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Decision-Making Process of Educational Organizations in Nepal**Dilip Humagain, Niranjan Katel, Navin Timalsena, Amber Gurung****M.Phil Scholar, Kathmandu University**

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Abstract

This study examines head teachers' experience regarding decisions at the institutional level. Particularly, it aims to explore the decision-making processes of head teachers in Nepal's community secondary schools, highlighting the lived experiences and ethical dilemmas that influence institutional decisions. We employed narrative inquiry to generate information from the participants. Altogether, four participants were selected from different parts of Nepal. Using a narrative inquiry approach, we talked directly to head teachers whose stories show that making decisions is much more than a technical or policy-driven act; it is a deeply human process shaped by personal values, the culture of the organization, and the weight of community expectations. Even though policy changes call for participatory governance, our research shows that decision-making power is still often centralized and that stakeholder involvement is often limited or just for show. Head teachers had ongoing problems like political interference, lack of resources, and bureaucratic inertia, but they showed resilience and an unwavering commitment to the well-being of their students. Their stories show how policy ideals don't always match up with real life. By focusing on decision-making that fits the local context and is guided by ethical and inclusive values, this study adds to our understanding of educational leadership in challenging settings. For the future, both research and policy should aim to close the gap between what is written in policies and what happens in practice. This can be achieved by encouraging teamwork, building

leadership skills, and making everyone more accountable. These efforts will help Nepal's schools move closer to offering fair, high-quality education for all students. Policymakers must make the rules clearer so that head teachers know what they can decide in the right way, and protect head teachers from unfair political interference. They should be given useful training for professional growth that will help conflict resolution, using the latest technology, and be capable of making the right decision to solve the problem. Head teachers must influence others by making the right decision. The parents, SMC members, students, and community also support the fair and transparent decisions of the head teacher.

Keywords: *Decision making, Educational organization, community Secondary School, Narrative Inquiry*

Raising the Curtain of the Study

Our research began with a casual discussion within our group about what it entails to be the head of a school in Nepal. One of us had a cousin who was a head teacher and would constantly narrate tricky choices, sleepless nights, and the pressure of pleasing everyone in the school community. Another was working closely with schools on a visit and saw firsthand head teachers' immense responsibility, which sometimes translates into minimal support. These direct observations interested us. We asked ourselves, how do head teachers actually decide, and what impacts those decisions?

The longer we talked, the more we realized that school decisions aren't just policy or rules. They're about people. We thought about the students, teachers, parents, and communities affected each time a head teacher makes a choice. That was when we realized this conversation was not just interesting but important. We wanted to go beyond policy and statistics, and hear instead from individual accounts of school leaders. We wanted their witness to tell us what decision-making in real Nepali schools is like. In the majority of developing countries, school leadership is still inextricably linked with community expectations, local values, and material realities, which cannot always be found through quantitative study alone (Bush, 2008).

The purpose of this study is to determine head teachers' perceptions of the decision making process. We would like to know how they make important decisions, how they encounter challenges, and how the values, experiences, and environments they live in influence their choices. It is proven that school heads make their decisions based on a mix of individual values, organizational culture, and environmental policy pressure (Leithwood et al., 2020). Through the

narrative interviews, we expect to obtain qualitative and rich information that portrays the struggle as well as the lessons of educational leadership.

Nepal's education system is also diversified, and so are the schools. But one thing is common: leadership matters. The head teacher's choices have an impact on the learning culture, teacher morale, student outcomes, and the connection with communities. In fact, leadership is the second most important school-based influence on student learning, second only to classroom teaching (Robinson et al., 2008). By conducting this research, we hope to bring the lived experiences of head teachers into prominence and show how the decision-making journey of head teachers can guide future leaders, scholars, and policymakers towards more effective practice.

Background of the Study

Decision making is generally known to be a thinking process where one has to choose between various alternatives. In educational organizations, the decision-making process can be considered an organizational change guide (Borko, 2019). Good decision-making in schools involves a collaborative undertaking by stakeholders to present input, analyze alternatives, and arrive at a rational conclusion of what will be the most suitable course of action.

The headteacher, in this respect, is a focal leader who plays an influential role in the school's operations. The head teacher is able to not only support the initiation and reinforcement of institutional values but also significantly contributes to the creation of an ethical climate in the school (Northouse, 2019).

