

# **Role of Head Teacher in School Management: A Case of High School in China**

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## ***Abstract***

*Head teachers (HTs) have a crucial role in school leadership as well as in education policy agendas internationally. School leadership plays a key role in improving school outcomes as well as the school environment by motivating teachers. This study was carried out considering the major roles of the HT in making school programmes effective in Chinese context. Data were collected through interviews with students and teachers; review of books, reports, journals, and various publications with a view to explore the role of HT. The school website (in Chinese language translated to English) was also studied for information. The study revealed that HT is the most senior teacher and leader of a school, responsible for the education of all pupils, management of staff, and for school policy making. There is a positive moderate relationship between the leadership style and students' academic performance in high school. This study has also established that the leadership that is instrumental towards school improvement is of 'distributed' kind of leadership; and the coordinated and collaborative efforts of the HT, teachers, students, parents, community leaders, district administrator and others becomes instrumental in ensuring the quality of education in school.*

**Keywords:** Head teacher, leadership, students, education, performance

## **Introduction**

China has the largest education system in the world, excluding graduate education institutions. China's education system is not only immense but also diverse. County-level governments have primary responsibility of the governing and delivery of school education (National Centre for Education Development Research, 2008, cited in OECD 2016a).

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Pre-school education in China is not compulsory, and many pre-schools are privately owned. Following the completion of compulsory education, students are given the choice to continue with senior secondary education. In China, there are five types of senior secondary schools: general senior secondary, technical or specialized secondary, adult secondary, vocational secondary, and crafts schools. In 2014, secondary vocational schools accounted for a little less than 22% of total senior secondary school enrolment in China (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2016, cited in OECD. (2016a). The senior secondary education is not part of compulsory education in China (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2015, Cited in OECD 2016a).

China's central treasury and local treasuries contribute to education funding. As for the qualification certificates for teachers in pre-school, primary school and junior secondary schools, they are issued by county-level governments. The educational administrative departments in the upper-level issues qualification certificates for teachers in senior secondary school (OECD 2016a). In 2014, the Ministry of Education implemented the National Training Programme for Primary and Secondary School Principals. Teachers in China are ranked by professional grades. Special-Grade Teacher is also a title for primary and secondary teachers (OECD 2016a). Currently, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has set four areas of priority: (1) rural, remote, poor and minority areas; (2) primary education in rural areas, vocational education and pre-school education; (3) subsidies for students from poor families; and (4) building a high-quality team of teachers.

In China, education is also considered as an essential element of patriotism, collectivism and socialism as well as in ideals, ethics, discipline, legality, national defense and ethnic unity. According to education doctrine in China, the whole society shall respect teachers (Ministry of Education China, 2009). China has implemented the Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020). The plan has clearly mentioned about building a vast contingent of quality teachers, promoting professional ethics among teachers, raising teachers' professional efficiency and streamlining administration over teachers (UNESCO, 2010).

To attract more teachers, China has developed teaching as a more desirable and respected profession. With the tradition of respecting and honoring teachers, September 10 has been officially celebrated as the Teacher's Day, recognized by the Chinese Government in 1985 (Hong, 2019)

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Following the Teachers Law of October 1993 regarding the qualification certificates for teachers in pre-school, primary school and junior secondary school, schools and other educational institutions should progressively adopt a system where teachers are recruited using employment contracts. Every pre-school, public primary, secondary and vocational school teacher has to re-register for his or her qualification certificate every five years (Ministry of Education, 2013, Cited in OECD, 2016a).

The HT needs time, capacity and support to focus on the practices most likely to improve student learning, and also should play an important role in cooperating with teachers and developing teachers' quality. The HT has to be able to adapt the teaching programmes to the local needs, promote teamwork among teachers and engage himself/herself in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional activities.

According to Cheng (1997), depending on the types of school effectiveness and the models of school management, various conceptual possibilities and dilemmas exist in monitoring school effectiveness. Cheng has identified eight different models of school effectiveness – namely goal model, resource-input model, process model, satisfaction model, legitimacy model, ineffectiveness model, organizational learning model and total quality management model (Cheng, 1997).

