

Exploring the Implementation of Good Governance in Community School: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study examines the implementation of good governance practices in Shree Shitaladevi Secondary School, Pokhara II of Kaski District, Nepal. It utilizes a case study design of a qualitative approach. Data collected through semi-structured interview with school head teacher, teachers, students and representatives of SMC as well as PTA and a focus group discussion with the representatives of school stakeholders has explored related themes to good governance such as openness and transparency, accountability, independence, integrity, and school effectiveness. The findings reveal positive practices including information sharing with stakeholders, transparent teacher recruitment processes, and financial accountability. Although students' participation in policy-making is limited, it has highlighted the involvement of parents, teachers, and students in decision-making. The study emphasizes the importance of good governance in ensuring quality education and identifies areas for further improvement. Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of governance in community schools and provides valuable insights for policymakers and educators striving for better educational systems. This study has suggested a comprehensive research based on community schools of Nepal to explore the governance mechanisms through which community involvement can be harnessed to address existing challenges of school governance.

Keywords : Community schools; governance; quality education; transparency; accountability

Introduction

The transformation of Nepal's educational landscape, initiated by the 2015 Constitution and 2017 Local Government Operation Act, has shifted the balance of power in school governance from parents and communities to local governments, relegating School Management Committees (SMCs) to a supportive role (Adhikari, 2022). This significant shift raises the potential risk to good governance at school by underscoring the need to preserve shared responsibility of school stakeholders and administration when crafting and implementing school governance policies. Good governance has a pertinent role in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system through the adoption of democratic values and principles in delivering quality educational services. The World Bank (2007) states that it is a set of responsibilities, practices, policies, and procedures exercised by an institution to provide strategic direction to ensure that objectives are achieved with the use of resources in a responsible and accountable manner and thus supports

schools in the delivery of quality educational services by the optimal utilization of available resources.

According to TOKSÖZ (2008), effective governance is crucial for every organization as it facilitates a stronger connection between public administration and the general public, enhances the efficiency of administrative processes, tackles corruption, encourages diverse stakeholder participation, enhances decision-making by incorporating varied perspectives, boosts the implementation of decisions, reinforces democratic principles, enhances the credibility of institutions, and promotes transparency and comprehension in decision-making procedures. Thus, good governance practices enrich the value of the educational governance system by ensuring participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, and equity in school affairs (UNESCO, 2008).

The history of the formal school education system in Nepal is not too long but it has experienced various governance practices. Education was not the priority of the state before the establishment of democracy. There was the active engagement of parents and communities in school governance before the implementation of the National Education System Plan-1971 (Shrestha, 2014). In the name of the nationalization of education, NESP minimized the role of community and shifted the whole responsibility of school governance to the central government and the bureaucratic model of governance was in practice. Later in 1990, National Education Commission advocated for the engagement of the community in school governance (Adhikari, 2022). The seventh amendment of the Education Act-1971 has made community people responsible to govern public schools through the formation of the School Management Committee [SMC] and Parents Teachers Association [PTA] from the representatives of parents, teachers, and community stakeholders. Similarly, the reformative activities such as the formulation and implementation of the School Improvement Plan [SIP], Village Education Plan [VEP], District Education Plan [DEP], and the provisions of transferring management to schools to community endeavor introduced by Education For All [EFA] framework with the expectations of effective school-based monitoring, greater involvement of parents in their children's schooling and better

accountability of teachers to the school and community also emphasized the role of community stakeholders in school governance (CERID, 2008).

The constitution of Nepal- 2015 and the Local Government Operation Act-2017 have authorized local governments as the major caretakers of public schools in Nepal. SMCs now play the role of supportive institutions to local governments in school management with the responsibilities to operate, care and manage schools as per the stated rules and regulations. National Education Policy-2019 and the report of the High-Level Education Commission-2019 also have emphasized reform of the role of SMC as a supportive body of local government.