As an educational leader, the head teacher is expected to make many decisions to ensure quality education for all irrespective of caste, creed, and ethnicity. In the context of politically influenced community schools (Shrestha, 2014). Head teachers are always responsible for quality decision-making. In other words, the head teacher's difficulties in making decisions may be hindering children from having meaningful access, participation, and getting a significant outcome of education.

Bhattarai and Maharjan (2016) argue that decisions become ethical when head teachers consult with their stakeholders (Subordinates, school management committee). The essence of their argument is that when head teachers don't consult with their stakeholders, their decision is likely to be unethical. When the head teacher does not consult with stakeholders about their decision-making dilemmas, making quality education accessible to all irrespective of their caste, creed, gender, and ethnicity could be deemed challenging (Bhattarai, 2013).

School should be a place where every child gets an opportunity to grow into their full potential. It is essential that all stakeholders, such as the School Management Committee (SMC), parents, teachers, ward chairperson, and head teacher, be like-minded to build an ethical school (Starratt, 2005) where the voice of every child is heard, decisions are made within the framework of the best interest of students (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), children get to see a role-model head teacher. So, they are taught moral virtues (courage, temperance, generosity, self-control, honesty, sociability, modesty, fairness, and justice) (Northouse, 2019). With its rich cultural heritage and diverse educational landscape, Nepal faces challenges other developing countries share, including limited resources, natural disasters, and lack of leadership development opportunities amidst global demands, political interference, and high stakeholder expectations.

Global education quality depends on school leadership (Berkovich & Bogler, 2020). The multidimensional nature of head teachers' work affects student outcomes; thus, the contextual nuances and school environment must be well understood to set a socially just climate (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2004). School practices are based on awareness of their roles, realities of contexts, and dimensions of leadership (González-Falcón et al., 2020).

In addition, the education system in Nepal has shifted towards decentralized governance as opposed to a centralized system, which has given the country a vibrant atmosphere in the leadership of schools, with both prospects and challenges to enhance outcomes. Nevertheless, there are no detailed research studies examining head teachers' in their roles, opportunities, and challenges in particular scenarios. This research paper fills this gap by considering the contextual meanings and experiences of four secondary schools' head teachers, and shedding light on the role of their understanding of context in their perceptions. This study enlightens the decision-making process of educational organization in Nepal by addressing decision-making dimensions in educational organizations in Nepal that reflect the socio-political, economic, and educational environment in Nepal.

Statement of the Problem

The decision-making process is at the heart of how schools are managed, and it really shapes not only a school's success but also how well students learn and how much trust people put in these institutions. In Nepal, big reforms have been aiming to give more power to local actors instead of central authorities. A key part of this reform is the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022–2032, which was published by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) in 2022. The SESP talks about making education fairer, inclusive, and high-quality by

using decentralized decision-making, encouraging local ownership, and relying on evidence to guide management (MoEST, 2022). Although such policies may appear ideal on paper, in reality, the situation in schools may be quite different and complex. Evidence indicates that teachers, parents, students, and community members usually play a token role in decision-making, which is not so influential but a show (Shiwakoti, 2021). The process of making decisions is not very transparent in most situations; thus, there is a disconnect between what the SESP wants and what happens in reality. As an example, even though the plan has focused on participatory type of governance, in most cases, a significant number of schools continue to make the majority of decisions at the top, either by the head teacher or by the SMC members who were elected to the positions due to political reasons (Puri & Chhetri, 2024; Regmi, 2023).

This concentration of power can leave teachers and parents feeling disconnected and less responsible for outcomes, which can harm school performance and community backing. The same concerns the studies of global management; e.g., McKinsey & Company (2023) notes that effective decision-making in most cases implies the introduction of the directly affected people and providing them with a real voice. It is likely that when stakeholders engage in schools, when stakeholders genuinely engage, this increases morale, allocates resources more effectively, and results in school governance that is more responsive (UNICEF Nepal, 2024).

To top all that, external funding and a sluggish bureaucracy may further cloud the waters. The priorities of the donors do not always correspond to the type of needs that are in local schools, and such policies are adopted that are difficult to implement (Regmi, 2023). Delays and rigid administrative steps can also block quick, context-sensitive decisions. These factors create a mismatch between actual educational needs and the policies designed to meet them.

