



Foundations of Education in Nepal: Local Values in School Governance Practices

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Abstract

School Governance in Nepal is largely discussed through the policy perspectives, without identifying its fundamentalism. Existing research also attributes poor school governance for deteriorating educational quality; however, these studies have presented inconclusive findings on how and what exactly needs to be strengthened in school governance. I argue that social-cultural domains have shaped the school governance in the country for years and deserve further exploration. In this research, I explore how peoples' local values constitute Nepali school governance through localism-governance theoretical lens. I applied a narrative research methodology and interviewed school stakeholders including School Head teachers, teachers, Education officers, parents, and SMC members in Lalitpur, Nepal. I found that local values provide a strong sociological foundation for school governance. These guiding norms include the community legacy that motivates the establishment and management of schools, a culture of care, and the value of belonging among school stakeholders. Such cultural orientations have played a significant role in shaping public school governance in Nepal and should be meaningfully integrated in the education policy debates. Although this study focuses on Lalitpur district, Nepal, its findings can be useful for educational policy makers and academics both within Nepal and beyond.

Keywords: good governance, local values, public education, School Management Committees (SMCs)



Introduction

Governance: Locating Nepali Schools

The concept of governance began in early 1990 with the worldwide flow of development aid (Hufty, 2011). Ekundayo (2017) agreed that the World Bank, an organisation that pioneered governance theory, propounded good governance as a criterion for supporting developing countries. The World Bank mentions governance indicators as: "voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regularity control, the rule of law, and control of corruption" (Kaufmann et al., 2010, p. 3). Achieving these indicators well means, the country has good governance system. Good governance is also considered an initiative of New Public Management reforms which aims to make the public sector oriented towards and accountable to the people (Chien & Thanh, 2022).

Good governance is essential to every country as a prerequisite to achieving sustainable development goals; however, bad governance is a threat to social and economic development (Kahar & Nath, 2018). People have better living standards if the country's governance performs well (Helliwell et al., 2014). Public institutions abide good governance by following rule of law, being accountable to people, and delivering services efficiently and equitably. It supports poor and vulnerable groups in society and helps in their development (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2012). Good governance is central to human development and sustainable economic growth (Gaghman, 2020; Meyer, 2018) and according to (Nag, 2018, p. 129) good governance supports free market economic growth by ensuring "human rights, sustainable development and social justice. However, Nag (2018) also states that the situation in developing nations is different as they require a strong state to manage internal problems such as conflicts, support unprivileged classes, and ameliorate poverty; so good governance includes a strong state instead of a free market. Poor or bad governance prevails today due to weak political leadership (Ekundayo, 2017).

In Nepal, good governance became popularised after the democratic movement in 1990 when political power was devolved to a people's government, and democracy was a key mantra of the state in order to provide development and justice to the people (Subedi & Subedi, 2021). The 2008 Nepal Good Governance Act defined the fundamental values of good governance as the rule of law, corruption-free and smart administration, financial discipline, and efficient management of public work" (Nepal Law Commission, 2008, p. 1). These initiatives aimed to deliver government services to the people and to create a welfare state (Lamichhane, 2021).

After the 1990 democratic change, Nepal started receiving international financial and policy reform-related supports. In 1999, Nepal brought in the Local Self Governance Act, granting significant authority to local bodies in deciding and implementing development plans through a participatory development approach (Government of Nepal, 1999). The 2002 Tenth Periodic plan highlighted that good governance could lead to poverty alleviation if there was a joint effort of the private sector, public sector, NGOs, and civil societies in the social and economic transformation of the country (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2002). These political transformation in the country also revamped the education system as, it is agreed by



report that educational system are a part of political process (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). The participatory development policies adopted after 1990, also facilitated the amendment of the 1971 Education Act in 2001. The amendment introduced School Management Committees by engaging parents and communities in school governance (Nepal Law Commission, 2001). The decentralisation of education management to communities aimed to generate local ownership in taking care of schools and to provide local support to school administrators (Nepal Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003). A SMC includes local stakeholders such as parents, communities, social activities, elected representatives, teachers and Head Teachers in the school governance process (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). Because community values are important in Nepali culture, the SMC model uses a collaborative and democratic approach, making school governance a strong example of participatory governance (see Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020).

