

Exploring Bureaucratic Leadership Style in Higher Educational Institutions in Nepal

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the administrative experiences of bureaucratic leadership in higher education in Nepal. The study was based on a qualitative research design. Participant is selected as a deputy administrator of a higher education institution purposively. I collected the narrative of the participant regarding his bureaucratic leadership experience. The stories of lived experiences were recorded, transcribed in Devanagari script and translated into English for analysis. The findings of this study indicate that the participant's family background, particularly the moral influence of his mother, played significant role in shaping his discipline, punctuality, and collaborative approach, which are essential for effective administrative leadership. His vision of developing the academic environment was the enhancement of physical infrastructure, the development of collaboration among staff, and representing a commitment to both bureaucratic and transformational leadership practices. In the case of financial management and transparency, the participant prioritized financial self-reliance by minimizing expenditures, optimizing internal resources, and ensuring fiscal discipline to sustain institutional activities without dependence on central funding. The bureaucratic leadership approach to managing the academic environment reflected a careful effort to cultivate a supportive, politically balanced, and aesthetically enhanced learning environment through staff collaboration, adherence to bureaucratic leadership indicators, and strategies

that promoted institutional development and staff motivation. This study contributes by showing how familial inspiration can shape essential leadership qualities such as discipline, promptness, and collaboration in higher education administration. It also adds to the literature by demonstrating that a leader's clear vision and effective bureaucratic practices can enhance infrastructure, foster collaboration, and cultivate a supportive and balanced academic environment.

Keywords: Bureaucratic leadership, higher education, institutional change, motivation, narrative inquiry

Introduction

Leadership is a process of influencing and inspiring followers. Bureaucratic leadership in higher education is mostly concerned about students' academic achievement on the campus by providing an academic environment. Similarly, the physical and economic environment needs to be managed by administrative leadership. Bureaucratic leaders should manage a strong relationship among leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff, and students for the proper management and development of an academic environment. Outstanding leaders have a vision for higher education (Bush, 2008). A leader with good knowledge, appropriate vision, and experience can easily create a favorable environment for higher education. Bureaucratic leadership at Tribhuvan University is a leadership approach that emphasizes professionalism, the distribution of power, coalition-building, and strong administrative capabilities. It aims to improve service motivation and job performance by fostering structured interactions, value exchange, and social learning between leaders and followers. This form of leadership promotes ethical values and accountability, serving as a vital mechanism for enhancing employee performance and ensuring effective academic and administrative service delivery (Lesmana et al. 2022).

The way educational managers manage tasks within an organization, like handling bureaucratic duties, is known as administrative leadership which focuses on maintaining order, coordinating resources, ensuring the smooth functioning, and implementing policies of organizational operations. The level of hierarchy within the organization influences how this bureaucratic leadership is carried out (Eren, 2020). Bureaucracy, in general, refers to the management of large organizations, which is characterized by hierarchy, fixed rules, impersonal relationships, inflexible adherence to procedures, and a highly specialized division of labor (Lumby,

2019). Leaders' work is based on the legal framework, which requires staff to follow procedures according to the determined acts or policies of the institution. Bureaucratic leaders are similar to autocratic leaders in terms of rules and procedures (Eren, 2020). They work with the supporting staff to enforce an organization's rules and regulations. The bureaucratic leadership style focuses on fixed duties within the employees who have certain responsibilities, with limited need for collaboration and creativity. A Bureaucratic leader is a higher-level office administrator whose actions are based on office policies. Bureaucratic leadership is a model type of leadership (Lumby, 2019) that requires adherence to rules, policies, and regulations within the concerned higher educational institution. Higher education (HE) refers to the academic programs that provide advanced qualifications and engage students in innovative research.

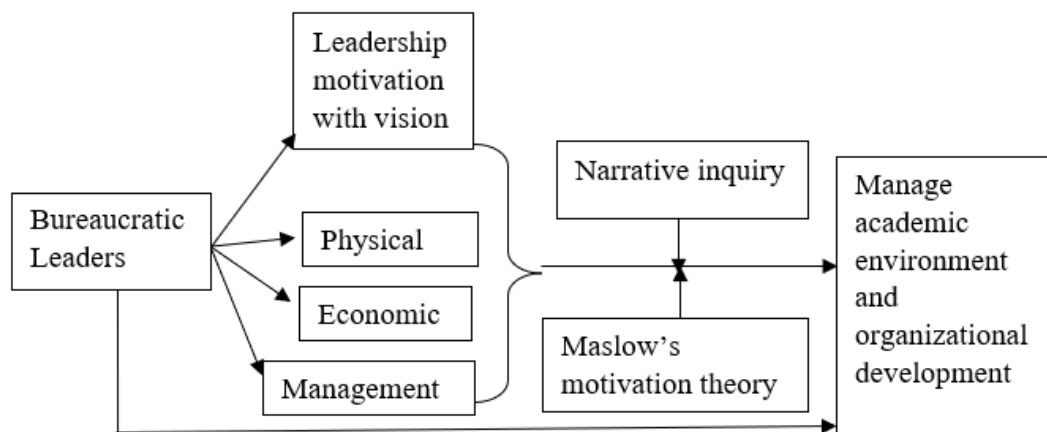
There are altogether 24 universities established till BS 2081. Out of these 17 universities and 7 medical universities. Likewise, 59 universities affiliated campuses are providing different kinds of programs. The name of seventeen universities are: Tribhuvan University (TU), Nepal Sanskrit University (NSU), Kathmandu University (KU), Pokhara University (PoKU), Purbanchal University (PU), Lumbini Buddhist University (LBU), Agriculture and forestry University (AFU), Far-Western University (FWU), Mid-West University (MU), Nepal Open University (NOU), Rajarshi Janak University (RJU), Gandaki University (GU), Lumbini Technical University (LTU), Madhesh Agriculture University (MAU), Manmohan Technical University (MTU), and recently Parliament passed Yogmaya Ayurveda University (YAU) bill. Similarly, seven medical academies: National Academy of Medical Sciences (NAMS), Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS), B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences (BPKIHS), Karnali Academy of Health Sciences (KAHS), Rapti Academy of Health Sciences (RAHS), Pokhara Academy of Health Sciences (PokAHS) and Madan Bhandari Academy of Health Sciences (MBAHS) as provincial deemed university (academy) first time in Nepal. Fifty-nine colleges affiliated to foreign universities are also providing education in different levels of programs with around 28 thousand students (University Grants Commission, 2024).