Despite the fact that a good decision-making process is crucial in the good running of the school, little is known about how the decision-making process occurs in Nepalese schools. Further evidence is required on, who makes decisions, what decision making strategies are widely applied, how the schools overcome challenges, and how they impact education and learning practices. Such gaps need to be addressed to transfer the objectives of the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) inclusiveness, equity and quality into the real practice at the school level.

Good decision-making is one of the key elements of good school leadership, but head teachers in Nepal usually encounter a lot of difficulties in making decisions that pertain to an institution. Although there are policy frameworks, including the School Education Sector Plan

(SESP 2022-2032), there is a very apparent disconnect between intentions made by policies and their actual application in practice. Head teachers are in social environments that are complex in nature with limited resources, bureaucracies, political interests, and contradictory expectations by different stakeholders. The conditions usually pose some ethical and practical challenges that define decision-making activities and influence the performance of schools. Consequently, the methods by which school administrators decide in such situations need to be studied to enhance the quality of school leadership in Nepal, its efficacy, and its inclusivity and ethical nature.

Purpose Statement

This study is meant to dig into how decisions really get made in Nepal's schools, trying to get a clearer picture of the whole process. I want to look at which decision-making models and techniques school leaders actually use in their day-to-day work, and also see how much, if at all, teachers, parents, students, and community members are involved. This big policy called the School Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2022–2032 stresses using evidence to guide decisions, planning at the local level, and making governance more inclusive to boost equity and quality (MoEST, 2022). But you often wonder: does that really happen in practice?

By pointing out both the roadblocks and the things that help good decision-making, the research should show where policy and reality don't quite match up. I hope to develop some practical suggestions for head teachers, policy folks, and anyone else who cares about school leadership. In the end, the idea is to feed into better school governance—and with luck that should translate into stronger educational outcomes all over Nepal (Puri & Chhetri, 2024; Acharya & Sigdel, 2024).

The purpose of this research study is to investigate the decision making processes of head teachers in community secondary schools in Nepal using their personal experiences. The study will employ a narrative inquiry approach, in order to gain a deeper insight on institutional decision making, problem negotiation, and stakeholder engagement by head teachers in their respective local communities. The research will attempt to show how personal beliefs, company culture, and policy realities affect practical decision-making by documenting their own stories. The findings are meant to guide the policymakers, school leaders, and researchers with the practical suggestions to come up with effective, ethical, and inclusive school leadership in Nepal.

Research Questions

1. How do Nepalese leaders make institutional choices while considering stakeholder input and local context?

2. What hurdles and techniques do leaders face and employ in their decision-making processes to guarantee successful and ethical school leadership?

Delimitations

This study zeroes in on how head teachers make decisions, using narrative inquiry in four purposively chosen schools across Nepal. In order to keep the scope tight and meaningful, the following delimitations apply:

- Only head teachers' perspectives are examined; views from SMC members, teachers, or parents are not included.
- Four districts (Solukhumbu, Surkhet, Nawalparasi and Syangja) are chosen to cover a variety of contexts, yet the sample is not supposed to be representative of all schools in Nepal.
- It concentrates on the macro-level decisions (resource allocation, involvement of stakeholders, plan of the school) instead of classroom choices.
- Instead of measuring whether policies "work," the study explores how head teachers interpret and apply policy provisions at the school level.
- Findings are grounded in narrative accounts from these four head teachers, so broader generalization to all Nepalese schools is beyond this study's intent.

Unfolding the Pack

The main purpose of this section is to analyze the collected facts and opinions about the decision making process. This section represents the participants' reflection regarding the decision making process of Educational Organizations, especially in Nepal.

Decision-Making Process of Educational Organizations in Nepal

Head Teacher 1

Head teacher 1 leads a community high school in an urban area of Solukhumbu district. He has held the school's leadership position for the past twenty years. He is an experienced teacher with two and a half decades of teaching experience. He has an effective internal support that started with his leadership journey because he was already a senior teacher who was trusted by the school and the community.

Head teacher 1 narrates how the process was followed to make the decisions in his educational organization. He is the head teacher of a community school. He narrates that,

“I view decision-making as a balanced and sensitive process that adapts to the situation at hand. In certain matters—especially those involving administrative responsibilities in educational organization, rules enforcement, and urgent issues—I adopt a centralized approach, making key decisions independently for the sake of efficiency and discipline.”

As a head teacher, he usually begins the decision-making process by preparing a formal agenda based on the school's needs. Sometimes, the agenda emerges from the pressure groups, often by stakeholders, as well as the head teacher himself. Once the agenda is ready, he shares it with all the concerned authorities through official notices to ensure they are well informed before the meeting.