At present there is the practice of multi-level governance of school education as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology [MOEST] under the federal government and the Ministry of Social Development and Health under the provincial government are accountable for policy formulation, coordination, follow up and monitoring activities of school education. The Education Development and Coordination Unit established in place of the District Education Office, in collaboration with the Education Units (Shiksha Mahasakha) at the municipalities, is entrusted with the task of organizing the logistical aspects of school governance, management planning, financial matters, quality assurance, and Education Management Information System (EMIS). Similarly, SMC is made responsible for formulating school action plans, resource mobilization, preparing school budgets, and human resource management including appointing the head teacher, reviewing the head teacher's performance, and recruiting teachers and staff from the internal sources of the school as per the Education Act and Regulations. As such, PTA has been assigned the advisory role for educational quality enhancement and coordinating for social auditing of school activities. The head teacher as a school leader has the prime responsibility of managing and administering all the school activities including planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and controlling in coordination with SMC and higher authorities concerned with school education. Such changes in school governance practices over a period of time has negatively impacted in ensuring active

engagement and collaboration of parents and local community stakeholders in school governance (Adhikari,2022).

Despite well-defined policy provisions and their implementation through various hierarchical organizational structures from the federal level to institutional levels, school governance is criticized for its efficacy. Pherali (2012) has stated that the politicization of school education has ruined the academic environment of it and the SMCs have been considered the power center for the existing political parties in the country. Unlike it, Shah (2016) suggested that the level of learning achievement and performance of students were higher at community-managed schools in rural areas than that in urban areas because of higher community participation in the decision-making process of school management, a stronger sense of ownership and accountability towards school, more number of child-friendly classrooms, and a higher level of encouragement for teacher training from the head teacher at those schools of the rural area than that of the urban area. Additionally, there were found improvements in the distribution of teaching material and textbooks in time at rural areas as well. It was the result of the effective governing role played by the school management committee to achieve quality education.

According to Transparency International Nepal is in 110th position out of 180 countries and territories in the world securing 34 scores out of 100 in Corruption Perceptions Index [CPI] 2022 (Post Report, 2023). This is another reflection of the poor governance of the public sector of Nepal. School as an institution, also demands good governance to provide quality education. Unless good governance is maintained, schools cannot deliver their services to the stakeholders in an appropriate way (UN System Task Team, 2012). Similarly, a Study report by (CERID, 2008) indicates that public schools are not functioning independently and the school authorities are not aware of accountability and transparency in the management and operationalization of schools. However, there is minimal information about the status of governance at the school level. In this context, this study has attempted to explore and develop insights in the implications of the good governance practices implemented in one of the community schools in the Kaski district of

Gandaki province, Nepal.

Methods and Procedures

This study is based on a case study design of a qualitative approach. The case study design is generally used to gain insight and understanding of a single case or a small number of cases based on analytical induction rather than focusing on representative sampling and statistical generalization (Starmann, 2013). This design permits the researchers to probe deeply and intensively to gain insight and understanding of phenomena that are new, not-understood, or unexamined. Thus, it allows researchers to understand the how and why of contemporary events, problems, and situations in ways that do not require control over those events or problems. Similarly, multiple methods of data collection are likely to be adopted in case studies, depending on how the researcher views reality so that the reality can be easily revealed (Mpanza, 2015). However, the generalizability of findings of such study is limited to the particular case or other cases of similar context only (Coombs, 2022)

As the study cites, Shree Shitaladevi Secondary School, Pokhara 11 of Gandaki Province of Nepal is purposively chosen for this study as it had succeeded to win two national awards (Rashtriya Shiksha Puraskar) in the years 2072 and 2074 for securing first position among all the community schools throughout the country and several other awards at district and provincial level in the recent years. All the students, teachers, head teachers, parents, and members of SMC and PTA are taken as the population of the study. Four teachers including both male and female teachers, four students including both boys and girls, the head teacher, and two representatives from each of SMC and PTA are purposively chosen as the informants for this study.

