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Exploring Challenges of Dalit School Education in Nepal An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract

The presence of the Dalits in the mainstream education needs social, historical, legal, cultural, political, and spiritual interferences to emancipate the Dalits from the chain of ignorance. This study, therefore, aimed to explore the challenges for the Dalits in approaching school education in the context of Nepal. Here, after identifying the Dalit concern, I reviewed the related literature. Similarly, the inquiry strategy was qualitative and ontologically based on multiple realities. Thus, I used an ethnographic research design with unstructured interview sessions and participatory observation. Likewise, school teachers, head-teacher, Dalit students, parents, School Management Committee members, and community people were purposively selected to collect information. The data was analyzed and interpreted with the lens of cultural difference theory and caste hierarchy theory to generate meanings. I also used my reflexivity to be aligned with the research and experiences obtained in the study field. The conclusion thus emphasized that the Dalits in Nepal are excluded in terms of cultural differences concerning the non-Dalits and caste hierarchy that is severely rooted in the socio-cultural context of Nepal.

Keywords: Dalit education, mainstream education, community people, caste hierarchy

Introduction

Dalit for this study is defined as the caste or group of people who are socially, culturally, economically, religiously, and politically exploited or discriminated and disadvantaged in the society due to the unequal social system (Rycroft, 2017). In other words, Dalits are considered politically voiceless, socially prestigeless,

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economically exploited, and psychologically dominated by a person, caste, or group of people. Because of an unequal social system, they are considered untouchable and unacceptable people by the people who believe in a caste system that helps to establish their legitimacy over the state's power and resources. Being the artisan and occupational group, the Dalits, in general, are the poor, marginalized, and excluded people who are practically denied their civil and human rights in their society (Kumar, 2009).

The meaning of Dalit helped me understand my study participants in terms of their social, cultural, and political space. Before going to the study field, such understanding made me conceptually clear about who the study participants were, especially in terms of their social, cultural, and political positioning. While interpreting their way of perceiving education and the way they explained their challenges, I linked their meaning of being Dalit in the given socio-cultural and socio-political context.

In this context of problematizing my research agenda, I appear with the question like, what sorts of perception, concepts, and worldview of Dalits and/or non-Dalits, especially in terms of education, caused such social relationship between Dalits and non-Dalits. This means, whether the problem lies in the perceptions of Dalits in their existing education that they possess at present. The problem as such induced me to inquire about non-Dalit's perceptions on education through this research. As an educator, I assessed my experiences which assert that my Dalit friends in schools during my childhood massively gave up their school education. They often used to be unsuccessful in the school exam and that they often remained silent and/or unresponsive in the classroom. The key purpose of the research was to explore Dalit's way of interpreting education and to identify the challenges that Dalits faced on the way to acquiring school education. I have developed research questions for seeking answer during research journey as how do the Dalit students and parents explain the challenges that they come across while acquiring education at school?

This study is important for multiple ways. First, it incorporated the section of Dalits in Tanahun district where no research as such was carried out in the past. This study provides how their perceptions towards education support or inhibit them to participate in the school education programme. Although empirical research on Dalit education has been done a lot but each research on this agenda in the past limited to their socio-cultural positioning, economic challenges, caste hierarchy, etc. to reveal these as the challenges on the way to acquiring education.

Literature Review

While discussing the discrimination of Dalits by caste and religion in the Nepalese society, it was started from the Malla period when King Jayasthiti Malla (1360-1395) formally divided Nepalese society into different functional and occupational groups. Later, the King Prithvi Narayan Shah, the founder of the kingdom of modern Nepal, also accepted the caste stratification in the society by announcing Nepal as a “*garden of four castes and thirty-six, varnas,*” all caste and ethnic groups, including the Dalits, have been dominated, excluded, marginalized, deprived, exploited, subjugated for centuries by so-called ‘high caste’ people (Bista, 1990). So, we can say that caste-based untouchability is one of the worst forms of violations of human right.

During the Panchayat period in Nepal (2017-2046 BS) for thirty years, some Dalit leaders were selected as members of parliaments and government. This was a significant political change for the Dalit community. In that period, some remarkable efforts were made to bring about social justice for the Dalit community. After the restoration of democracy, the constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal was promulgated. It states all citizens are equal before the law and no people would be discriminated against based on religion, sex, caste, tribe, ideological conviction, or any of these, it added right against untouchability has been enshrined and no persons are discriminated against based on caste as untouchables are deprived access to any place of being deprived of the use of public utilities, any contradiction of that provision shall be punishable (Constitution, 2047 BS).