What Constitutes Nepali School Governance? A Research Opportunity

A SMC in a Nepali public school operates, manages, and supervises all school activities related to teaching, learning and administrative management (Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b). The SMC model has been in operation across all public schools in the country for two decades; however, public education is always blamed for producing poor academic outcomes (Koirala, 2015; Nepal Ministry of Education, 2020, 2021; Neupane, 2019; Parajuli & Das, 2013; Shrestha, 2014; Thapa, 2015). Public school problems extend beyond funding, as the government's annual education budget is on an increasing trend (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2014, 2015, 2016a, 2017). The 2020 Fifteenth Periodic Plan identified “enhancing good governance and accountability” as one of the challenges for public education (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020a, p. 229), so effective school governance is important to reversing the deteriorating public education in the country.

Several studies indicate that poor school governance contributes to the low quality of education in public schools. Khadka (2021)'s research on the effect of governance on education performance in Nepal found that the country has weak performance because the Government is incapable of providing effective education-related service delivery and has implemented plans and policies that hamper sound school governance. Parajuli (2007) claimed that the SMC model in Nepal was a donor agenda and that there was low public participation in school governance due to a lack of management ideas. Carney et al. (2007) blamed SMCs for representing local elite groups who prioritised the surveillance of teachers and restricted teacher independence and autonomy. Pherali (2012) also raised similar distrust concerns regarding the ordinary people's involvement in the SMCs in Nepal; he claimed that SMC gatherings are more focused on keeping an eye on the financial issues of schools rather than improving academic achievement. In addition, the agendas in the SMC meetings are generally non-academic and the members are motivated to participate if they can receive economic benefits and increased status (Pherali, 2012).

Laurent-Olive and Bourn (2020) reminded that female participation in compulsory in an SMC but it does not require representation from ethnic communities, so not all voices are



included in governance. They also said Nepal's education culture follows a "west is best" mind set and lacks a local touch (p. 13). The view of flawed school governance in Nepal is supported by Rajbhandari (2016), who argues that public schools in Nepal are turning into poor wo/men's schools. Even though public schools offer free education, parents choose private schools because learning conditions in public schools are getting worse. He also said SMC-led school leadership is weak, as most chairpersons are not from academic backgrounds and have little experience in administration. Baral (2013) claimed that community schools are turning into 'girls' schools' as parents enrol their sons into private schools that provide a good education. Bhattarai (2022) found that the government does not consult with local stakeholders, such as schools and SMCs, when implementing school policies. The poor practice is creating a gap in education in Nepal and has caused a new kind of gender discrimination. Khanal and Timilsena (2022) and Hamal (2020) stated that the central government in Nepal is always reluctant to share education-related power to local bodies because of a hierarchical mind set and political motives. Khanal and Ghimire (2022) found that Head Teachers are unable to make autonomous decisions for a school's welfare as they are under constant work-related pressure from the SMCs.

Above-mentioned research on school governance in Nepal has been focused on the lapses in governance and its role in deteriorating educational quality (Baral, 2013; Bhattarai, 2022; Carney et al., 2007; Hamal, 2020; Khadka, 2021; Khanal & Timilsena, 2022; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Parajuli, 2007; Pherali, 2012; Rajbhandari, 2016). Gisselquist (2012) took the discussion further by arguing that the question "how to improve governance?" is not significantly important unless "how to improve what exactly?" is identified (p. 22). There is a little research on how Nepali school governance is shaped by people's local values, which shows a big gap and a chance for further study. This research explores the perspectives of school stakeholders to uncover how school governance is constituted in Nepal through the lens of localism.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in the localism- governance theoretical framework. Localism means focusing on giving local people the power to improve their own lives. The top-down development policies that aim to bring about social and economic reforms have generally failed in developing countries such as Nepal (Limbu, 2019). Nepal acknowledges the mobilisation of local human capital and invests in a community-centred development approach to make people's lives better (Nepal National Planning Commission, 2020b). There are different views on perceiving localism, such as synergising local strength in community works (Kurland et al., 2012), rights and representation of local stakeholders (Smith, 1985, as cited in Elander, 1997), as an element of multi-level governance (Harmes, 2021), and a practice in decentralisation (Madanipour & Davoudi, 2015). Localism aims to give political power to local people, making sure they play a key role in development. Nepali school governance adopts the principle of localism as an important element. I argue that Nepali local values have bound school