Every successful organization must have the ability to make decisions that enable it to achieve its goals and meet its basic needs. All management activities and functions essentially involve the decision-making process. This is because planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising are all related to the concept and behavior of decision-making (Yunita et al., 2023).

The head teacher further narrates that, *“I always try to practice participatory decision-making. In scheduled meetings, I bring together the School Management Committee (SMC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), teachers, and sometimes even student representatives. We have open discussions, where all can express their opinion. In discussion, we arrive at a consensus. Once a decision is finalized, I sign the meeting minutes as a form of official verification, and the decision is formally documented.”*

However, there are times when urgent decisions must be made. In such emergency situations, he takes the initiative to act independently for the welfare of the school, though he makes sure to report and justify his actions in the following meeting. Despite the authority he holds, he values transparency and inclusive practice.

He takes on leadership role, when making some key decisions, especially on academic planning and day-to-day running of the school. He also makes sure that all the concerned parties are perfectly set and well informed in the process. School Management Committee (SMC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), teachers, parents and students are updated and included as much as possible.

He involves the chairperson and important members of the SMC in making decisions that are either complicated or may be sensitive because he acknowledges the importance of collective

decision-making and shared responsibility. In the decision-making process, he ensures that the decisions taken therein must be in compliance with the Education Act and the existing rules and regulations in education. As much as he tends to be more directive in terms of discipline and order, this is targeted at balancing with participatory and collaborative practices that take cognizance of the needs and voices of the school community.

Being the head teacher, he has experienced numerous challenges in steering the decision-making process within his school. One of the most widespread challenges is that SMC members, PTA members, and parents are unaware of the Education Act and existing education rules and regulations. Many of them are not properly informed or educated about these issues, resulting in misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations during meetings.

Another major challenge is resistance to change on the part of some stakeholders. Even if measures are being taken for the betterment of the school, introducing new policies or practices is met with hesitation and outright opposition. Such resistance is likely to discourage necessary reforms.

Political intervention is the main block to be free in decision making. Some non-qualified persons are also selected in the committee by political interference and are guided by the same political parties and ideology. This undermines power and blocks the right decision in making the school plans and policies for academic improvement (Upadhyay, 2020).

Political biases are another issue of concern. Some stakeholders approach school decisions based on politics rather than what is best for the students and the school. Especially in crucial decisions like appointing staff, resource distribution or introducing new programs political influence disturbs the situation which undermines the process's core values.

The majority of stakeholders, such as SMC and PTA members, have other work or activities to attend to outside of school. They tend to allocate little time to school affairs, attending the meetings in a rush or walking away before matters are resolved. This hurried involvement affects the quality of the discussion and makes it difficult to make extensive decisions.

The head teacher is seen struggling with the school's very small budget. Even when he comes to an agreement on what needs to be done, he largely faces difficulties in implementing

decisions in reality since he often faces limitations in implementing decisions effectively due to lack of funding or necessary materials.

There are also communication gaps between the stakeholders themselves. Misinformation and lack of proper follow-up create misunderstandings that delay execution all the more. This situation is further aggravated by the ambiguity of defined roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders. Most members end up overstepping or withdrawing without clear comprehension of their roles, thereby creating an imbalance in participation and accountability. Such is the nature of these challenges that they make decision-making very frustrating. In spite of that, he keeps his decision-making open, inclusive, and participatory to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of the school community.

The head teacher further narrates that, "In my experience as a head teacher, stakeholder participation in school decision-making has been inconsistent. Some stakeholders are highly active, sharing their input and doing their share in balanced discussions, while others are passive observers, rarely contributing or participating in the process. This uneven participation tends to affect the quality of the decisions we arrive at".

To enhance transparency, he makes sure that all meetings are well recorded; all decisions are made in a written form meeting minutes. This practice offers a transparent account to future reference and enhances trust in the stakeholders since the players can observe that their opinions have been taken into a formal consideration even in cases where they are not directly involved in influencing the final decision.

But at the same time he mentions that participation is not always equal. More educated or confident people usually like to take control of the discussion matters hence, decisions may be made based on the opinions of several people as opposed to representing the whole group. However, parents and students, in particular, are often passive because of a lack of confidence, insufficient knowledge of the problem, or because of cultural norms that do not encourage open speaking in official decision-making contexts.