Furthermore, it was the constitution that declared caste discrimination and untouchability punishable. With the change of political scenario, untouchables became politically aware, and a lot of efforts were made by Dalits and non-Dalits to minimize caste-based discrimination. As a result, the old civil code of Nepal 1854 was amended in *Muluki Ain* (2020 BS). This code has positive aspects since it is abolished for the first time and explicitly prohibited any form of discrimination based on caste denial of access to public places and public utilities and stipulated punishment for those violating those provisions.

According to the Constitution of Nepal (2015) Article No. 24, ‘right against untouchability and discrimination stated that (1) no person shall be treated with any kind of untouchability or discrimination in any private or public places or grounds of caste, ethnicity, origin, community, occupation, or physical condition’. Similarly, Article No.40, Right of Dalit states that Dalit shall have the right to participate in all agencies of the state, special legal provision of empowerment, representation, and participation of Dalit community for employment in another area also including the

public service, (2) Provision of free education with scholarships from primary to a higher level of education. In addition, it further says that everyone has the right to participate in the cultural life of his/her community as they have the right to preserve and promote culture and heritage. Significantly, the constitution provides the rights of the Dalits (GoN, 2015).

Theoretical Lenses

Cultural Difference theory and Caste Hierarchy theory helped me explain Dalit education in line with their philosophy and the school culture. Because of the differences in tools, systems, and cultural relationships, they seemingly appear to be different from the others in the community and schools, conditioned by their schooling and education opportunities. In the Cultural difference theory, Ogbu (2001) argues that the gap between the minority cultures and the mainstream culture does not favor schooling/ learning of minority children who are socially and culturally disadvantaged. The disadvantages of Dalit children as the marginalized minority cultures are also deprived due to the dominant mainstream culture.

Similarly, to make this research more scientific and meaningful I used one more theory i.e., Caste hierarchy theory. The social setting in Nepal is based on caste hierarchy. That is, the social category and/or identity of the people living in the given community is built up with reference to their caste. This means, that people under different castes have different identities that shape their social positioning, economic opportunities, educational participation, and social relationship. Although the practice of caste-based codes is illegal and/or unconstitutional, it is found to be in effect covertly.

Thus, the hierarchy of castes in Nepal is a social, cultural, and religious agenda. It is in practice since the dawn of the Hindu civilization, which is particularly traced to King Manu's time. According to Sharma (2006), in ancient times, King Manu categorized people based on their duty/work. People in society are divided into four castes: *Brahmins*, *Kshetri*, *Baisya*, and *Sudra*. The *Brahmins* belong to the highest caste, followed by the *Kshetri*, the *Baisya*, and the *Sudra*, respectively. Based on their hierarchy, they are provided with some work to perform.

Methods and Procedures

I developed my research design in the form of a plan, structure, and strategy to obtain answers to my research questions (Kerlinger, 1986). Being a qualitative researcher, I supposed that my research design must contribute to exploring and understanding the meaning that my study participants ascribe to my research agenda - Dalit education (Creswell, 2007). I developed an ethnography research design that

allowed me to explore multiple realities in line with the subjectivities of my study participants, especially by adapting relative values.

While doing so, I explored the experiences of the study participants relative to their social and cultural contexts and gave their experiences a meaning. Ethnography research design allowed me to be context-specific, flexible, and value-laden. In the context of this research, I was attached to the socio-cultural context of Dalit, and I became flexible in interpreting their multiple ideas and experiences related to their education. It also gave me space to observe their socio-cultural relationships and performances to learn how their education, learning to help them participate in the broader socio-cultural activities.

I interviewed the head-teacher, teachers, School Management Committee (SMC) chairperson, and some key parents and children using unstructured questionnaires. While conducting interviews, I held a dialogue with my study participants. The interview aimed to explore their in-depth understanding, enriched descriptions, and detailed account of their culture, the process of being educated, and the roles of schools as they perceived. It was an open-ended, discovery-oriented method (Hart, 2001).