stakeholders in a thread of community and culture. This binding encourages stakeholders to work together in an ethical, moral, and united way for a school's development.

Similarly, school governance in Nepal involves multiple stakeholders. These include parents, community members, teachers, head teachers, elected representatives, and Education Officers. Governance is an art of collective decision making among the various stakeholders with in an institution (Plumptre & Graham, 1999). If there is a practice of good governance, political power is distributed across hierarchies, and all stakeholders can raise their own voices or through their representatives in the decision-making process (Dailiati et al., 2018).

Thus, the localism-governance theory is relevant for exploring the local values as the sociological foundations of Nepali education governance. Figure 1 illustrates that Nepali school governance intersects with local values and roles. This shows how social norms and values, and active participation of locals have created local-led school governance.

Figure 1: Theoretical Framework



Narrative Inquiry Methodology

In this study, I use a narrative inquiry method to gather information from the field and understand its meaning. The literature review shows that in Nepal, most policy documents explain the meaning and roles of school governance (see Nepal Ministry of Education, 2016b, 2019, 2021; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). However, the opinions and experiences of people involved in schools are often missing from academic writings in Nepal. Their real-life stories can help us learn how they support schools. Narrative inquiry is the



relevant methodology I adopted to collect school stakeholders' understanding, perceptions and experiences, and to give meaning to my research (Barkhuizen, 2018). I interviewed 43 school stakeholders (but this article includes only some of them) including Education Officers, Head teachers, teachers, SMC members, parents, and locals to know their perspectives about how Nepali school governance is built on. Their number was determined by the information richness and saturation required to meet the purpose of the study (Mocănașu, 2020; Saunders et al., 2017). They were selected based on their experience and involvement in school management activities. I conducted this study in three purposively selected public schools in Lalitpur district Nepal, which I have given pseudonyms as Sahar ko school (at urban location), Semi- Sahar ko school (semi-urban), and Gaau ko school (rural). I received the ethical approval from the University of Waikato, New Zealand to conduct this research.

I adopted the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2008) to thematise qualitative texts, which include: familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching the themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. I gathered the similar stories under a thematic heading to give a sensible meaning. A resonant thread of stories is used to make meaning in narrative inquiry research (Huber et al., 2018). I have presented the verbatim to ensure the original meaning of the research (see Ntinda, 2020). The following section presents the field narratives.

Local Values in School Governance

Based on what my participants told me, I looked at how communities in Nepal started helping to develop schools after the Rana regime ended in 1951. The Rana family ruled Nepal with absolute power for 104 years. After their rule ended, people began supporting schools by giving donations. The results about local values in schools are shared under these main ideas: history and traditions, alumni as generous helpers, and close relationships between schools and communities.

Historical Legacies

In 1974, Nepal was ruled by the Panchayat system, which was very strict. In the area where Sahar ko school is now — the place where I was born and grew up in the 1980s — twenty-one young people formed a group called the Sunrays Youth Club to help their community. Mr. Hakki became the leader of the club. They did many helpful things like cleaning the streets, painting a temple, and planting trees. Since there was no school nearby, the club wanted to start one on public land. They asked people in the community to give money, and many were happy to help. The community also helped build the school's foundation. A traditional savings group called Guthi lent them 1200 Nepali Rupees to start Sahar ko school in 1974. The students came from nearby, and the teachers were young people from the club. Because the community had little money and no help from the government, the school was very simple. It was a small hut with a straw roof and walls made of mud and bricks. There was not enough drinking water at the school. Every morning, the first School Management Committee Chair, Mr. Hakki, and his wife carried a bucket of water from their home to the school.