Semi-structured interviews combined with observational field notes has been used as the primary data collection technique. Dearnley (2005) argued that semi-structured interviews allow all participants to be asked the same questions within a flexible framework. It allows the participants to use their own words and in the same cases, used non-verbal communication cues like tone of voice and facial expressions also enriching the value of the information thus generated (Horton, Macey &

Struyven, 2004, cited Mpanza, 2015). For the same purpose, research participants are individually made aware of research objectives and are asked to fill a consent form for their participation. All the participants are assured for the confidentiality of their responses by not revealing their identities anywhere in the research report. Interviews ranging from 25 minutes to 40 minutes has been conducted individually with the sampled participants based on different set of interview questionnaires for head teacher, teachers, students and SMC/ PTA representatives that included the existing policies and practices of decision making and implementation in the school, role and responsibilities of the concerned stakeholder, challenges and opportunities of school governance etc. They are motivated to share their personal experiences through questions that allow for open-ended responses, and the subsequent questions are arranged based on their individual responses. Participants' responses are audio recorded in consensus and non-verbal clues are noted in the observational field notes. At the last session of data/information collection, a focused group discussion has been conducted among the representatives of all the stakeholders focusing on the good governance practices implemented in the school. Nyumba et al. (2018) state that focus group discussion is intended to collect qualitative data from a group of purposively chosen individuals to obtain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena. The audio data obtained from the interview and focused group discussion are self-transcribed to intelligent verbatim. The trustworthiness and credibility of the information are confirmed by the use of data triangulation and the member check techniques. The data collected from the interviews, along with reflexive field notes and focus group discussion are systematically organized for segmentation and inductive coding to generate various themes concerning the implementation of good governance practices in the school. The data/information thus analyzed and interpreted is presented in the form of narratives and direct quotes under the respective themes.

Various theories provide guidelines for the governance of organizations. However, policy network theory focuses on the relationship between the state and interest groups and assumes that outcomes and performance result from interactions between a variety of actors (Bevir, 2011) and

development theory focuses on public capacity and effectiveness, clear rules, transparency, accountability and probity, citizen participation, human rights and liberties (Moncada,2013) has also been taken it to consideration for the analysis and interpretation the data and information and to conclude this study.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of this study. It is presented under some specific themes that are generated in the course of data/information coding and categorization.

Openness and Transparency

Some of the responses from the participants are found clustered around a theme of openness and transparency in school which is one of the elements of good governance. Openness and transparency in a school system are concerned with processes, mediums, and commitment exhibited by a school for sharing information with its stakeholders so that the required information is accessible and understandable to those concerned with them (Poudel & Maharjan, 2018). In this regard, there is a good practice of interaction among the stakeholders about the overall achievement of students after every terminal result. The class teachers meet regularly with the parents of students where they share the overall achievements and social behavior of individual students in schools. One of the informant parents who participated in focused group discussion says that "parents have the opportunity to know about their children's potential and progress while comparing it with the overall performance of students".

To ensure transparency in teacher and staff recruitment in the school, there is a unique provision of the School Academic Council [SAC] comprising three members including locally available but renowned academicians and a representative from the District Education Office which is made accountable for selecting and recruiting capable and qualified teacher staffs through fair and open competitions. This practice is found effective in minimizing irregularities in hiring new human resources and is against the widespread reports about corruption and favoritism in teacher recruitment and redeployment (Khanal, 2011) and the elite monopoly of the School Management Committee [SMC] and the influence

of individuals in powerful positions makes it difficult to secure accountability (Edwards, 2011).

The principal and the spokesperson of the school strongly claimed that the school has adopted a strong transparent financial policy. The records of school documents also reveal that transactions of school are done through the banking system. Social audit is done with the participation of stakeholders and financial audit is conducted as per the guidelines from higher authorities of education. The audit reports are presented to the stakeholders in the annual functions. One of the participant teachers suggested that “the school needs to manage its own web page and mobile application to publish its information via those mediums with its stakeholders regularly”. The school has adopted open and clear policies and procedures and there is a clear criterion for decision making, recording of decisions and actions. There is a clear and concise level of authority from the school management committee, the school planning committee, the head teacher, the assistant head teacher, coordinators, and school staff. This practice is found consistent with the study of Gichohi (2015), who focused on transparency and openness in education-related information in the school through the adoption of a democratic process and mechanism for reporting and feedback. From these findings, it is evident that the school has attempted to ensure openness and transparency in its administrative activities through the adoption of well-defined mechanisms and procedures.

