Process and Practices of Community Participation in School Education of Nepal

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Abstract

Formally, community participation in schools was started after the establishment of democracy. It has really a good influence on development of physical infrastructure and efficient use of local resources for school development. In this context, this article analyses the existing situation of level of participation and struggle of member of SMC experiences while they are working as authority's persons. It is a drawing upon a grounded theory. The site and sample both are purposive and information was also collected by open-ended interview with real stakeholders. This article argues that poor language and economic status as well as lack of awareness of community people, political intervention and differences between home and school culture are subjected to what fairer terms of difficulty of community participation within schools for backward society with illustration how such problems influence on participatory decision making practice in school. This article emphasizes the need of education policy; it is obviously based on the society's socio-economic and intellectual capacity.

Keywords*: Participation Theory, School Management, Public School, Involvement of Community, School Administration*

Introduction

After I finished my higher education, I worked as a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Sanothimi Campus, which is located in MadhyapurThimi Municipality, Bhaktapur. I have been teaching there since 2066 BS. I along with my colleague live in the same municipality. Not only a good co-worker he is also an active social worker of this place. With the recommendation of my friend I was appointed as a member of a school management committee for three years as stated on the Education Act, 2028 7th amendment.

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Days passed by and one day I came to know about the fact that I was being selected as a member of the School Management Committee. I was handed over the appointment letter of the committee which stated about being selected as a member of SMC of a community school. I thought that this would be my golden opportunity to reform the educational standard of that government school. It might build up my professional expertise and make my social adjustment with my society. During the early days of the SMC meeting, we were regularly called for the meeting. Members of this committee used to give an appreciable suggestion. All of the members were positive toward the SMC. But in later years we were called only in the meeting during the new opening session of school, only to complete the formality just by signing the official documents. I wasn't satisfied with my job as a member of SMC. Not only me, but other members of SMC were not satisfied with the unfair act performed by the school.

As time passed by, I got involved in the Private Boarding school's SMC in the same locality. This school gave me the chance to work as a chairperson of that school. There was a frequent meeting in this school to enhance the quality education of school. Frequent seminars and training were held in the school to enhance the professional development of the members as well as teachers. The members of the SMC of this school were very hardworking and cautious towards school. It gave me a good opportunity to develop my professional skills. Involving in this school, many questions stuck in my mind: Why is the Community school not concerning in maintaining the educational quality of the school? Why is the school not giving time to SMC, a powerful organ involved to enhance the quality of Education? Do members of SMC satisfy in their job? Does this give any appreciable change towards school development?

In a historical glance, Until the 1950s, education in Nepal was an opportunity available only to those closely associated with the Royal or Rana oligarchy families. The ending of autocratic rule of the Rana family in 1951 opened the space for communities to establish schools at the community level usually with the support of local patrons and, by 1971, all schools in Nepal were community managed. In order to maintain central control of the education sector, the Government of Nepal (GON) endorsed the first Education Act in 1971, which initiated an era of state management.

In 2001, in line with Nepal's broader reform agenda to decentralize government services and involve communities in local governance, the GON amended the Education Act and re-introduced the partnership with community for school management, in a way, each community school formed a SMC within the provision of education act, 2028 with seventh amendment to work together for school development through school improvement planning. Besides enhancing participation and fostering

ownership among local communities, the main aim of partnership with community was to improve the overall efficiency and accountability of public schools

To ensure the community participation in Nepal, the legal document have provision to formulate the school management committee in each community and institutional schools. In community schools, School Management Committee (SMC) consists of nine members who are elected or nominated by the school's parent assembly for a period of three years. Three members are elected from among the guardians of enrolled students; among them one member should be female and another one is nominated by these elected members (one should be the Chairperson of the respective ward, Village Development Committee or municipality), one elected by teachers, one representative each of the school's founders or donors, one education expert and the school's head teacher as secretary. The SMC is responsible for the day-to-day supervision and management of the school, including infrastructure development, regular monitoring of school activities, promotion of teachers (those appointed by the SMC) as well as the recruitment of staff. Since 2003, SMCs are permitted to recruit temporary teachers and, instead of appointing teachers centrally.