Here is an interesting story about Sahar ko school. In December 2021, I went to the school to watch the students and children practice martial arts. The school gate was open, and the children wore Taekwondo uniforms as they gathered on the playground. While watching, I remembered a water tank that a kind man, Mr. Hakki, had built 30 years ago. Since he is my neighbor, he had told me about it before.

I went to see the water tank in the school's backyard. It was in bad condition and looked like no one had cared for it for a long time. Grass was growing on the plain walls, and the taps were broken. The place had become a dump for leftover school building materials. Near the old tank, I saw two plastic tanks given by an NGO and a water treatment plant installed by the Soft Water Company. Their names were written on the walls.

Near the water treatment plant, I met a man named Mr. Smiley in the restroom. He asked if I was from the Soft Water Company and if I had come to check the water plant. I told him who I was. I learned that the Soft Water Company put the water treatment plant there to give clean drinking water to the students. The school hired Mr. Smiley to sell extra water in jars and put the money into the school's account.

I thought about the old water tank built by Mr. Hakki, even though it was no longer used. On the tank's wall, there was a stone plaque with writing. The words were faded but I could still read that Mr. Hakki and his mother built the tank to remember his late father. The plaque said: "In memory of the late Shri Mr. Buwa. His wife, Mrs. Aama, and son, Mr. Hakki, built this water tank. It was opened by the Mayor of Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan, Mr. Rana Shrestha. Saturday, February 3, 1993."

This plaque shows how the school's social support worked thirty years ago. I realized that Sahar ko school had almost forgotten the kindness of the person who helped a lot. He wanted to give clean water to teachers and students. This old water tank, built by a local man many years ago, holds many stories about community, power, money, and help. Hakki told me a story about that day in February 1993 at Sahar ko school. He said:

"In the early years of the school, there was no drinking water. Since my house is nearby, my wife and I used to bring water every morning in a container for the students and teachers. My wife earned 200 Nepali Rupees per month for this work. We saved this money to build the water tank, which cost 22,000 Nepali Rupees. To open the tank and show other community projects, we invited the Mayor of our area, Mr. Rana Shrestha. A large crowd gathered at Sahar ko school on the opening day, February 3. As the SMC Chair, I also spoke a few words. I told the crowd:

"Mayor Saab! I heard that once our King Birendra visited a village to see their farming. From his helicopter, the King saw green fields with fresh cauliflowers and was very happy with the people's hard work. But on the way back, the King saw all the cauliflowers were turned upside down. He realized it was all faked to impress him. This is the same situation at this school today. You have come to open this water tank, and it is full now. But you may not know I bought a tank of water for 700 Nepali Rupees



just to fill it this time. From tomorrow, who will fill the tank? Why don't you provide a regular water supply to our school?"

(Mr. Hakki, First SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

When Mr. Hakki spoke in front of a big crowd, he showed how frustrated the young people were with the Panchayat rulers in Nepal. The government did not give much importance to public schools, so the community had to take responsibility and build them. Even though there were many political and government problems, people worked hard and gave their time and effort to support education. Because of Mr. Hakki's bravery, the Mayor and other leaders began to notice the school. A few months later, the government installed a separate water pipe so the school could have clean drinking water.

Mr. Hakki's story helps us understand what society and education were like in the past. Now, I often see Hakki, who is 70 years old, at the temple near our home every morning. He likes to remember those old times and says:

"This stone goddess in our temple never speaks to us. But we gave our youth, money, ideas, and hard work to start Sahar ko school and named the school after this goddess. Now the goddess speaks through the voices of the children studying there. We feel blessed."

(Mr. Hakki, First SMC Chair, Sahar ko school)

Mr. Hakki's words showed me how much people valued education by building schools and school facilities. They acted selflessly to open schools and help others get a good education.