I also visited school to explore how Dalit children perform school activities. I observed their participation in the classroom activities, regularity, punctuality, their way of reacting, responding, and greeting their teachers and peers. I also paid attention on how their peers and teachers receive their way of presence in the school. I asked the teachers about performances and participation of Dalit children in school activities (ECA) and the way they helped them (Dalit children) for the same. Besides formal interviews with teachers, I also engaged with them in informal conversation in which they shared their ideas by the virtue of their perceptions, actions and worldview towards Dalit children and their education in schools.

I did not only engage into observation and interview as claimed in (Marshall & Rossman, 1989), but also recording them in ink and electronic devices. During the day I was with my study participants and in the evening, I revisited those recording. While doing so, I often came with new ideas, opinions, feelings, and impressions which I noted them as my insights and learning about Dalit education. I also talked with some non-Dalit community members and children to explore their way to interpretation of Dalits' education. In this way, I stayed for about a month for collecting data in my study sites.

Results

The data were coded, categorized and analyzed depending upon the meanings/themes (Saldana, 2016) it revealed and were discussed with reference to theories and my reflexivity. The challenges on the way to Dalits' education are discussed in terms of different headings namely, economic, social, and other family-related challenges etc. as mentioned below:

Facing Economic Problem

Economy and education are the sectors in human life where the former influences the latter and vice versa. Hartas (2011) states that economic advancement of the families often provides children with opportunities for school choice, an improved learning environment and leisure to engage in educational activities. On the other hand, education offers opportunities for placing oneself in a better job and enhancing economic status (Hooley & Yates, 2015). Asserting these relationships between education and economy, Dalit experiences with obstacles to education, in my study context, also were observed in a similar line.

In this regard, one of my research participants (SMC Chairperson) said: *'The children coming in this school are from a low-income source, they cannot feed their children unless they go for house making'*. The poor economy as a barrier to education has massively been discussed in the work of Desai (2012). For some scholars (Hartas, 2011; Hubackova & Semradova, 2014; Lynch, 2006), a lower level of the economy on the part of the family brings an inability for the family members to manage the basic requirements that necessarily support children to access the school. For example, some key stationeries, books, bags, etc. are the basic needs to get the students in question ready to go to school. That is, a school preparedness plan in the family needs sufficient resources both in cash and in-kind (Hubackova & Semradova, 2014), which promotes the enabling conditions for the children to access the schools. In this context, I see that the family economy's role is to contribute to children's preparedness for school education.

But in the context of my research, my study participants did not only strive to get access to school education but also for survival. For example, as mentioned in the data, the parents work for survival and not just for supplying the basic requirements. Burkett (2006) encourages me to view the economy as the measure of human activities. That is, the economy shapes culture (Tan, 2002). Stepping on such Marxian's view, I get the meaning from the narrative of my study participants that their poor economy caused them to engage in work throughout. As revealed in the data, their economy is so deteriorating that the family in question can survive only when they can generate income daily.

In such conditions, the focus of the family is not to support children in going to school but also to make them survive by generating income daily. This shows that the measure of their education is their economy. Had their family income been enhanced, they would have been able to go to school. Besides this, their economy also hampered their preparedness for going to school. In this regard, one of the study participants (Teacher) told me: *'Dalit children do not take tiffin in the canteen, they do not wear washed uniforms like shirt, paint, shoes, tie etc.'* The school preparedness in the context of this research is not the basic knowledge to place in the classroom but the availability of the basic utilities like school dress, stationery, shoes, and so on. Access and availability of basic utilities create an enabling condition for children to go to school.

Thus, the basic utilities as such help the students convince and/or motivated in being regular, punctual, and active participation in the activities organized by the school.

Lower Motivation for Education among Dalit Children

Lower motivation for education among Dalit children was also a barrier to their education. Hubackova and Semradov's (2014) studies on participation in educational activities in schools demand motivation among the participants. In the context of my research, I inquired whether their level of motivation for education influenced Dalit participation in school.