Accountability

Accountability is the process of ensuring that all members of the organization are seen to be responsible and answerable for their decisions and actions that are assigned to accomplish. Accountability in school is related to the fact that how parents, teachers, and students exercise their voice; how the school listens to that voice and is answerable to it. The findings of this case study indicate that members of diverse communities represent in SMC. The participant SMC committee member states that “we regularly conduct meetings to support school administration prioritizing educational quality agenda. This committee gives due importance in formulating policies to support underachieving and marginalized children by providing with additional logistic and academic support.” There

is a provision of regular parent teacher meetings in the school on a regular basis to share the progress and difficulties faced by the teacher and individual student to promote learning. The participant PTA member in the course of interview reflected his satisfaction to this provision stating that “regular meeting with teacher has provided us to share the behavioral issues of our children with class and subject teachers that has been supportive in resolving learning and disciplinary issues of our children.” The representatives of parents actively participate in the school-level decision-making (e.g. scholarship distribution, school improvement plan, per child fee, teacher recruitment, etc.) processes. Children are actively involved in the decision-making processes concerning various school activities, including excursions, sports, physical infrastructure, libraries, and more, ensuring their meaningful participation. However, it has been observed that students lacked opportunities to engage and express their opinions in the formulation of school policies.

The findings of this study reveal that teachers regularly attend the classes assigned to them. School has assured the regularity of classes to the students even in the absence of certain teacher on leave. In the regard head teacher said “If a teacher stays on leave, alternate schedule of the teacher for the particular day is prepared and respective teachers willingly conduct those classes.” SMC and PTA also monitor regularities of school staffs and school activities. Head teachers, class teachers, and subject teachers are answerable to parents about children’s learning achievements and other school activities. The school has strategically set action plans and programs to promote peace and social harmony in the school. The teachers who participated in focused group discussions also accepted their participation and engagement in dialogue about inclusion, human rights, and social justice in the school. The head teacher and SMC chair maintain a transparent, professional relationship to avoid both tussles and mutually beneficial collusion. The above information reveals that the school has made significant progress in the accountability aspect of its governance. Regarding the accountability aspect of governance, school practice does not fit with the findings of CERID (2008) which has indicated poor accountability of school stakeholders. As per the policy network theory, this school has attempted to ensure

accountability in its affairs through the relation and interactions among concerned actors within the system.

Independence

Independence in the decision-making procedure is an aspect concerned with good governance. The school Head teacher in this regard responded that different bodies of school management have been functioning with their clear role and responsibilities as per the provisions set in the education act, rules, and regulations. He further extended;

We have an innovative practice of the School Academic Council [SAC] which is assigned the advisory role for teacher management (recruitment, selection, development, reward, and punishment), academic planning, and school supervision. The SAC and SMC are working independently but in collaboration. Though SAC does not have legal provisions as that of SMC and PTA, recommendations made by it will be solely approved by the SMC meeting.

A similar response is obtained from participant teachers as well. During the interview, all the teaching staff expressed their freedom to discuss and make decisions without any interference from upper bodies. One of the participant teachers said: “We have been selecting our representative to upper bodies (SMC) freely adapting democratic practices through the staff meeting.” In the researcher’s query about independence, one of the participant students said that “though we conduct our activities in coordination with school administration, we are free to decide our plans and programs by our child club also we have separate funds that have been operating ourselves to conduct programs.” These views from different participants indicate the presence of a balance of power and authority in the school.