Stories of Land Donation and Labour Contribution

In 1960, the people of Dukeh settlement, a small village in Lalitpur, started a school called Gaau ko school. After some years, the villagers talked about moving the school to a spot between Dukeh and Khaldo Bazaar so that children from both areas could go there more easily. After many discussions, they moved the school to a piece of public land near a temple. More students joined over time, but the school could only teach up to Grade Eight because the land was too small. So, the villagers began searching for a bigger public land to move the school again.

The government gave a little help to build a new school building, but the villagers couldn't find a good place to build it on. Later, a kind man from the village, who was also a teacher at Gaau ko school, donated his own land in Khaldo Bazaar. With this land, a new school building was finally made in 1980. The school was then upgraded to a secondary school, and students started taking the SLC exam there.

When I visited the school in 2021, I saw a photo of an older man with a garland hanging on the wall in the Head Teacher's office. The writing said he was the man who donated the land to the school in 1979. To thank him, the school kept his photo in the office. Although he had passed away, his son, Mr. Jagga, worked as a teacher at the school. I interviewed Mr. Jagga, who said:

"In 1979, my father was the acting Head Teacher of this school. Back then, the school ran only up to Grade Eight and was located near a temple. Everyone agreed it should



be upgraded to Grade Ten. But the school building was old and small, and the land was limited. My family owned 800 square meters of land at Khaldo Bazaar. My father donated this entire land to the school for building and upgrading classes.”
(Mr. Jagga, Teacher, Gaau ko school)

Having a school that goes up to Grade 10 is very important for a community in Nepal. Grade 10 used to be the last year of school before college, although now it has been extended to Grade 12. Only students who finish Grade 10 can go to college or apply for government jobs. But in many villages, traditions mean that many girls get married right after finishing their Grade 10 exams. Because of this, communities worked hard to upgrade their schools to Grade 10 so their children wouldn't need to leave the village and go to the city to complete their studies.

The story of Gaau ko school's construction goes beyond just building a school. The villagers all helped to build it themselves. There were no good roads or transport to bring building materials from the city to the village. So, the villagers carried everything by hand — bricks, wood, zinc sheets, cement, iron rods, stones, sand, and other materials. In the 1970s, a single trip from the city to Khaldo Bazaar could take many days. But because of their hard work and determination, the villagers made their dream of having a school building come true. Thanks to the efforts of the local people, Khaldo Bazaar now has a secondary school that provides a strong foundation for education in the community.

Alumni: Philanthropic Agents

Semi-Sahar ko school is located at the edge of Setidevi municipality, surrounded by farmland and community forests. Recently, the government made the road to the school and nearby villages wider and paved it. The area has long been home to people from the Ghimire, Poudyal, and Dalit caste groups. But recently, more people from other districts have moved to Setidevi. Many come because it is easier to make a living here than in big cities like Kathmandu. Another reason is because of political problems: between 1996 and 2007, the Maoist conflict and the Terai-Madhesh movement caused many people to leave their villages and move to cities (Khatiwada, 2012; Singh et al., 2007). Because of this, public schools in cities started accepting more students from outside. This might be why Semi-Sahar ko school now has many students from outside the local area.

At Semi-Sahar ko school, about one out of three students is from the local area, but most students come from other places outside the municipality. This made me think the school might not have enough local students and may get less support from the local community. According to the school's smarika (annual report), twenty years ago all the students were from nearby areas, and the school was very popular with students from surrounding villages. The school even had an alumni group, but it stopped working because of poor leadership, low interest, and lack of clear goals. In 2019, the school community understood how important the alumni group was and started it again.

I talked to Mr. Dada, a teacher and former student of the school, who told me about his role in the alumni group and the activities they do:



“Nearly twenty years ago, some ex-students formed and registered the alumni and even raised some funds. But it stayed inactive for a long time. Three years ago, we started to revive it. As both a teacher here and an ex-student, I connected with many former students. The Head Teacher also asked me to bring it back to life, so we formed a new committee. We plan to re-register the alumni soon at a government office to create a network of ex-students working in different fields in Nepal and abroad. Recently, the alumni painted the school building, spending 60,000 Nepali Rupees. The alumni are like jewelry for our school.”