Chengdu No.7 High School was established in 1905 and was given the status of “Key Secondary School of Sichuan Province” in 1978. (Chengdu No.7 High School, 2018). It was the first high school in Sichuan that was elected to be the key high school in China. This high school is considered as the top high school in Sichuan Province and is well known across the country for its high-quality education and good academic performance. It is one of the four "National Model High schools" in China. It was honored by China's Education Ministry as a “National-level Model High School” in 2000 (Chengdu No.7 High School, 2018).

The research reported in this article, therefore, aims to explore school effectiveness focused on the leadership roles of the HT in Chengdu No.7 High School. The research was conducted so that the findings from the case study of Chengdu No.7 High School related to school operation and the learning environment would be useful to transfer the positive learnings in Nepali schools.

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### **Objectives of the study**

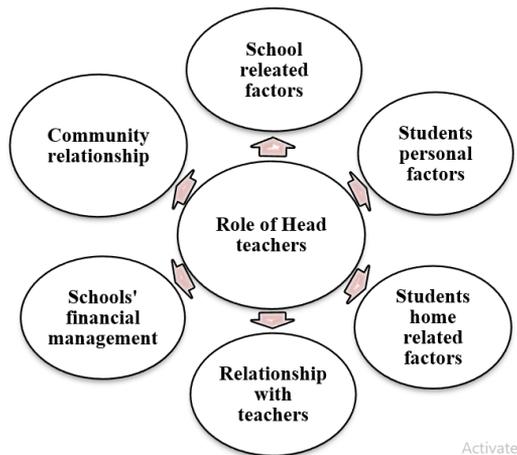
Specifically, the objectives of this research are as follows

- a) To analyze the various roles performed by the HT of the Chengdu No.7 High School to run effective school programme;
- b) To provide recommendations to further strengthen the performance of the HT of Chengdu No.7 High School in school management; and
- c) To draw implications for the effective role of HT in Nepal.

### **Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework of the study was considered based on six key roles of HTs which included school related factors, students' personal factors, students' home related factors, relationship with teachers, schools' financial management and community relationship – as depicted in the figure below.

*Figure 1: Conceptual framework*



This framework shows the contextual factors that govern the entire school effectiveness and therefore the role of HT on the whole.

### **Literature review**

According to Herman and Herman (1993, p. 92), “School Based Management (SBM) is an essential dimension of school improvement and among various factors, the leadership role of the school principal is widely

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regarded as the primary factor contributing to a successful relationship between SBM and school improvement” (as cited in Botha, 2006). Mosoge and Van der Westhuizen (1998) opine that school principal has to play key role to exercise leadership in various roles in a school, in the forms of “visionary leadership, transformational leadership and mentor leadership” (referred to by Botha, 2006). More specifically, school management includes professional personnel who are responsible for school management or administration. (OECD, 2016b).

Broadly speaking, aspects of school management include management of a school in terms of managing the material equipment; management of school plan; management of human resources. In addition, school management includes management of ideas and principles such as organization of ideas and principles into school system, curriculum, time schedule, norms of achievement, co-curricular activities. Besides, the objective of school management involves the embodiment of a spirit and of an ideal progress of the school (OECD, 2016b).

In school performance, quality of leadership is the dominant factor (Schwartz and Mehta, 2014; and Crawford, 2017, cited in Wolfenden and others, 2018). Pont and others (2008), based on an OECD study of school leadership around the world, revealed that many countries have moved towards decentralization, making schools more autonomous in their decision making and holding them more accountable for results. Management of teachers requires great amount of skillful control and guidance of teachers in order to achieve the schools’ desired outcomes. MOE recognizes that the HT plays an important role in leadership and management that determines the effectiveness of the school (Ministry of Education, Nairobi, 1999, Cited in Kitavi, 2014).

Katz (2001) defines teacher leaders as the teachers who are leaders and lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders, and influence others towards improved educational practice (cited in Kitavi, 2014). Opposite to this view Boles and Troen (1994) have mentioned that teacher leadership is a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively (cited in Kitavi, 2014).

