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PhD Thesis Abstract

Ethnography of School Violence: A Cultural Perspective

Raj Kumar Dhungana* 

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School education is largely universalised in Nepal, but schools are not yet free from different challenges like violence. This study aimed to explore how adolescents are experiencing school violence, how it affects the school life, and how Nepali public schools are responding to such violence. Exploring these aspects, as the theoretical basis, I used the idea of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990), critical theory of othering (Kumasiro, 2000) and some of the locally practiced perspectives.

The ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in five schools in the fragile contexts caused by active political violence, economic crisis and overt ethnic tension. I used a new ethnographic approach, ‘ethnography of school violence’ by being flexible and sensitive ethnography. Hence, I used conflict sensitive research approach, considered the participants and the ethnographer’s physical and emotional safety, dealt with unpredictability by being flexible, managed ethnographer’s identity with honest self-disclosure, used self-reflection, and applied relevant past experiences.

This study revealed that the adolescent students are exposed in direct form of violence such as corporal punishment, discrimination, bullying, and different forms of harassments. The majority of the students also experienced some forms of structural violence such as making public schools suitable for economically poor students, not addressing the issues such as overcrowded classrooms and poor physical infrastructure. The direct and structural violence has unequal consequences based on student’s cultural

* Author Email: rajkumar@kusoed.edu.np
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4894-4230>



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and academic merits. The school, through the othering process, exacerbates suffering for those students who are economically poor, culturally less privileged, and academically weak. Further, the risks to the vulnerable student increase when schools are situated in a fragile context.

The adolescents, who experience othering and violence lose the sense of safety, get deprived of academic freedom, lose their potential life opportunities and increase the risk to be involved in violence. Nevertheless, the students together with other stakeholders and policy makers are actively responding to school violence. Most of the response actions are targeted against the direct forms of school violence, and therefore ineffective to challenge the cultural forms of violence.

In conclusion, the aim of achieving quality and equity in education cannot be realised without addressing the school violence. Accordingly, it emphasised that school violence cannot be effectively understood and prevented unless realising the 'normalised' violent practices rooted in the school culture. Further, continued development of specialised methodologies like 'ethnography of school violence' is essential to better understand the cultural violence in schools. This study provides the policy makers with a case to the ongoing debate of redesigning the school education systems.

Keywords: *adolescents, school violence, ethnography of school violence, othering*

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