(Mr. Dada, Teacher, Semi-Sahar ko school)

After listening to Mr. Dada, I understood that the alumni group plays an important role in connecting former students with the school and building a support network. Having an alumni association was something new to me. I went to a private school in Lalitpur, and there was no alumni group there. Since I finished Grade 10 in 1999, my classmates never had an official reunion or gathering. The school never encouraged or organized any alumni activities. Unfortunately, my school, which started in 1986, closed down in 2015 because of money problems. Private schools often face financial difficulties because they depend fully on investors for money. On the other hand, public schools get funding from the government, which is more steady and dependable.

I thought the alumni work at Semi-Sahar ko school was interesting because it showed a smart way to collect resources. I also met Mr. Party, an elected leader from Setidevi Municipality, who said:

“The alumni were formed out of love for the school. Students who grew up here and learned their basics can never forget their school. We can bring big changes if everyone gives a little help.

Former students now work in many fields — as engineers, doctors, soldiers, government officials, and more. Some hold important positions that can help bring funds to the school. If everyone’s ideas and contributions come together, we can develop the school quickly. That’s why we reformed the alumni and are preparing to register it officially.

Through the alumni, we have organized picnics to bring people together and held programs to honor former teachers. We also plan to set up a fund to support hardworking students.”

(Mr. Party, Elected Representative, Setidevi Municipality)

Over the past seventy years, Semi-Sahar ko school has graduated thousands of students who now work in different jobs both in Nepal and other countries. The alumni association helps bring these former students together and keeps them updated about what is happening at the school. Although Nepali education laws do not officially recognize alumni groups, some schools still use them as important community networks and as a way to collect money for the school. Mr. Curri, the Education Officer of Setidevi Municipality, shared similar thoughts:



“Nepal’s school rules do not officially recognize alumni groups. But from a resource-raising point of view, alumni are very useful today. If a school’s management supports the alumni, their impact can be great. As the school grows, it will have more graduates who have good jobs in society, business, and government. Their social networks and incomes are valuable. These graduates belong to the school, and we can build a network with them to help the school progress.”

(Mr. Curri, Education Officer, Setidevi Municipality)

Alumni groups give former students a chance to come together, remember old times, and keep their friendships strong. They also help collect money from the community to improve the school’s facilities. Their support comes from kindness and a genuine wish to help.

Reciprocal Relationships with Communities

I remember a day during my field visit to Gaau Ko School in April 2021. The school was closed because it was a weekend holiday. The Ward Offices of Kalidevi Rural Municipality, along with a local youth club, had organized a volleyball tournament on the school playground in Khaldo Bazaar. On the final day, six teams from nearby villages were competing hard. Hundreds of people came to watch and filled the area around the school. As someone who loves sports, I found a spot in a corner of the field to watch the games. It was also a good chance to see how closely the school and community were connected, with local young people using the school grounds for their event.

I heard the sharp ‘dang-dang’ sound when players hit the ball hard, and dust rose as they ran to catch it. The crowd cheered loudly to support the teams. Some young people even watered the ground to keep the dust down. A big banner showed information about the event and the sponsors who helped organize it.

I talked with some people watching the game, including teachers sitting together on a long bench. I learned that a local teacher, Mr. Tall, was a well-known volleyball player in the area and had coached many students. I greeted him with “Namaskar,” and he greeted me back. We talked about the match, and he told me that he had been a student at Gaau ko school and had been teaching there since 1987. “Many players in this tournament are graduates of our school,” he said. He also shared memories about how the playground used to be:

“Years ago, the playground was rough, full of gravel and covered with Ghangharu, a local thorny grass. Our school rebuilt it and made it flat. On this ground, our students do sports, morning prayers, and assemblies regularly. The nearby community uses it for games and social events. This ground belongs to everyone. There is no other space nearby for big events like this. Even though it is on school property, the community does not have to pay to use it.”