In some communities, for example, the least educated have substantial amounts of influence, which sometimes can be beneficial and at times challenging. While their input can lead to an informed choice, those voices often overpower others to the point of dismissal.

While the involvement of stakeholders does exist in theory, their quality and balance significantly differ. One of his long-term objectives has been to nurture more open and fair involvement where every member irrespective of his background can derive a sense of ownership for the growth of the school and its improvement.

Clear policies and guidelines make the decision-making process easier and effective in schools. Decision-making would be easier in instances when there exist well-defined rules and procedures supporting such decisions. Confusion is thus avoided, with everyone working within the same structure. Such frameworks often cause delay and inconsistency due to either unavailability or lack of awareness.

The head teacher narrates, *“Another important requirement is regular training and capacity building for stakeholders. Most of the members of the School Management Committee (SMC, PTA, and even teachers themselves do not know the exact roles they should play and the legal provisions they ought to observe. Providing them with the continuous orientation and training would enable them to play a bigger and more meaningful part in the process, as confidently as possible”*.

A strong and effective communication system is also vital in the school. The head teacher further states that misunderstandings or a lack of timely information often lead to poor decision-making or missed opportunities. We should implement effective communication processes within the school, either formally or informally, such that everyone speaks, everyone is listened to, and informed decisions are made.

Furthermore, clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder are necessary. The process will be easier and more participative as everybody will be aware of what is required of them. Ambiguity in roles often leads to overlapping responsibilities or, worse, complete withdrawal from the process.

Lastly, promoting an inclusive and participatory culture is key. A few individuals should not dominate decision-making. Each of the stakeholders, be it a parent, teacher, student, or member of the community, must feel that his or her contribution is appreciated and that it can make a difference. Creating a culture where all voices matter will make the process easier and more democratic and sustainable."

The head teacher mentioned that overcoming challenges in the school decision-making process has never been easy, but through experience, it is a combination of collaboration, strategic communication, and leadership effort. Collaborative problem-solving practice has been among his major strategies. He engaged all members of the School Management Committee (SMC), Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), and teachers in discussing problems and finding solutions. This was a strategy that ensured all decisions were participatory in nature and contributed to the development of a sense of group ownership.

Of course, there were also instances when it was not easy to build consensus—particularly when there were differing opinions. Thus, he made it a point to convince everyone on the need to build consensus. In fact, he tries to explain the strength brought by a collective decision.

According to the head teacher, he was able to derive beneficial support and direction from the SMC, PTA, and other key stakeholders of the school. It was with the support of such key stakeholders that the decisions taken gained strength and were easier to implement at grassroots levels. The head teacher relied on the intervention of the authorities for matters that were beyond his control, such as those that needed administrative and legal attention.

An important area is to follow governmental rules and regulations. By incorporating his decisions with existing policies and education legislations in place, he has managed to maintain accountability and transparency. When some were hesitant over his decisions, he took the time to educate them on why his choices were beneficial to students and the learning ambience.

However, at the same time, there were situations where coming up with a consensus could prove to be a challenge, and it could even come to a standstill. In such a case, it was important for him to play the part of a strong leader. At times, in order to fast track the process and ensure all the pressing activities were completed, he even relied on his own authority for everything to work well in the school.

With the combination of both collaboration, persuasion, compliance, and forceful leading when needed, the individual was able to move past the hurdles that were there while ensuring the decision-making process remained functional, with the goal at heart."

The Patterns of Decision Making Practiced in Most of Those Institutions of Learning, Especially within the Developing World of Nepal, are Faced with Challenges that are Preventing

Efficiency and Inclusivity in the Processes of Decision Making. Challenges faced in contemporary decision-making practices include the hierarchical manner that the administration adopts. In this, it can be reasoned that the administration adopts a top-down approach towards decision making, whereby the power lies in the hands of a few individuals in the organization.

The other pressing matter is the absence of stakeholder engagement. The communication that exists between management and other key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and students tends to be inadequate as well as poorly designed. The consequence of this is the absence of active participation and consultation. The voices of the grassroots are not normally heard, and transparency is nonexistent.

Moreover, data and ICT are not sufficient in decision-making. Headteachers use manual systems and old-fashioned ways because they cannot access ICT easily, nor are they conversant with it. Furthermore, poor use of ICT and a lack of training obstruct effective data-driven decision-making. As a result, a system whereby decisions are sluggish, unresponsive, and incongruous with the needs of the whole school community is established.