In this connection, I asked Head-teacher (HT), why Dalit children's participation is lower in school. In reply, he said: *'Few children are participating in ECA in school days like dancing, singing and speech delivering. Dalit children are less present on a Schools' Day or Parents' Day. They take a holiday if there is no formal class in the school. In sports week also Dalit students are less participating. They take it as a holiday on those days.'* Motivation for learning is supposed to be the first step on the journey to acquiring education. Motivated students can learn faster and better than those who are not motivated at all. If so, are Dalit students motivated to school education? I raised this question to ensure whether Dalits' participation in school education is influenced by their level of motivation. As claimed in the narrative, Dalit children mostly remained absent in schools and they do not intend to participate in extracurricular activities.

Connecting the issues of school absenteeism on the part of Dalit children with Maslow's (1954) motivation encourages me to think that Dalit participation in school education is low as they do not get their various needs addressed. For Maslow, a child needs can be categorized into five different needs such as psychological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization. They are motivated to perform the given task if

these needs are addressed. Since their rigorous engagement in school was reported to be less participatory and unpunctual, they are supposed to be less motivated to school education.

Parents' Inability to Support in Doing Homework

Parenting practices differ from one culture to another. This happens because every culture has a unique kind of parenting practice. However, cultures vary in the extent to which parents can vary the cultural socialization theme (Arnett, 1995). In this sense, parents' role is important in raising and educating the children. Therefore, parents' academic inability influences their child's performance at school.

In my research context, I discuss how parents' illiteracy affected children's performance. One of the participants (a girl student) said: *'I seldom do my homework; my teachers give me punishment for that'*. This shows that the teacher punishes her so that she can complete her homework in time. The use of punishment in this sense is a technique that accelerates one's learning. Punishment is used as pedagogically relevant technology in the classroom, particularly in the school where the child from a low socio-economic family is served. She doubtfully discussed how punishment functions as a form of pedagogical indifference in schools.

When I further inquired why she does not do homework. In reply, she said: *'My teacher told me to read and write the activities from the text, but I didn't do it because I asked my father to help, nevertheless, he couldn't help me, then I also stopped doing my homework.'* In this case, one of the participants shows interest in reading, but she does not get favoured in her study by anybody. She claimed that 'her father is not supporting her in her study, and she is, in some cases, unable to solve the problem in assignment herself.

Thus, she leaves homework undone. But when she goes to school the next day, her teacher beats her for the same. She is an inspiring girl because she makes a query with her father about things that she does not know. But the environment and people at home are not inspiring. Her problem at home is quite unknown to teachers. Teachers punish her simply because she does not submit her homework. But the teachers never seek reasons behind undone homework. Why do teachers not care for the reason for their inability to do homework? This question is relevant for fostering a school environment to make friendly to her.

Poor Communication between School and Home

The conversation between school and the home is vital in fostering children's performances and creating a learning environment at school (Faust-Horn, 2003). This means that any gap in the communication between the two hampers children's

performance and the relation between the two becomes doubtful. Thus, the poor communication between school and home functions as a barrier to the academic development of a child. One of the parents blamed the teachers that the ‘*government gives money to teach children, but Sir and Madam only sit in the office and talk about political matters.*’

Here the participant emphasizes that, though teachers receive money from the government for their duty to teach children at school, they do not perform their duty well. They just gossip and pass on the time. She confirmed that, if teachers do not teach children at school, then there is no worth of sending children to school. Addressing the remark, one of the male teachers said: ‘*We teachers are many; however, certain periods are assigned to us to go to the classroom, and some periods we have leisure. In our leisure time, we sit in the office and check the students’ performance.*’ This shows that the school’s communication system with the parents is weak. The parents are to be well informed about the activities, duties and responsibilities of teachers within the school premises to avoid any such dilemma which is liable to lead the teaching-learning process on the wrong track.

Inadequate Classroom Management

Classroom management is an integral part of teaching, and teachers need to acquire techniques for managing students. The public widely considers inadequate classroom management and discipline to be the major educational problem. Therefore, it is essential to consider Dalit classrooms to understand the inaccessibility of school education. The remark one of the parents whose child studies in class two claimed that: ‘*Children of various age groups are kept in the same classroom; the elder in the classroom tortures the younger one*’. She means they are naughty and keep on making noise. For minor cases, the bigger one beats pushes, pulls, and threatens the younger children in the same classroom. Sometimes the pencil, eraser, and cutter are lost. Since the younger children cannot fight with their bigger ones, they either bear the pain of torture or cry out. Any complaint to the teacher in this regard causes the teachers to make temporary peace in the classroom. Since the classroom environment does not maintain peace and group solidarity, learning always remains in doubt.