(Mr. Tall, Teacher, Gaau ko school)

I was fascinated to hear how the playground connects the school with its community. I kept watching the game. Although it was windy, the sun was shining, and a large crowd had gathered. Journalists covered the event, police provided security, and an ambulance stood ready



at the school gate for emergencies. I heard the event's MC thanking donors and helpers over the microphone:

"We thank Mr. [...] and Ms. [...] for sponsoring prizes for our players. Thanks to the Area Police Office for security. Thanks to the Health Centre for medical support. Special thanks to Mr. Purba Sir, Head Teacher of Gaau ko school, for providing physical support to organize this event."

(An MC, Volleyball competition, Gaau ko school)

Gaau ko school helped with the event by providing the playground, stage, toilets, desks and benches, microphone and speakers, electricity, and water. Many of the players and organisers were students from the school. The local youths and organisers warmly thanked the school for its help. I found it interesting how public schools and communities support each other.

Understanding School Governance: The Role of Local Values

Governance means guiding and managing societies and organizations (Plumptre & Graham, 1999). It is where different people with power and responsibility come together to make decisions (Nepal Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development, 2008). In Nepal, many studies show that poor school governance leads to low quality education (Baral, 2013; Bhattarai, 2022; Carney et al., 2007; Hamal, 2020; Khadka, 2021; Khanal & Timilsena, 2022; Khanal & Ghimire, 2022; Laurent-Olive & Bourn, 2020; Parajuli, 2007; Pherali, 2012; Rajbhandari, 2016). These studies say good governance is missing in schools but do not explain clearly how school governance works. My research looked at how school governance in Nepal is shaped by local community values.

I found three main parts of school governance in Nepal.

First is the community's history and traditions. In the past, Nepali people actively helped start schools by working together. In the 1970s in urban Lalitpur, young people raised money and built Sahar ko School. From 1961 to 1990, Nepal was ruled by the undemocratic Panchayat system, and all schools were controlled by the central government. Still, people paid to build school buildings themselves. In 1993, Mr. Hakki built a water tank at Sahar ko school to honor his late father. In Nepal, it is common to remember loved ones by helping the community. At the school, I saw a stone plaque with over 100 names of people who donated money, goods, or labor to support the school. Similarly, in rural Lalitpur, I heard stories of people working together to build Gaau ko school. A generous local teacher gave his land to the school so it could become a secondary school. In Nepal, land is very important because families rely on farming. After the land donation, villagers carried building materials on their backs from faraway cities to build the school. This was in 1980, when the village had no roads connecting it to nearby cities. But the community was proud and determined to build a secondary school close by. Teachers, students, local people, and politicians raised money through cultural events like Dheusi-Vailo, a traditional festival.

Other studies (Dhungel et al., 2013; Nepal Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, 2009; Pradhan et al., 2019; Sharma, 2008; Shrestha, 2014) agree that communities started schools in Nepal. But they don't clearly explain why communities worked



so hard to build schools. I found some important reasons: One reason is political. From 1846 to 1990, Nepal was ruled by two autocratic governments — the Rana regime (1846–1950) and the Panchayat system (1960–1990). In 1975, people protested against the Panchayat rule (Bhandari, 2012). In my research, young people in urban Lalitpur started Sahar ko school to educate others and raise awareness. Their goal was to quietly resist the rulers by teaching people peacefully. The other reason is the pride of communities. Communities felt proud to build schools in their areas (Pande, 2003). People believe that children need at least some schooling to live better lives (Acharya, 2017). And another important point is kindness of people. People's willingness to help others motivated them to support building schools without expecting anything in return. These reasons show that in Nepal, "communities/societies are the places where the education systems evolve" (Dhungel et al., 2013, p. 31). I found that this positive attitude from past generations is still an important value in how schools are governed today.