In quite different ways, a Dalin (1994) suggested four discernible and discrete dimensions of teacher leadership role which included the translation of the principles of school improvement, teacher leader focusing on

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participatory leadership, mediating role and forging close relationship with individual teachers through which mutual learning takes place (cited in Kitavi, 2014).

Vroom (1979) defines leadership in terms of achieving the objectives of the organization (cited in Kitavi, 2014). Lewin's studies identified different leadership styles. According to Lewin, three major styles of leadership are autocratic or authoritarian, democratic (participative) and laissez-faire (ibid.). In a study authoritative leadership style was found to have a significant effect on school (Iqba, 2005, cited in Kitavi, 2014). A democratic style was reported to have significant effect on having higher test scores than an authoritarian or laissez faire (Valesky, 1992 cited in Kitavi, 2014). On the other hand, in Ugandan schools, Nsubuga (2009) revealed that the democratic or consultative form of leadership was the best (cited in Kitavi, 2014). The findings of the study showed that no single leadership style was used in schools everywhere. Although the democratic style was mostly preferred, it was found that depending on situations in schools, leaders tend to use the different leadership styles and at times used other styles of leadership. It was established that where the democratic style of leadership was practiced, the school was likely to achieve good overall school performance (Kitavi, 2014).

Pointing towards the impact of democratic leadership style of the HT, Ngugi (2006) observed that HTs who used democratic leadership style posted high exam results (cited in Kinyanjui and Orodho, 2014). However, no significant relationship was revealed to show the difference between the autocratic leadership style and academic performance in public secondary schools in Maragua district, Kenya (cited in Kinyanjui and Orodho, 2014). Similarly, Onyango (2008) found good academic performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) as revealed by the schools whose HTs were practicing a combination of autocratic (task-oriented behaviour) and democratic leaders (relationship-oriented behavior) (cited in Kinyanjui and Orodho, 2014).

Kitavi (2014) in a study revealed that a strong relationship was established between Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) performance and the HT's leadership styles, whereby it was established that school performance and in particular students' academic excellence in primary schools is positively related to the democratic leadership style employed by school HTs (Kitavi, 2014). Daniel and others (2016) also found a significant

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positive relationship between democratic leadership and academic performance of primary schools in Tinderet Sub County of Kenya.

In a study in the context of Nepal, (CERID, 2004) HTs were found to be exclusively active in mobilizing local community and local donor representatives for fund raising for school improvement. Unlike in most public schools, management in these successful schools has been found to be actively engaged in various self-initiated activities without much regard to the government-supported programmes and activities. This study revealed that the determination and self-initiatives are fundamental to maintain school enrollment, education quality and for collecting funds for school improvement (CERID, 2004).

Ngugi (2006) observed that HTs who followed democratic leadership style yielded higher exam results. But no significant relationship was found between the autocratic leadership style and academic performance in public secondary schools in Maragua Sub County, Kenya (cited in Kitavi, 2014).

### **Research methodology**

The study design adopted to address the research objectives was qualitative. The primary data were collected from Chengdu, Chengdu Number 7 High School and its surrounding areas using personal interview. As a secondary source, the review of previous research reports, policy documents of the government and various papers, journals, and articles published by the related professional organizations and media were used. The school website (in the Chinese language translated to English) was also studied for information. The 'do no harm' principle, confidentiality and voluntary approach with the informed consent from the respondents (Chinese students and teachers) were followed in a participatory manner during data collection.

### ***Results and discussion***

The study revealed that Chengdu No 7 High School gets funding from the government to run the school, to manage the infrastructures and to pay for the school teachers. The curriculum is decided by a group of teachers. Government funding includes the entire cost of running school. The school has made the provision of scholarship for the best students in the class.