However, she questioned me whether she should send children to school to fight and cry or what? In fact, classroom management is a prerequisite for effective learning for which, as discussed by Walker et al. (1996), teachers are to develop classroom systems to “manage the academic performance and social behaviour of students within instructional environments and arrangements” (p. 198). Thus, the voice mentioned above demands a well-managed classroom to maintain peace and

order to ensure better academic performance and accepted social behaviour of Dalit children.

Children's Irregularity at School

We know that academic performance is highly dependent upon the attendance of students in school. If the children are not attending class regularly, they do not know what is taught in school in their absent days. Less achievement in learning among Dalit children is claimed to be the result of their low classroom attendance rate. For that, an English teacher at this school blamed that: *'Dalit students come to school once a week, they do not come to school regularly, making it difficult to teach and make them pass or upgrade from one level to another.'* The teacher above asserted that Dalit children are irregular in their studies. If they were regular, they would participate in the classroom learning processes. Participation in classroom activities would enhance their learning achievement. Being absent means they miss a lot of learning opportunities at school.

Thus, the learning achievement remained poor day by day. Supporting the view of the teacher above, the children who are likely to be regular in the school achieve a higher score than those who do not (Etsey, 2005). Thus, the regular participation of Dalit children in classroom activities is a must. Undisputedly, classroom participation can lead the Dalit child to some positive changes. University Teaching Development Centre (2004) also recognizes that regular classroom participation encourages children to think and reflect on issues and problems. It also fosters the children's presentation, communication, and language skills.

Moreover, it provides opportunities for the social interaction and sharing of ideas which could help Dalit children to vitalize their potential for occupying wider space in the larger social context. In the context of this research, when Dalit children became irregular, they missed the opportunities to foster their presentation, communication, and language skills, etc. They also missed the opportunities for participating in social interaction and sharing ideas, feelings, attitudes, thoughts, emotions, opinions etc.

As a result, they found themselves aloof from the educational setting available at school and often felt inferior to other children who are most regular at school. In the end, they left the school. The purpose of school is to unfold the immense potential of children (Awasthi, 2004). Since the irregular Dalit students remain aloof from the schools and the educational activities that are performed in it, they could not get their potentials unfolded. Thus, they could not realize the meaning of school and its contribution to imparting education.

Discussion

Some key challenges were found to be in place for Dalits' education. Their economic fragility was one of them. Their family occupation could not help them bring economic freedom in the family, nor did their socio-cultural positioning provide them opportunities to access other means of survival resources (Corno, 2013). In this context, Caste hierarchy theory sees education in the form of dominated and dominant forms. The dominants are in majority and therefore often impose their power on the dominated ones. As a result, the dominated ones hardly get any socio-economic opportunities to bring changes in their lifeworld. They were found to have led their life in economic confinement. Earning by one family member (family head) was not claimed to be sufficient for the survival of the family members throughout the year. All members of the family, including school-age children are bound to engage in income-generating work. As a result, the school-age children could not go to school regularly. The socio-cultural positioning was also found to be one of the severe challenges to their school education.

The key challenges in this regard were untouchability, exclusion, inequality, and discrimination (Bishwakarma, 2009). Although the visible practices as such are becoming poorer these days, these are still symbolically stronger affecting the socio-cultural life of the people and their regular attendance in the schools (Hartas, 2011). In this context, being placed themselves as the lower part of the caste hierarchy, Dalit segregate themselves from non-Dalit and demean themselves in the form of excluded, marginalized, and disadvantaged ones. Such practices also were found to be the reasons to create the feeling of emotional insecurity on the part of the Dalit children in schools, leading them to be irregular or school dropouts. The lower level of motivation for school education among the Dalit students was found to be responsible for their poor participation in school. The reasons behind the lower level of motivation for school education were found to be many.

First, they intensely engaged in domestic chores which hardly made them free to go to school. Second, their family tradition of work and wages often convinced them that they can survive without acquiring a school education. Third, the level of poverty in the family forced them to urgently need to increase family income rather than participate in school education programs. The lower level of motivation as to the caste hierarchy theory and to the cultural difference theory is the product of socio-cultural priorities.