The second part is the culture of care. Former students of Semi-Sahar ko school have formed an alumni group to support the school's development. Mr. Party, a local elected leader, said, "They created the alumni group because they feel a strong connection with their school." Over time, these former students get important jobs locally and abroad. Their experience and financial help can improve school buildings, support teachers, and help students. Even though Nepal's education laws do not officially recognize alumni groups (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2019; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2017b; Nepal Ministry of Law, 2020), I found that alumni groups are very important for raising resources. Two main values guide alumni activities: Former students respect their old schools and teachers, and they value unity and teamwork, which is common in Eastern societies (Sapkota & Tharu, 2016). In Hindu culture, teachers (gurus) are highly respected (Rigopoulos, 2018). Former students want to reconnect and use their relationships to support their old schools by building social capital (Claridge, 2018). Alumni networks help bring former students together to pool resources for their schools (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021). However, alumni groups remain informal because education laws do not clearly explain how they should work.

The third part is the connection between the school and its community. Cooperation between schools and communities is very important for a strong relationship because schools are part of their communities. After the 1950s, communities helped start schools by giving land, money, and labor (Pradhan et al., 2019). Today, schools are run by the government but still rely on the community. Schools teach students skills, knowledge, and good values so they can help society (Nepal Ministry of Education, 2021). Communities believe schools create a better future for their children. In my research, communities use school playgrounds and facilities for activities besides school. For example, youth groups in Kalidevi Rural Municipality organized a volleyball tournament on the Gaau ko school playground. The school helped by providing tables, chairs, sound systems, electricity, water, and toilets. The youth club that organized the event praised the school's support. A teacher, Mr. Tall, said, "Our students play sports here, do morning prayers, and hold assemblies. The community also uses this ground for games and

social events. This ground belongs to everyone.” The playground was rebuilt for students but also opened for the community. This shared space has created a strong bond between the school and the people around it.

Figure 2: Highlighting Local Values in Nepali School Governance



As explained earlier, school governance in Nepal involves many different people, including parents, teachers, head teachers, local residents, elected leaders, and education officers. My research, shown in Figure 2, found that local values like strong traditions, caring for each other, and close relationships connect schools and communities. People take part in school activities because they feel socially and culturally motivated to improve education. They also help manage the school in creative and thoughtful ways to make it better.

When local people get involved, school management becomes more open and responsible to students and parents. When citizens participate in public work, it helps make public institutions more accountable and ensures the government works for the good of many people (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014). Also, when people work together and use their social networks, schools can find more resources locally. This means schools don't have to rely only on money from the central government and can find ways to grow on their own. Using local resources supports the idea of decentralization in school governance (World Bank, 1988, as cited in Weiler, 1990). These social and cultural parts of Nepali society form the base of how schools are governed. Parajuli (2014) agrees that people use their local knowledge, developed over many generations by learning from experience. Hussain (2021) also says that culture



strengthens social bonds and keeps human connections alive. Culture gives meaning to life by linking people's feelings through shared values.

Therefore, local leadership has shaped the education system in Nepal (Dailiati et al., 2018; Kurland et al., 2012; Madanipour & Davoudi, 2015; Plumptre & Graham, 1999). Local values build school governance through a strong community history, caring culture, and close ties among school members. School management reforms that are based on these local values will make Nepali school governance stronger. However, recent policy discussions are trying to reduce the role of locals in school governance (Adhikari, 2022), which could harm the way schools have traditionally been managed in Nepal. There is no doubt that local values have played a very important role in shaping public school governance in the country (Adhikari, 2024).

Conclusion

Nepal's public education system is blamed for not functioning well, mainly because of poor governance. Literatures have not explicitly identified what constitutes the country's school governance. This research explored that Nepali school governance is inbuilt with local values such as community legacy, culture of care, and connectedness amongst school stakeholders. Local values prepare a base to bring selfless support of stakeholders for school's welfare and growth. These values create the sociological foundations of education development in Nepal, and must be meaningfully integrated in education governance policy debates.

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