Independence among different governing bodies of a school can be observed through the working mechanism of school social audit and provision of external auditing. In this regard, the school head teacher reveals that “the external auditor is appointed through government body (i.e. Education Department of Pokhara Metropolitan) so that the person who is appointed is independent and he/she is responsible to prepare financial report independently. In the case of social auditing,

we focus more on the participation of parents and representatives of local governing bodies of the state.” Participant teachers’ view about this topic was similar to the head teacher. In the part of social auditing, one of the participant teachers said: “We invite our parents and local authorities and present the situation of the school in different aspects. They are free to point out some queries and authority makes their concern clear before finalizing the social audit report so, that there is no interference of none of the school governing body in it.”

Parents’ representatives also argued with teachers’ views. However, the student was quite unaware of the decision-making procedure of either external auditing or social auditing or any other financial-related activities as well. Such information provides the evidence of openness and independence of school governing bodies and their stakeholders in all aspects of school activities. This is against the findings of CERID (2008) which has indicated a lack of independence in the operationalization of public schools and also with that of Pherali (2012) which has marked the negative influence of politicization in school education. This good governance practice implemented in this school is found to have been influenced by the development theory that has emphasized public capacity, transparency, public participation, human rights, and liberties.

Integrity

Integrity as an aspect of governance is concerned with moral norms and values. Duque (2014) views that it is closely linked to ethics and there is a strong adherence to honesty and fairness. Any institution must show integrity to achieve good governance. Integrity is concerned with the strictly following rule of law which is based on policy as well as ethical consideration. Based on the information provided by the interviewee, it is found that for the allocation of responsibilities/duties/ resources/ facilities, decisions are made with the participation of all the teachers and based on capacity and consensus. In this concern, one of the participant teachers told that “we discuss thoroughly on the agenda floored and lastly we make consensus on every decision”. Another participant female teacher shared her experience of selecting a teacher representative “this time we had two teachers interested in teacher representative for SMC but

we asked both of them to make a consensus. Finally, they made a consensus and one of them withdrew from the candidacy”.

About the salary and benefits, a participant teacher said that “there is no extra allowance for the teacher in addition to their salary. The salary structure for the teachers appointed from internal resource of school is low in comparison to that of appointed by the government.” Another teacher further added, “I myself being appointed from school’s internal resource, I feel to have lower decision-making power as compared to the government-appointed teachers”. Along the same line, one of the participant female teachers shared her bitter experience of not believing female teachers the administrators for assigning additional responsibilities. She told, “We female teachers are getting the low opportunities for professional growth as compared to male teachers”. These information from the participant teachers is evidence of the lack of some sort of fairness in assigning additional duties and responsibilities to the teachers within the school though the head teacher and SMC representative had claimed of having integrity in each aspect of school management. The participant student shared their experience of feeling good regarding the school culture of assigning seating arrangements and selecting class monitors following the democratic principles and equity perspectives. One of the participant student said “we are happy with our regular teaching and learning practices but school has focus to other co-curricular and extra activities to support all round development of all the students of varied attitude and interests.” All the participants showed their satisfaction about financial management of the school, one of the participant PTA member shared that “we are charging minimum fee to the students on a monthly basis. Which is against the government policy free school education but we have made this decision in consensus from parents for managing additional expenses required for English medium classes and other logistic arrangements in the class rooms. As Per head teacher the provision of social audit and financial audit have supported school to ensure financial integrity. These responses indicated the better move of school towards the acceptance of good governance practices. Though implemented practices of governance concerning integrity demand further improvements but is not

felt as worse as depicted by Khadka and Bhattra (2021) that there is the influence of nepotism, party politics, and impunity in the integrity practices in public schools.

School Effectiveness

School effectiveness is the product of several variables associated with the school as a whole. It encompasses all important variables which are related to teaching, instruction, management, students’ learning, and community involvement. According to Magulod (2017), successful schools prioritize student achievement while considering the dynamic interaction of additional elements such as motivation to learn, effective classroom management, students’ learning attitudes, and active participation.