The historical arena, legislative provision and my experiences has shown that there has clear gap in process and practices of community participation in schools. To fulfil the gap, this study has explored and analyzed the management process of community school in Bhaktapur, particularly the explication of ideas which the member of SMC put down to the management process which are obvious in community school management practices.

Methods and Materials

This research study covers and analysis of the community involving in school management process with the aim of how the members of SMC [School Management Committee] exercise the management process in community school with the assumption of participatory approach as mentioned by SESP [Secondary Education Support Program] (2002) and suggest that to achieve the goals of decentralized system of planning and program management of community school sectors to work together: in particular, the Head teachers and SMC, via the SIP [School improvement Program]. The theoretical assumption of participatory approaches will be used as a study framework in this paper. It is considered that the process and practices of community school management should be examined. This study was form an interpretivism research paradigm which believes reality and varies from place to place, multiple reality constructed through the contextual and, as result of interaction with the social context where we live and perform in the context, they occur (Crottey, 2003, p. 10). The ontology of this study is that the participants, who are being studied, have their own

thought, experiences and meaning. As epistemology is an interaction with members of SMC within their social world in subjective ways. Qualitative research activity is a form of inquiry that explores the phenomena in the real ground setting and uses the inductive method to interpret, understand and bring the meaning of the information. Thus, the qualitative design has been employed to carry out this research.

Qualitative research always begins with presumptions, a world view, the possible use of theoretical lens and the study of research problem inquiring into the meaning of individuals or groups endorsed to the social and human problems (Creswell, 2007). While conducting the research I used an emerging design in the enquiry of this research. As a guideline to this design, I collected the data with the help of open-ended interview in a real ground setting. The site and sample both it has selected purposively are Bhaktapur district and Member of S.M.C. and head teacher from respective school (A1, A 2 A 3 respectively). During the study, it has not revealed the participants' real names following the research ethics. The interview of a member and chairperson of SMC and head teachers are being taken to reach the saturation point and validate it. As a researcher, I view social reality in terms of community participation in school management process as being co-constructed by individuals who interact and interpret their experience or reality in an active way.

After the data collection, I transcribed it and read carefully more than once. I developed the multiple layers of theme with the help of raw data and ordering them according to my research problems as well as I combined multi-theme into large theme or perspective. After then, I started to analyze data under the code and theme which is completely based on the primary information collected during the study periods and deduced the meaning inductively.

Results and Discussions

The study aimed to find out the existing practice and process school management in terms of needs of Community participation, responsibilities of school management committee, parents and community people, participation process in decision making, conditional factors of community participation, barrier of community participation and ways to improve the practice of community participation. In this purpose, thematically information has been analyzed with the help of theme which was developed in field information and meanings are deduced inductively.

Needs of Community Participation

Education is a major concern of the community and public involvement in school management is essential. Many educators suggested that for the promotion of community involvement in school management. Campbell (1992) carried out the

research on community participation in school and found out that "it pays off in higher student test scores, better grades, and improved attitudes toward learning particularly for inner-city and minority students. At the same time a participant said that

> *"If the management committee have not strong itself and even the headmaster is the same, school are not good."*

McGinn and Welsh (1999) support the argument and say that, across the nation, polls indicate that the public overwhelmingly supports the idea of parent involvement and believes that parents play a major role in children's education. In the same ways, The SSRP is the Core education policy at school level that realized the needs of community involvement and suggested that "The School Management Committee and the Parent-Teacher Association will develop a system for informing parents of those who do not attend school regularly. In this context, one participant shares his\ her experience in this way:

> *First of all, this school was established on the 11th of Baishak, 2055 BS from my house. How to save it is still in my chest! In the early days, when school was established, there were many students. By the time of kalu (pseudo name of head master), the number of children has been declining.*

SSRP (2064) clearly states the role of head master, teacher and SMC respectively; the headmaster will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the school, the teachers will be responsible for ensuring the learning of the students and the school management committee will be responsible for providing a suitable environment. This is the experience of a participant in the context of our society as:

> *In the beginning days of school, there was an only one teacher's post ... at that time, teacher was taught to student in the ground. There wasn't not any furniture Some teacher used to take a piece of Gundri for student sitting. Now a day, children are being taught in a RCC building, we have electricity, drinking water facilities, and the school has compounded by walls. Kapil Baskota inaugurated the event on April 30. Anyway, I am happy with the progress of the school.*

In the context of Nepal, Kafle (2064) said that the Community participation in school occurs by volunteering, giving money and materials to the school, providing land and participating in decision making. The same ideas have been carried out by the Secondary Education Support Program with focus on decentralized education policy: "to create the ownership on the part of local communities of their schools, which must be directed towards the more effective, efficient and accountable management and greater utilization of local resources in their work. "From this discussion, the main reason of community participation in school is to increase the responsibility, accountability and transparently from the side of teacher, head teacher and school management committee as said SSRP (2064).

Responsibilities of School Management Committee, Parents and Community People

For most of the responsibilities of community people in public school, it is expected in terms monetary and non-monitor support. For instance, land, funds, volunteer teachers, labors, construction materials etc. From the point of expansion of education, it is an appropriate way of to achieve reasonable level of progress with the direct participant of the community. Mapp (2012) is a prominent family engagement expert and he emphasizes that the involvement of community in school is for sustained investment in strengthening home-school partnerships. In this respect, a participant has shared about the contribution of SMC:

> *The school management committee has been conducting regular door-to-door programs for the enrollment of children in school as well as help the school manage the tiffin for student at the school.*

Every public school in Nepal has formed its own school management committee under the national education act and their role and duties are limited by Education act. The school management committee encompasses to manage and operate the school relatively within the specific location and communities. SMC as local body of school governances is formed by the represent of local people, so our local polices must be consistent with policies set out with national school policy. In this context, one of the participants said, *"Collective discussions on the issues especially, it is seen in teachers like transfers of teacher and other problems of teacher that occur in school and solved it"*.

In this regard, SSRP (2064) supports this argument and says that the school management committee will have an important role in determining the criteria and standards for the selection of headmasters, as well as to make the plan with head teacher for auditing the performance of the teachers. In the same ways, Ornstein & Levine (2002) said about the power and responsibility of school management committee is to make general policy, human resources management, to improve the relation between employee, to collect and manage the local resources, to help for development of community relation and student support programs. From these ideas, the responsibility of SMC is not to be underestimated for whole school development. The another participant of this study has said in his \ her interview: *"To take the decision on how to spend the monetary resources (building and other expenses), How to motive parents toward the school? and how to increase the number of students in school .... it will remain our main role"*.

What Ornstein and Levine (2002) said about the responsibility in the context of American societies the same ways the policy and action have been practiced in the context of our society.

Participation in Decision Making

Share decision making always believe on "two head is better than one in decision making at school." The collegial model has said that the major policy decisions for school have been made by the participation of the staff, student, parents and governors (Bush, 2001). In this context, a participant stated,*"The previous management committee was not good. he just calls to me for sign. When I asked him why you do this, he take me out of the committee. But the municipality re-appointed me"*.

To promote the community participation in school management processes is to increase the community support to school as well as community observation of school processes. Accordingly, several policies and strategies have been developed to promote participation in school. National education policy (2076) has emphasized that the school management committee will be made responsible and accountable for building lively relationship between the school and the community as well as formulation of policy decision regarding mobilization of local resources. Although the power of decision making has been delegated to local body and real stakeholder like parents are not free from the dominance of positional power which one occurs in bureaucratic systems. National education policy (2076) focuses on decentralized management policy and says that, "financial and managerial powers required for school operation will be decentralized at the school level. From this view, we can say that the provision of policy about the role and duties of local body as well as parents and community is appropriate but the government has unable to empower the local people about their right, duty and responsibility in school. Kafle (2065) noted about participation in decision making and said that our schools have to be developed as learning centers by the collaboration of school, parents and community rather than school or state alone. The researcher has also been working as teacher for ten years, his experience does not match with the ideas which were stated by Kafle but it matches with the experiences of participant as he or she states that:

> *At the time of formation of the committee, they put the political pressure for appointment of SMC member and chairperson who they are affiliated with their political parties.To all these people have a greater role to play in school decision-making. They said to be that there shouldn't politics in school. I have spoken very openly. it is my own practice and experience*.