In the caste hierarchy, the Dalit are placed at the lowest level, and in terms of culture, they are supposed to be less valued and useful, especially among the non-Dalit. Since the community and schools appear to prioritize those who are in

the uppermost rank of the hierarchy and those whose culture is prioritized the most, the Dalit in question perceive that the education which they receive is not helpful to promote their caste ranking and it does not also support them to be the part of those whose culture is valued in the community and schools.

As a result, they remain demotivated by school education. Their own family environment was found to be another challenge on the way to acquiring a school education. Most Dalit families claimed that children did not get an appropriate learning environment (Biesta, 2011). They did not receive any support from their parents in accelerating their learning achievement. Since most of the parents were found to be unschooled, they were not found to be able to contribute to accomplishing their children's educational assignments provided in the schools. The Dalit parents were also not found to have visited the schools and communicated with the teachers focusing their children's learnings (Bernstein, 1971). They were not found to have participated in various activities organized in schools. Home-school link thus was found to be poor.

However, their children's education was not claimed to move ahead in a desirable way. According to cultural difference theory, the connection between the school and home becomes strong, is aligned with the other in terms of culture. Since the culture of the schools favors the culture of those who are in majority, Dalit, as the minorities ones remain unaccounted for. As a result, the link between the Dalits' home and the school remains poor due to their poor education. After exploring Dalits' perceptions on education, I focused on identifying their challenges in acquiring education. Since Dalits' perceptions on education were a culturally rooted, socially situated, and contextually influenced phenomenon, the problems that they faced on the way to acquiring an education were found to have existed in the realm of their social, cultural, economic, and contextual lifeworld. Their hindrances of accessing education in these components of life are discussed hereunder.

Economic fragility among the Dalit was discussed to be one of the key challenges, which often created obstacles in getting access to education. Since the economy reciprocates the level of education (Bates, 2005), poverty among the Dalit appeared to be one component pushing them far back from school education. However, I observed that their poverty was the product of their cultural practices, social positioning, traditionally engaged occupations, and, by and large, their own perceptions of life and education. Finn (2010) sees the relation between poverty and school education and explains the poverty of the Dalit as a socially constructed phenomenon.

In this context, one may ask a question: In what way does the poverty among Dalit prevent them from getting access to education? In this regard, Bhattachan et al. (2001) seem more convincing when s/he claims that the practices of untouchability, exclusion, inequality and discrimination on the part of the Dalit have a wide gap between them and the economic opportunity available in their socio-cultural context. Since the Dalit in my study sites remained far from the available economic opportunities for centuries, they were bound to grow up in poverty. As a result, their key focus appeared to be survival rather than education.

In this sense, the poor economy among the Dalit in my study sites seems to be a challenge for them. What is there in a poor economy or the family conditions under poverty that makes 'poverty' responsible for poor education conditions among Dalit? This question is rather important to justify why poverty matters in acquiring education. According to the cultural difference theory, the economic condition of an individual is the outcome of one's cultural activities. For example, the economy of the Dalit in my study sites was deeply connected with their occupation's culture. Most of the Dalit in my study sites followed the ancestral business that caused them to live in economic confinement. Life under strictly defined income becomes hard as such levels of income often appear to be insufficient to meet life's everyday needs. Educating children is also supposed to be one of the most important daily needs, the economic support to Dalits' children's education did not adequately respond to their educational needs.

Thus, the lower level of motivation for education among Dalits was also discussed as one of the challenges. The level of motivation reciprocates the level of participation in educational activities (Valerio, 2012). That is, the active participation of Dalit in education can be ensured through their strong motivation. In this regard, some questions seem to be important: What motivation has to do with learning? How does motivation take place among children? What does it mean when we say Dalits' children are not motivated for school education? To answer these questions to inquire about the space of motivation in education, I would like to get support from (Poudel, 2007) who informs me that motivation energizes an individual and pushes them to participate in the target activities. On the other hand, it maintains that motivation arouses interest and further induces the individual in question to come into motion to finish the given task (Korde & Paulus, 2017).