All the participants show due respect to the head teacher and his relation with all the stakeholders is highly appreciated. In the course of interviewing participants, teachers also appreciate the vision and dedication of school leadership in bringing the school to its present status. Teodorvic (2009) revealed that strong educational leadership, emphasis on acquiring basic skills, orderly and secure environment, higher expectations of student achievement, frequent assessment of student progress, cooperation, and strong parental outreach are the major factors determining school effectiveness.

As such, the school as an organization has to formulate and implement different short-term and long-term planning. School effectiveness is highly influenced by its capacity to formulate plans and their effective implementation. In the context of this study, it is found that the school has formulated the school improvement plan (SIP) in collaboration with its all stakeholders and was implementing it dually. The school is found to have prepared and distributed the school calendar to all the teachers and students at the very beginning of the academic session. All the working days, holidays, school events, and detail of co-curricular and extracurricular activities are found to be enlisted in it. All the participant teachers, students, and parents accept the good implementation of the annual calendar. Participant teachers and the head teacher revealed that there is the provision of preparing a terminal work plan by each teacher. In this regard, one of the participant

teachers shared that “I used to face the problem of course completion in my previous years. With the provision of a terminal work plan, I am having enough time even for revision works at the end of the session.” A similar positive response is obtained from other participants too. Besides such mandatory planning, this school is found to have prepared strategic planning as a long-term plan with the collaboration of locally available academicians and the school management committee. Thus this school is found to have committed to efficient planning and implementation.

Similarly, despite some conventional thoughts and facts, the parents, teachers, and students of this school are found with tremendous faith in the institution. Most of the teachers are found admitting their children to the same school. This is against the claims of Chitrakar (2007) that public school teachers have no faith in their schools and most of the teachers themselves admit their children in private schools. The school is having a sufficient number of students and is facing pressure to admit more children every year. In this concern, the head teacher told that “This year we had seats for only 9 students in classes six to nine but there were more than 190 applicants for the same seat and we selected students through the entrance examination.” The retention rate of the school is also found appreciable. School records showed that more than 95 percent of level completion rate and more than 98% of pass rate in aggregate. Contrary to Koirala’s (2015) findings, which suggest that despite the significant endeavors made by the Nepal government to enhance the quality of education in public schools, the performance of these schools remains unsatisfactory. Parents’ and students’ perceptions of public school are also not positive.

All of the above, the participant teachers are found to have pride in their institution. My observation and interview data reflect a similar attitude among all the teachers. The school has just 11 teachers getting regular salaries and benefits from the government and the rest of 54 teachers are paid from internal resources. But, the teachers appointed by the school from internal resources are also found working with the same enthusiasm as that of others. The practice of fairness in teacher selection, equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities, mutual respect and understanding, justifiable workload, and remuneration are found to be the key elements for

heightened morale and motivation among teachers in the school. This finding correlates with the statement of UNESCO (2008). It states that a school’s effectiveness is highly influenced by the quality of teaching and the skills, motivation, and commitment of the teachers. Teachers with moderate efficiency but high motivation can contribute to the school more than that of a teacher with high efficiency and low motivation.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of findings, this study concludes that the adoption of good governance practices has a significant role in the delivery of quality education in community schools. The findings presented in this paper provide a sense of optimism that community schools have the potential to address the prevailing challenges in school education. It also highlights the substantial benefits of community involvement in promoting transparency and accountability within the education system. The collaborative efforts among schools, communities, and relevant stakeholders can create an environment conducive to effective learning and holistic development of students. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of fostering collaborative partnerships between schools, local communities, and relevant stakeholders to ensure sustainable improvements in educational outcomes. Based on the discussion of findings of this study, it is suggested to the policy makers and practitioners of school education to adopt the policies and practices of good governance founded upon bases of openness and transparency, accountability, independence, integrity and school effectiveness so that the equitable access to quality education can be promoted. Future research should continue to explore the specific mechanisms for promoting collaboration of community stakeholders with school administration to enhance educational outcomes and address existing challenges of school governance.

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