Mapp (2012) with homeschool partnership in relational trust states and shares decision-making. The key finding about process and practices of community participation in school management centered on boarder process of social interaction and process of socialization that is called interpretive paradigm, such paradigm has advocated that the process of community involvement in school has legitimated by the level of social interaction and the level of their empowerment. The finding of this

study also corresponds to the notion of participatory theory, which believes that the school management committee work with the real stakeholder's situation, experience and their opinion. But in this context, the authority of public school management was given to community through the seventh amendment of education act, 2028 in spite of delegations of the community. Still, there is influence of the positional people in the decision making process.

Conditional Factors of Community Participation

Education takes place not only in school but also within parents, community and society. School as an institution prepares the students for the betterment of society. So school can't or should not operate as separate entities within society. Consequently, the processes of community participating in school are explicitly and implicitly influenced by the socio-economic status, cultural and intellectual level of people of the society. In this regard, Sharma (2008) says that the community participation of school discloses a lot of benefit such as, ownership of the school by community, willingness of community to support the school financially and materially and the whole school environment where democracy is practiced. As a participant reported that (Chairperson of the SMC):

> W*e belong to the Dalit class. This place is neither accessible nor inaccessible. .....*
> *Our social environment is traditional or primitive (it is the thought of the time*
> *of the whole Baja Bajai). The number of old people is very high. Being the poor*
> *language and culture, there is a problem for change.*

The participation of community seems more important for the development of school in terms of school financing, improvement of infrastructure and learning environment and so on. But the participant of community in school is explicitly influenced by the level of empowerment among people of its community. In this regard, Secondary education support programs [SESP] (2002) has said the participation of community in school management increases partnership with community and ownership in school. In order to achieve the goals, it is good to empower the members of school management committee, parents and local community's members. Participants A and C ('C' SMC member as a represent of women) share their experiences *as: "It hurts me, when parents don't understand. we thought that our society would have good, we want to make the children here better. Children are the ones who are (palayakaMunahun) growing up".*

Education is a major concern of the community and their participation in school management is essential. Sharma (2002) agrees with this idea and says that the participation of community in school facilitates the relation among teacher, community, parents and school and work together in school for shared decision – making as a

result to reduce "adversarial relations" and to contribute to better decision making. As the same ideas have been stated with the amendment of 7th education act, community is recognized as a powerful body that would be managed by SMC on which some members are elected and others nominated within the community. In this context, community is a formative contribution to school management in Nepal and even it is an authority body to employ community people and mobilization its resources for school management. But there is the low level of awareness of community to their own socio-economic and cultural condition and even confusion on their right, role and duties in school. One of the participants reported in the interview:

> *It is difficult to clarify and introduce to the stakeholder about the activities that accrue in school. They say whatever they want (showing anti-social behaviors) like, there are many of the member are coming with drinking alcohol and saying that "the school principal and chairperson of SMC have worked together and eaten together, they have not shown anything, they have not saved anything.*

These things make us hurt. In such a situation, empowerment of community is considered as an appropriate way for enabling the community to school development only in the case of traditional society. Hand (1995) argues that empowerment 'makes the difference between ordinary job competence and excellence' that is, by realizing the potential of individuals in an organization, employees would perform not just competently, but with enthusiasm. School had very little community support at rural society because of their social and economic condition as well as it was unable to get opportunity of empowerment about what are the role and duty they perform in school management. A participant informed that:

> *My wish is that the regular school should be open. Most of the day, I arrived at the school before ten o'clock, but the staff would not come. If I had read, I would have known what was written in some information.*

The problem of member of SMC is not only poor socio-economic condition and lacks of awareness about their role and duties but also the problems of communication in school management. As explained in the SSRP (2064) School based Management is planned to strengthen through empowerment of SMCs and making them accountable towards parents and local level actors.

