational leadership practices in community schools, and they responded as follows:

> A key aspect of educational leadership is developing teachers to meet students' needs. The head teacher must train and inspire teachers to create a workshop-like classroom environment, focusing on teaching methods that go beyond just imparting knowledge. This approach is being practiced in our school, with an emphasis on learning procedures and regular remedial classes. Our lecture-based teaching approach has not been effective. To address current educational challenges, we must integrate technology and ICT into teaching. School leadership is crucial in adapting teaching strategies to meet students' needs. We are actively working on implementing these practices in our school. Educational leadership should be diligent in praising, granting recognition, and fostering collaboration. It must respect parents' opinions, listen attentively, and avoid imposing views. Effective leadership fosters collaboration among teachers, students, and parents. In our school, the culture is evolving to include these practices. As an educational leader, I adapt strategies each academic session based on identified needs. I prioritize teachers' satisfaction, as it directly impacts student outcomes. I emphasize that teaching is not just about our own interests but about ensuring students' learning. To address this, we oversee additional teaching activities before 10 AM and after 4 PM, despite official hours. We have adjusted school procedures to align with our understanding of effective management.

Creating an environment where students can independently grow and learn is more crucial than just teaching them. To foster such an environment, we have increased parental involvement by arranging regular communications and informing parents about the results of four types of exams each year. Subject teachers manage this process, which occurs on Saturdays, allowing parents and students to critically analyze progress. We have optimized class time by employing subject monitors and allocating time for project work. Students are given research assignments, such as reporting on local experiences after studying topics like population and health. As head teacher, I dedicate my entire day to the school, from 6 AM to 6 PM. To support teaching, we provided teachers with tablets (laptop) from our budget and this initiative has inspired and motivated our teachers. In our school, we manage tasks through department heads, level-wise in-charges, and committees for various functions. As head teacher, I organized these roles to create a dedicated working environment where staff and teachers are fully engaged. I hold regular meetings with all committees and divisions for briefings and idea exchange. We also use group-based reciprocal learning, such as having top students teach their peers during the leisure of math periods. This approach has been applied across all subjects, fostering a collaborative teaching-learning school culture. The school provides overtime pay to teachers, fostering a culture of valuable contributions and ensuring no tasks are overlooked. With over 90% of staff having children enrolled, this transparency builds trust with parents. The head teacher's own children also attend the school, enhancing credibility. The head teacher has trained others in similar roles and emphasizes that although strict

regulations may not apply, a system is in place requiring teachers to spend full days in class and their free time on educational activities, while fostering a positive environment for students.

> I have positioned myself as a service provider rather than a boss. At this school, every employee, including teachers, is equally qualified. Furthermore, officially speaking, I am the sole employee in the role of head teacher. But I base all of my choices, ideas, and other activities on the conversations that take place at staff meetings. We have monthly staff meetings on a regular basis, and following any decision made during these sessions, I also feel quite committed. I therefore declare that we are proceeding in a spirit of unity. We efficiently divide tasks among professionals in the school, making it easier for educational leaders to manage external responsibilities while the team handles internal duties. If necessary, we assign teaching tasks to other qualified teachers, who record their work in a log book and are compensated upon departmental approval. This system prevents empty classes and ensures each person feels valued by participating in teaching-learning activities. We also assign qualified teachers to higher-level morning classes, preventing them from seeking additional employment. Everyone benefits from these opportunities. Students find the school outdated. To address this, we are introducing project-based work, field trips, and practical techniques. Teachers will need to invest more time and effort, but social recognition for their hard work motivates them to excel.

Creating an environment for independent student growth is crucial. We've enhanced parental involvement with frequent updates and exam results, managed by subject teachers on Saturdays for critical progress analysis. Classes are full and overseen by monitors, with project work time allocated. The head teacher, dedicating an entire day to the school, organizes this environment. Efforts are supervised through department heads, assistant head teachers, and committees, with regular meetings for idea exchange. Students are grouped, with top students teaching peers, fostering collaboration. Efficient task delegation helps manage external responsibilities and internal work, preventing empty periods and boosting teacher morale. Qualified teachers are assigned higher-level morning classes, offering excellent opportunities for all.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions and practices of educational leadership in community schools in Kathmandu Metropolitan City. The finding of the first research question suggest that the educational leaders of the community schools should focus on collaboration and team work to meet educational objectives of community schools. This result is in line with the study by Tedla and Kilango (2022), Hidayat and Patras (2023), Dahal (2020), Moreno (2024) and contradicts with the study by (Shrestha, 2021).

The finding of the second research question suggest that the educational leaders of the community schools should focus on Creating an environment for independent student growth involves enhancing parental involvement, managing classes and projects, and fostering collaboration through efficient task delegation and regular supervision. This result is coherent with the study by Dholkawala (2023), Dhungana (2020), Kafa (2023), Dhakal (2024) and contradicts with the study by Gift Muyunda (2022).

This study highlights that head teachers alone cannot create a conducive teaching-learning environment; instead, collaborative efforts from all stakeholders are essential. Educational leadership should act as facilitators to build effective partnerships, establish trust, and motivate stakeholders for growth and development. The findings align with Distributed Leadership Theory, which emphasizes cooperative contributions, and Transformational Leadership Theory, which advocates for evolving leadership patterns to enhance the teaching-learning environment.

Conclusion

This study investigates leadership behaviors in creating effective teaching environments in community schools. It highlights the need for teamwork and collaboration to meet government goals for the psychomotor domain and underscores the importance of leadership theories, as well as motivating teachers and students. Creating an environment for independent student growth involves increased parental involvement, project-based learning, motivated staff with technological support, efficient task delegation, collaborative student groups, and effective

supervision and coordination by the head teacher. Educational leadership should prioritize praise, respect for parents, and cooperation to build strong partnerships among teachers, students, and parents, ensuring progress through intellect, adaptability, honesty, and collaborative duty assignment, which leads to student excellence. In community schools, staff unity and responsibility, combined with distributed, and transformational leadership theories, are crucial for success, given the significant role of students' socioeconomic backgrounds.

The study offers detailed insights into how educational leadership practices in community schools of Kathmandu Metropolitan City are shaped by its unique cultural, social, and economic contexts. It explores effective strategies for fostering a positive learning environment, contributing to a broader understanding of educational leadership. The study highlights the role of leadership in fostering a holistic learning environment that includes social and emotional development. It provides practical recommendations for educational leadership, emphasizes community involvement, and identifies challenges and opportunities in Kathmandu's schools. This research contributes to the literature on educational leadership in developing countries, offering new perspectives on leadership and teaching in community schools.

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