Head Teacher 2

Head teacher 2 is the head of a community secondary school in urban Surkhet, Karnali Province, Nepal. He has been head teacher for the past eight years. He had 18 years of teaching experience. When he was appointed to head, the school had a population of about 350 students. In the long run, the school has more than 1,000 students through strategic planning and involvement of the head teacher. His leadership career began well on the inside with support because he was already a senior teacher, who was equally respected by the school and the community.

At the time of his appointment, there were approximately 350 students in the school. Over time, through targeted planning and stakeholder engagement, he was able to increase enrollment to over 1,000 students. His leadership journey started with strong internal support, as he was already a senior teacher trusted by the school and the community.

He said that the early years for school improvement were marked by a clear vision on infrastructure development, integration of ICT, and the introduction of bilingual instruction along with a technical stream after SEE. He mentioned that the aforementioned reforms were aimed at modernizing the school and making the institution more responsive to the needs of the students and the community.

"I had a dream to bring visible change within five years. So, we introduced a technical stream and dual mediums of instruction to give students more opportunities. ICT labs and building upgrades were also part of that plan."

In his school, the structure of decision-making seems to be formal and participatory. For instance, the SMC is a key organ at the level of overall decision-making, including on infrastructure and human resource issues. On the other hand, everyday or classroom-level decisions are made by shared leadership with teachers and departmental heads. Annual plans and achievements are published in booklet form and publicly shared for transparency. As noted by the head teacher, while there are specific directives from the local government, school-level decisions are usually discussed internally.

He explained that, while planning is often inclusive, implementation is frequently more difficult because of limited resources, inconsistent commitment, and structural constraints.

"Everyone agrees during the planning phase. They all say 'Yes, this should be done.' But when the time for implementation comes, then it gets complicated. There are delays, resistance, or lack of support."

One of the most significant experiences that he communicated was that he has been able to bring students of the Badi tribe that was located 14 kilometers remote from his institution. The dropout rates among these children, especially the girls, used to be very high after grade five since the children had to walk to and from the institution, and many got married at a tender age due to lack of resources."

"We observed that Badi children stopped studying because of distance issues and social problems. So we merged their school with ours. We also provided free transportation. The children are performing very well in Japan and other countries too. However, we still suffer difficulties in managing the transportation fund."

According to his opinion, the involvement of the stakeholders has been one of his greatest strengths. As he explained, the teachers, parents, and the community have been actively participating in the development of schools. Nevertheless, he observed that there are tensions raised by the overlapping powers between the local and central governments. For instance, the management of teacher transfer and promotions falls under the central government.

Despite these challenges in the institutions, the need to have dialogue and shared ownership in the handling of the SMC, in particular when there are conflicting interests, was stressed. There is a reliance on the committee to take the lead in important sectors.

“I empower them by allowing them to make decisions on matters such as HRM and infrastructures. It assists in promoting trust and avoiding friction.”

His leadership is a recognition and capacity building based style. He has established systems of awards for the Best Teacher, the Best Parent, and the Best Student in his attempt to create high morale and motivation rates. Further on, he has made sure to have teacher trainings, leadership roles in school departments, and financed by the school.

The headteacher has observed that leadership style has changed over the years significantly. During his youthful career as a teacher, leadership in the school was rather authoritarian with the focus on control and punishment. There has been a significant change in more empowering and participative types of leadership.

“In the past, leadership was very autocratic. Now, it is about encouragement. I follow a simple approach: First I do, then we do, and finally you do.”

From his experience, he concluded that transparency, teamwork, and distributed leadership are essential for effective school governance. He believes that giving ownership to others builds long-term commitment.

“It has to be a transparent process. Others should be given ownership. I have got support from all around, and that keeps me going.” Overall, the description of Head teacher 2 is seen as a combination of a visionary leadership approach and ground-level collaboration. It is worth mentioning the manner in which the personal experiences of Head teacher 2 characterize the job of head teachers in Nepal.

Head Teacher 3

Head Teacher 3 is the head teacher of a high school in rural Nawalparasi with about 1300 students. He took up the leadership mantle with a high desire to work toward the success of the school. He shared how his decision-making has evolved with the years through experience, problem-solving, and consultation with the community.