Barrier of Community Participation

Even though community participation in school development is a basic need in our society, our society is a geographically, economically, culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse society; as a result, the capacity and interest of local people to involve in school management are varied. A participant shared his or her experience in an interview:

If the work is not done in a favor of head master, he will try to remove from the committee, (An attempt was made to remove me from the management committee) but the resources will be blocked if the members of the committee do not sign at right time.

This argument is supported by the study carried out by "Missisipi State Department of Education (2004) on the problems of community involvement in school. According to this research, many parents avoid school involvement because of negative perceptions of administrator and teacher attitudes. The similar result is provided by the study of Sharma (2008). The conclusion of the study was that the perception of administration, background of the member of SMC and opportunity cost are the major problems in our context. In this context one of the participants said that:

We have to go to the municipality around 4 to 5 times a month. mostly, it cost from thousand to fifteen hundred (transportation and tiffin cost) each time. The government has not given freedom to spend for such expenditure and doesn't approve of such spending. I haven't time to do the work of household as a result family member get angry with me.

Further, Khanal (2009) added that the basic influential factors are largely dependent on socio-economic and political factors, personal interest and social condition where school has located. In this regard, a participant said that:

In spite of the power has delegated to SMC or community, it is difficult to reach from top to bottom "access for Dalit people" .... Gained experience while keeping my son in school. I have felled that wherein there are to be own people in different places and position. social relationship is an important factor, without good social relationship, performance of social work is impossible. so it has been humiliated.

Carilo and Valismo (1994) carried out a research about the obstacle of community involvement in school. This research finds out that, the schools are perceived as a formal institution, parental and community members do not feel welcomed to participate in their children's school because most of the parents of the community are not capable of taking any responsibility in school issue. In the context of Nepal, most of the societies are socioeconomically weak and especially minority groups of people of our societies develop negative attitudes towards the school. A participant of the research is representing from minority group, and says that:

The children here are from the Dalit class, even, the parents come to school with drinking alcohol and the use of language in home and school are different. it is difficult to change them due to the poor family background and languages.

Carilo and Valismo (1994) research's conclusion supports this argument and says that the people do not speak the country's official language and hold other than mainstream traditions and culture feel discouraged in classrooms where teachers don't show respect to their linguistic and cultural diversity.

Therefore, although the state has given importance to the community, there will not be equally capable people in all the communities, so the people of all the communities may not be able equally in the development of the school as expected by the state. In the context of our society the problems of community participation in school have been facing as said by Crewe and Harrison (19 98) and for them, participatory approaches tend to overlook complexities and questions of power and conflict within communities. The assumption of the participatory theory based on that all communities' people, group or families are homogeneous and think and behave mutually compatible interested. In the real situation, differences occur with respect to age, gender, wealth, ethnicity, language, culture, race and so on. Even though marginalized or minority groups may be physically present during discussion, they are not necessarily given a chance to express their views to the same degree as others.

Ways to Improve the Practice of Community Participation

Although community participation can be a strong tool to tackle the financial overload of central government and some other educational problems like access of education, efficiency use of local resources and close supervision of school. It is not only the appropriate solution that can solve all the problems that have been happening in the school. One of the researches said that any strategies to achieve a high degree of community participation require careful examination of communities because each community is unique, and complicated in its nature (Uemura,1999). In this context, Kafle (2064) said that, to improve the community participant in school, for him, our policy should focus on the partnership with real stakeholder, representation and involvement of women and marginalized people in education and clearly division of role and duties among the school, community and parents. The theory of participation that based on the assumption of partnership as well as people are the means and ends of the development (Bhushan,2002). One of the participants shares his ideas about how we can increase the effective participation of community in school, as follows:

> *Opportunities of involvement of parent, families and community should be created, to inform regularly about the activities of school, the educational policy and institutional policy always concerned towards needs of local people.*

In the context of Nepal, Kafle, 2064) said that the Community participation in school occurs by volunteering, giving money and materials to the school, providing land and participating in decision making. According to Campfens (1997), the main

factors for effective participation, there are to be open and democratic administrative environment, decentralized policies emphasis on local benefit, training for community involvement and leadership, creation and maintained the collective decision making practice or structure and link participatory activities with policy frameworks. In the same time, one of the participants said that:

> *In some cases, the decision that can be made by the school administration and management committee but parents may not be satisfied with this decision, so when making important decisions, parents have to be involved. If that is not resolved, we will call a meeting of the people of the community, so that tomorrow will not be blamed us*.