If so, what brings obstacles to raising the level of interest among the Dalits to ensure their active participation in school activities? Seeking the answer to this question with reference to cultural difference theory seems to be relevant. For Poudel (2007), individuals feel happy or satisfied if they find a particular context like their cultural context. Cultural similarities strengthen interests while cultural differences

diminish them (Hofer, 1976). If so, is the school's culture different from the culture of Dalits? Why are schools in Dalits' catchment areas not able to be congruent with the culture of Dalits? These quotations seem to be the subject of further inquiry to resolve the issue of motivation for education among the Dalits of my study sites.

Similarly, the Dalit students have also faced difficulty in getting support at home to get an education. The culture of the school and the culture of home, in this context, were inconsistent. The culture of schools consists of student-students and teacher-student interaction (Pianta et al., 2008). Such interaction creates a learning environment for children in which the target children get opportunities to redefine, rearticulate and reform their knowledge- their socio-culturally rooted experiences. Such knowledge is validated through social interaction between teachers and students in the school setting (Baidhya, 2002).

The culture of the school, therefore, consists of a knowledge system that is globally recognized and nationally demanded (Vermeer, 2010). Dalit children, however, are largely prevented from getting such support at home. Historically and culturally, Dalits' home environment does not resemble the school environment so far, the matter of learning support available for children. Since the parents of Dalit children do not have the strength to support them in their home assignments, neither were they able to maintain family interaction in line with the one in the school. As a result, Dalits' children often become helpless and are not responded to in terms of their learning at home.

The cultural differences, in terms of learning, between home and school required intervention to be alike. The linkage between school and home is often focused on strengthening and promoting (Poudel, 2007). The purpose of linking home and school is to reduce children's complexities likely to occur on the way to acquiring knowledge (Bates, 2005). Linking home and school makes the channel of communication between the two effective. Effective communication in this context consists of sharing the purpose and activities related to children's education at home with schools and vice versa (Sullivan, 2002). Such communication is supposed to be learners' friendly in the way that teachers in schools get an opportunity to learn about students' family contexts and the parents, on the other hand, learn how their children in schools are dealt with by teachers in schools (LaRocque et al., 2011). It also helps the parents learn the meaning of interacting with children, especially in constructing knowledge.

In the context of my research sites, communication between the school and home was poor. The status of such poor communication is the product of cultural dissimilarity between home and school, especially in relation to children's learning.

Due to the poor link between home and school, the cultural differences of these two places do not interact to construct negotiated meaning of being Dalit or non-Dalit. As a result, the school, and the Dalits are indifferent to each other. The irregularity of Dalit children was another challenge for them in getting access to education.

Various studies on Dalit education in Nepal make their irregularities responsible for their poor educational performance (Ghimire, 2012). But, in this context, a question can be raised: Why do Dalit children often appear irregular in schools? There are so many reasons behind this. For Manandhar and Leslie (1994), Dalits become irregular in schools due to their intense engagement in household chores. On the other hand, it reveals Dalits' school irregularity as the result of family ignorance.

In the same way, in many cases, the Dalits are satisfied with their traditional occupation which they transfer from one generation to another. As a result, they think their occupation is sufficient to help them meet their family needs and, thus, they do not need to send their children to school (LaRocque et al., 2011). These reasons behind the irregularity of Dalit children in school also appeared to be prominent in my study sites.

Conclusion

While observing their challenges to education with the perspectives of cultural difference theory, I understand that the school culture, such as the classroom practices, curriculum, and the contents to be imparted to Dalit are still not coherent to the culture of the Dalits. That is, their irregularity and dropout appear to be the result of the differences that take place between the Dalit and non-Dalit children. The efforts so far made to address the Dalits' education appear to be external, borrowed, and conditional. To promote the status of Dalit education and ensure their active participation in education, the Dalits are supposed to enter the schools in the same way as non-Dalit children do. But their presence in schools often seems challenged by the school culture that is not supposed to be fully aligned with Dalit culture.

As a result, the school appears to be an unfamiliar space for Dalit children. Reflecting on the finding of this study, I feel that the issue of Dalit education cannot be duly addressed unless their perceptions and challenges to education are addressed within the socio-cultural environment of the schools. Dalit children enter the school along with their emotions, feelings, dispositions, habitus, etc. The schools can be claimed to be Dalit-friendly if they adequately respond to these Dalit features. The Dalit students can participate in the school activities equally as non-Dalit children if their issues, interest, capacity, and safety matters get space in the school curriculum, pedagogy, textbooks, extracurricular activities, and so on.

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