He narrates, "When I first assumed the head teacher position, I was a bit hesitant to directly present agendas in the SMC meetings. I was afraid the stakeholders would feel that I was imposing my views upon them. So, I used to request other members informally to introduce the agendas during the course of meetings beforehand. Only afterwards did I gain the confidence to present the agendas myself."

As head teacher for the first time, he was fresh into leadership and insecure. He had himself decided not to be at the forefront to assume authority, instead allowed others, especially the SMC, PTA, and teachers, to bring agendas in the meetings. He understood how other people could perceive him and did not want to come across as an autocratic leader. It allowed him to build up trust and gradually get to know the internal workings of the school. As time went on and he became more confident and built stronger relationships, he became more active in meetings, engaging fully with discussion and decisions.

"To maintain transparency and meet legal requirements, I call formal SMC meetings and make sure proper minutes are recorded."

He insisted that all decisions, however small, had to pass through a formal process. Members wrote and signed minutes of meetings to avoid any future legal issues. It shows his sense of responsibility and his watchfulness in following the procedures of the Education Act and other formal processes. His awareness of legal and procedural responsibility is key to how he leads.

"While selecting teachers funded by the school's private resources, I often face pressure through phone calls from individuals urging me to appoint their preferred candidates. Managing such situations is quite challenging."

Like many school leaders in Nepal, his leadership is not without challenges. One of the biggest challenges that he faces is political pressure during the recruitment of teachers in school's private source. The political stakeholders do not interfere once the recruitment process is completed. But their interference at the beginning creates a huge amount of stress. Other challenges that he faces are maintaining discipline among students and staff, dealing with teacher transfer and managing capital expenditure budgets.

"I believe participatory decision-making is important for making good and acceptable decisions, so I encourage all stakeholders to take part in the meetings."

Nevertheless, he is sure that decision-making can be simplified when all the stakeholders are involved. He attempts to make meetings interactive and participatory by engaging teachers, SMC, PTA, and even parents when distributing results. He has also established a good rapport with the community he lives in by allowing the use of the school playground by the youth clubs. This has generated goodwill and collective responsibility for the well-being of the school.

Although he believes in the involvement, he is aware of the fact that in some instances, the head teacher will take charge of the meetings. He is not hesitant to confess that there are moments when the leadership, which is strong, is necessary to make things happen. He is a hands-on leader, works collectively, and dictates where needed.

“Being fair, unbiased, and financially transparent as a head teacher is very important for overcoming challenges.”

When asked how he copes with challenges, he highlighted fairness, integrity in financial matters and building an effective team. Though he has not developed written policies and procedures to solve problems, he handles problems based on the situation, applying his experience and judgment. He believes in building a "core team" of trusted staff and involving the community in order to solve the challenge. Personal relationships, local context, and the day to day realities of school life clearly shape his leadership.

Towards the ending of this conversation, he reflected on the challenges still faced in the decision-making process. These may include political interference, a lack of cooperation from teachers, inadequate participation of the community, a lack of resources, and conflicts of interest among stakeholders. These are challenges not only faced by his school, but also prevalent in most schools in Nepal.

What is striking in his narrative is the way in which he has evolved into his role. His leadership is more confident, based on community engagement, and context-dependent. His decisions are based not only on policy and procedure but also on people, trust, and experience. His journey shows how school leadership in Nepal is as much about procedure as it is about relationships, managing expectations, and operating in between collaboration and command.

In the end, Head Teacher 3's narrative reminds us that decision-making in schools is not a one size fits all procedure. It is deeply human in nature and often influenced by the local environment, social influences, personal philosophies and the leaders' perceptions.

Head Teacher 4

The story of Head Teacher 4 reflects leading a large school of students in a rural area of Putalibazar Municipality, Syangja district; he shared how his decision-making practices have evolved over time through experiences, challenges, and community engagement. He explains the way decisions are made in his school. Classrooms at the school begin with Early Childhood Development (ECD) and end with Grade 10. Being the head teacher underlines that a participatory approach guides the school's activities.

He narrates, *"I view decision-my opinion is that making the right decisions in a school setting involves teachers cooperating, being clear, and organizing their processes. We focus on involving all important stakeholders in every major decision at our school- teachers, the School Management Committee (SMC), parents, and students—this way, schools are managed inclusively and everyone is well informed."*

He states that the process usually begins by pinpointing the main issues and priorities at the institution. Plans for meetings are made according to those requirements, and at times, issues come from teachers or the SMC. As soon as the meeting agenda is ready, notice and circulars are given to all stakeholders to prepare them beforehand. Having this approach means that each person has all the information needed before the meetings.