At the same time, the similar result is provided by the study of Muthoni (2015) who finds out that, although there was a good relationship between the schools and the community, the involvement of minority people of community in decision making process was minor in these schools. On basis of above statement, local community is the ultimately final ground for decision making. Therefore, the relationship with the community is an appropriate way to increase community participation in school. The communication and relationship between administration and member of community does not look like good, especially in traditional societies. Therefore, Campfens (1997) suggested that the training should be provided to members of SMC and other members of community in the context of Nepal. Another participant said: *"If I have done a good work, most people would have said that "he had well done" or if I have done bad work, they would have said that "such things need to be improved" as a suggestion"*.

At the same time, the similar result is provided by the study of Muthoni (2015); it is that, although there was a good relationship between the schools and the community, the involvement of minority people of community in decision making process is minor in these schools. One of the participants shares his ideas as follows: *"The opportunities of involvement of parent should be created, to inform regularly about the activities of school, the educational policy and institutional policy always concerned towards needs of local people"*.

It has cleared that partnership with the community for school is necessary for the establishment of new school's physical infrastructure, to help teachers and principals to be accountable for their work and to support for effective utilization of resources available at the local level.

The education policy of our state is attempting to make the community more responsible to school management and development in terms of financial and non-financial role; it also practices at the international level and finding is that it is to be

taken positively by the community especially minority community too. But they feel burden about the role related to school activities like school monitoring and policy decision.

Due to the political competition and intervention, and especially the members of women from backward and ethnic group could not take an active role in decision making. Although community participation in school management is considered as a basic need, but the poor social, cultural and economic condition of the community as well as unawareness about its role, the participation does not seem to be as expected by the policy. Though, educational policy has given the importance of participation of community in school, the community is not able to participate equally because the negative attitude towards the members of SMC by the school administration, ambiguity in role between school administration and SMC, lack of prior knowledge about the school rule and regulation and without any financial support to member of SMC etc. are found as a barrier of community participation in school in our society.

Especially, those people who are representing from ethnic and marginalized groups, they feel difficult to participate openly due to the lack of knowledge about school activities, lack of basic communication skills, language problems and social norms and values. Before making the education policy, there should be careful analysis of the community because each community is different in one another way and is complicated in its nature. As a result, the new education policy will help to address real needs of the community.

To empower the members of the school management committee, parents and family regarding the policy provision related to the school and the community and to ensure them regularly participate in the school activities and regularly inform them about it. The policy should put emphasis on the development of a policy of supporting and rewarding programs for school and community members on the basis of their performances.

Conclusion

It comes to the conclusion that community participation in school management is an important part of the school since its inception. Particularly, it seems to have the main responsibility of building the physical infrastructure as well as creation and protection of sustainable educational environment. Both urban and rural communities have found as a positive attitude towards the school. Obviously, there are a number of combined factors that are detrimental to low participation of community in school management. On behalf of the school, the negative attitude of the school administration towards the members of SMC, dilemmas in the roles, inability to inform regularly about the activities of the school and lack of motivational programs for community

people etc. are barriers. From the community's point of view, poor communication skills, school policy rules and lack of prior knowledge about educational activities are the main factors. Particularly among the members of the backward society, they are reluctant to come close to the school because of the differences between the language they speak at home and the school and other critical factor is poor cultural condition. Therefore, in order to provide continuity and sustainability of community participation in school management, the policy should carefully examine the nature of the society and the community awareness programs, the roe and responsibility of community assigned on the notion of social needs and capacities. As a consequence, community participation in school makes more positive effect in our society.

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