To evaluate the teacher's teaching, another teacher or a leader attends the class while the teacher is teaching. The HT leads school and provides various types of support to the teachers in the professional tasks. There is a

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provision for the School Management Committee Dean or professional teachers who know about the rules and activate them. They play active role of coordination with the Head Teacher. The school organizes meeting with parents during the "open day" with the purpose of enhancing the quality of school programmes.

The responsible person from the government supervises the school activities to ensure the quality of education and the performance of the school. The students demonstrating outstanding performance get scholarship in top universities in the country like the Peking University and Tsinghua University. Often the students get support from the desk mates. Coordinated and collaborative efforts of the HT, teachers, students, parents, community leaders, district administrator and others have been instrumental in ensuring quality education in Chengdu No 7 High School.

The HT is the most senior teacher and leader of a school, responsible for the education of all pupils, management of staff, and for school policy making. The entire role of the HT is reflected in educational leadership, programmes, learning outcomes, student welfare, staff welfare, physical development and management, financial resource management, and school and community partnerships.

Based on the interview with the teacher and students regarding the role played by the HT in Chengdu No.7 High School's management, in view of the effective school, it was seen that the HT has three roles which include: leading and managing the school, ensuring the achievement of excellent educational standards, and promoting and safeguarding the welfare of students. The HT's role can thus be categorized into three categories: Firstly, culture and vision; secondly, leadership and management, teaching -learning, curriculum and standards; and thirdly communication and consultation.

Across OECD countries, school leadership has become a priority in education policy (Pont and others, 2008). Furthermore, Leithwood (2007) and Bush (2013) mentioned that successful school leaders make use of a mix of leadership models, and are responsive to context - i.e. school goals, school organizational structure and culture (as cited in UNESCO, 2014). Instructional leadership is particularly useful in guiding teaching and learning.

According to Heck and Hallinger, 1999 and Stewart 2006, transformational leadership focuses on vision, inspiration and relationship for the purpose of improving teachers' working environment and pupils' learning (Stewart,

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2006; and Robison and others, 2006, cited in UNESCO, 2014), while the instructional model focuses on the instructional leadership. A study of different models of school leadership in England mentioned traditional models, managed models, multi-agency models, federated models, and system leadership models (Pont and others, 2008). Hope (2002) appreciates that the head teacher's role is more central (cited in Mpaata and Zaid, 2018; Mwesiga and Okendo, 2015). They have emphasized that a successful school leadership rests on the nature of leaders that is observed in communication, ability, knowledge, skills, behaviors, flexibility, and personality traits, among others.

According to UNESCO (2009), though head teachers can delegate authority to teachers for daily activities, they have crucial role to lead, ensuring togetherness of other staffs in various tasks like parents' meeting, involving them in school activities and staff in implementing school policy. Franz (1999) has indicated the rising complexity of roles and tasks of head teachers in western industrial societies. Having school autonomy, schools have to deal with financial management and staff development and instructional leadership and administration. Franz has emphasized that due to growing autonomy, the quality development and evaluation pose an additional challenge to school heads. This requires the Head teacher towards having a systemic perspective for their professional development needed for overall development of school system.

Broadly, it can be said that there are three models linked to different concepts of the school that are, in turn, dependent on the organization of education system. The first model is that the HTs need no qualification other than those required for teachers and that they may return to teaching. Such a return is most unusual in secondary education (UNESCO, 2009). The second model is the separation of the functions of teacher and HT. In Germany, HTs are trained for administration and management, while in the USA; there is no formal requirement for HTs to have taught. (UNESCO, 2009). The third model believes in different fields of action of the management team; accordingly, the members of the team divide their roles – some take the responsibility of management and others perform teaching.

The major educational policy trends observed around the world place the school at the heart of reforms (UNESCO, 2009). The overall management that guides the development of school's physical infrastructure, improvement in access to education, and education quality rests on the HTs' leadership, characteristics, supervision and monitoring. The HTs should have

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good relationship with the school teachers, School Management Committees, parents and the local communities. There should be good relationship between HT's leadership and students' learning achievement, student regularity, school teachers' attendance, and enrolment pattern.