"We also have scheduled meetings to host staff and SMC gatherings to discuss important topics such as our academic plan, campus improvement, finances, and student concerns. Everyone takes part in expressing themselves, and group decisions are made through reaching agreement together."

The decisions are recorded in official records and signed by the appropriate people to keep things visible and responsible.

The school uses mobile messaging applications and emails to increase communication and make things easier. With such tools, all things are at hand instantly, opinions are heard, and past session decisions are clarified. He thinks that using these tools has simplified decision-making and made it easier and more convenient. In reflecting on the institutional framework, he notes, *"School Management Committees (SMCs) play a key role in the management of Community schools in Nepal. Established under the Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2018) and Local Government Operation Act (2017), SMCs are constitutionally obligated to plan and manage schools focusing especially on decentralization and community participation."*

“One key challenge,” he says, “is the lack of sufficient budget for school education. Resource constraints often limit the implementation of decisions, no matter how well-conceived they are.”

He also points out that, despite the legal framework, local authorities do not always consult the SMCs when executing policies at the school level, which weakens community involvement and undermines the principle of decentralization. Citing the study by Jung & Shiwakoti (2018), he states that the school leaders don't just make educational decisions in Nepal; many people participate in this process. More and more, teachers, parents, and community members are involved in non-administrative matters. Involving them in planning and coordination guarantees better management in schools.

Despite all these constraints, he is fully committed to participatory leadership. *“We're working towards building a culture where all stakeholders—regardless of their background—feel empowered to contribute. We continually strive to do better by enhancing communication, capacity development among the committee members, and aligning our practices with national education policies.”*

Conclusion

This study explores day to day decision-making experience of head teachers of community secondary schools of Nepal. Leading a school is a challenging job for the head teachers. It is because of limited resources, political pressures and limited support from teachers, parents, and local government. Nepal's major education policy, like the School Education Sector Plan (2022–2032), promotes participatory and decentralized decision-making. However, putting these policies into practice is very hard. Every school has its unique problem and the head teachers have to employ combinations of leadership strategies to cope with them. Sometimes they consult broadly and decide together but decide alone in emergencies or politically sensitive circumstances. This flexibility assists them in coping with the stresses of daily life but does not necessarily assist in inclusive leadership in every case.

The findings reveal that the head teachers have high regard for openness, honesty, obedience to law and community engagement. However, they are faced with challenges like unclear roles, low levels of community engagement and bureaucratic lag. Such limitations affect efficient leadership as well as the development of an inclusive nature of school culture.

Nepalese school leadership is not always top-down. It requires political intelligence, emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity. In the head teachers' interest, the research recommends continuous professional learning, more consistent policy documentation, increased use of technology and improved communication among all the stakeholders.

The research offers rich data on education leadership under challenging conditions through a focus on grassroots decision-making and inclusion and equity. In the coming years, research and policy interventions must strive to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Building cooperative leadership, streamlining capacity-building programs, and strengthening accountability measures will be key to Nepal's schools ensuring equitable and quality education for each child.

Implications

This study illustrates that Nepalese head teachers often have to make decisions in sensitive situations. For political reasons, limited resources, and sometimes rigid regulations, they cannot always follow the ideal "group decision" approach to the letter. They become pragmatic instead, taking some decisions independently in the interest of efficiency, typically under emergent situations, while trying to engage teachers, parents, and members of the community to the extent feasible for greater school matters. This means that our presumption of how school principals work needs to be more practical and adaptable in response to the real demands they face daily within a setting such as Nepal. Therefore, the future wave of research has to study intensively how leaders can balance such demanding demands and yet try to be fair and listen to all stakeholders.

Because head teachers are struggling with these challenges, they need much better support to do their jobs well. First, policymakers must make the rules clearer and simpler so that head teachers know what they can decide and how to involve others in the right way, and protect them from unfair political interference. Second, head teachers will need useful training in rules, not just in people-gathering, conflict resolution, and using simple technology to share information easily. Finally, parents, SMC members, and the community also need help understanding their role in the school so that they can participate in decisions more effectively. By giving head teachers this kind of practical help and protection, schools in Nepal can make better decisions and get closer to offering a good education for every child.

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