This study showed that there was a strong relationship between leadership styles and pupils' performance in Chengdu No 7 High School. In other words, academic performance in school was explained by the prevailing style of leadership. Leadership style may be a strong factor accounting for further explanation in terms of higher academic performance of pupils in the Chengdu No.7 High School. This study, however, did not reveal the views on autocratic leadership and laissez faire leadership style of the head teacher. This study also showed a positive moderate relationship between most school teachers, performance of the teachers and students, and overall reputation of the school.

The study showed that leadership is critical in the performance of the school as a whole. It was apparent from the study that the HT supervises the activities in the school closely; the HT guides and counsels the teachers, and interacts freely with teachers. There was presence of environment conducive for improved overall school performance.

The role of HT in Chengdu No.7 High School are:

- a) promoting a culture of encouragement, support and challenge in order to achieve students' full potential and the highest possible educational standards
- b) shaping the vision of the school by mobilizing parents, school teachers and the support staff
- c) translating the vision into objectives and operational plans and promoting creativity, innovation and the use of appropriate new technologies

Other roles fulfilled by the HTs included mobilizing all staffs to achieve the highest professional standards; building a collaborative learning culture within the school and building effective learning communities; managing the school finance; effectively working closely with relevant government authority; and ensuring the job descriptions and performance management for all staffs and teachers. The HTs as an academic leader inspires and engages all pupils; ensuring a consistent and continuous school-wide focus

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on students' assessment and achievement for outstanding standards of learning and teaching at all times.

The roles of public relation and collaboration included building effective relationship with all stakeholders through excellent communication and interpersonal skills, co-coordinating the school's work, and regularly and effectively communicating the progress of every student's learning to their parents. This study clearly indicated a need for facilitating HT's leadership styles to show a direct relationship with pupils' academic performance and involve teachers and parents in matters of students' performance. The HTs, however, should be trained in areas of management so that the teachers can also view them as active leaders, managers and facilitators.

As part of this study, it was observed that there are evolving leadership roles of the HT internationally. This has obvious implication for China in general and specific to Chengdu High School No7. The HT can delegate a large share of the daily tasks of organizing the teaching duties and managing the school logistics, their overall responsibility leads them to intervene on many fronts:

- Meeting parents, noting their opinions and involving them in the school;
- Motivating teachers and other staff involved in education and ensuring that they work together;
- Interpreting the supervisory authorities' policy and explaining it to all;
- Organizing the assessment of pupils' performance;
- Motivating teacher teams to involve everyone in improving the school

With distribution of functions and a great variety of combinations, many people can best be utilized to make the management function more effective

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

It is obvious that quality of school programmes and education has been ensured by funding from the government to run the school, support the infrastructure and pay the school teachers and provision for scholarship for the best students in the class – as found in Chengdu No. 7 High School. To evaluate the teacher's teaching, the capacity building of the teachers through

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a teacher or a leader attending the class could be a positive step. The provision of prizes to motivate the students to perform well and the scheme for students' scholarship in top universities for the students with good score is very praiseworthy step for their enhanced learning.

There is a need for exploring whether the HTs' responsibilities could be changed based on various types of leadership styles to relate it with students' academic performance in Chengdu No. 7 High School. The HT should involve teachers in school administration, which could enhance participatory leadership and hence contribute towards better academic performance. A study on teachers' perception of the HTs and their leadership style as well as their own job performance should also be conducted. It would be a positive lesson to bring back home that the school curriculum should be developed in consultation with a group of teachers and students. The leadership should explore ways of raising the level of overall student performance and narrowing the gap in the performance among students. Based on the present study, further research may be conducted on the roles of HTs in Nepal to explore the relationship between their level of motivation and school's performance especially students' learning, and the effect of other HT-related factors on students' performance.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS**

<b>CERID</b>	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
<b>DEO</b>	District Education Office
<b>HT</b>	Head Teacher
<b>KCPE</b>	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
<b>KCSE</b>	Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>MOE</b>	Ministry of Education

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<b>OECD</b>	Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>RPs</b>	Resource Persons
<b>SMC</b>	School Management Committee
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