The bureaucracy of higher education mostly depends on the non-teaching staff. Some of the highest official posts of the office bearers of Universities are appointed from the teaching staff. Indeed, different posts of the office bearers in the University are related to the sector of bureaucratic leadership. In this regard, Tribhuvan University Service Commission members, Deans of different faculties,

and Directors of different research centers are appointed only from the teaching staff at T.U. Similarly, some posts of the office bearers are appointed only from the non-teaching staff, such as the administrator officer and chief accountant. The lowest post of non-teaching staff is office assistant whereas the highest post is known as administrator (Tribhuvan University, 2050).

Based on the above context, I have developed a conceptual framework to guide this study which is mentioned below:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



The figure 1 indicates that a Pathashala (pseudonym) campus has a administrative leader which has considered as a bureaucratic leader in this framework. His post is deputy administrator. He is only on officer of the campus. His role was management, administration, and physical development, utilization of financial and physical resources to create the academic environment. He was self-motivated to change the academic environment. The information provided by the bureaucratic leader is derived from the narrative inquiry and findings of the study, which analyzed based on Maslow's motivation theory (Maslow, 1943) are focusing on the top two hierarchical needs: esteem and self-actualization. Esteem needs relate to a person's prestige and self-confidence development, while self-actualization pertains to the recognition, personal growth, and realization of one's talents or potential. These needs are addressed since the first three basic, social, and safety needs are already fulfilled by the deputy administrator. Similarly, deputy administrator bureaucratic leaders strive to enhance the academic environment and promote organizational

development. This study aims to explore the administrative experiences of bureaucratic leadership in higher education in Nepal.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design and applies a narrative approach (Creswell, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). Focused on a single participant the sample size for qualitative research design is flexible, ranging from one to twenty-five participants (Adhikari, 2021; Kim, 2016). In narrative inquiry the researcher collects information from the participants' life stories. In this study, a non-teaching administrative staff member from Pathashala campus was chosen as a participant, who was a deputy administrator. He was selected purposively from Pathashala. Then, an in-depth interview regarding his leadership experience was conducted. However, the study was limited to the role of bureaucratic leadership in higher education in Nepal. I have collected life stories from a participant. During the interviews, I have maintained a natural setting. The narrative of a bureaucratic leader in this study is based on administrative stories. Data were collected from a deputy administrator serving as the educational bureaucratic leader at Pathashala campus, holding the top bureaucratic position with five years of leadership experience. An unstructured interview pattern was utilized for collecting his stories, with data collection conducted three times to ensure information saturation. As previously mentioned, I purposively selected a deputy administrator as the informant due to positive feedback from many staff members regarding his effectiveness as an administrator. During the initial visit, I explained the purpose and elicited information in different phases. Subsequent phases focused on preparing interview guidelines and conducting interviews to gather comprehensive data. Data analysis was carried out using the thematic approach outlined by Stirling (2001), categorizing data into 'basic themes,' 'organizing themes,' and 'global themes.' Ethical considerations were maintained through obtaining consent and ensuring the credibility of the participant's information. I guaranteed the participant's privacy and confidentiality by not disclosing his identity in my written works. Before finalizing the paper, I also shared it with the participant for member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and data validation.

Results and Discussion

This section outlines the results and discussion of the study. Themes were developed using an inductive approach, based on manual coding from the quotations and discussed the participants' responses on the basis of the literature.

Family and Professional Background of Participant

Family background has an important role in shaping an individual's behavior. It contains various factors such as parental education, occupation, cultural values, and house and organizational environment. These factors collectively influence of individual's behavior. Understanding family background is essential for how administrative leaders behave in higher education institutions.

The research participant's family background is related to the armed forces; he chose the position of an administrative leader. Ram (pseudonym) said that: "My father served in the British army, and I initially aspired to follow the same path". However, after facing challenges in the selection process, he redirected his focus to working in Nepal instead of joining the British army. "I gained diverse work experiences, except for being a carrier and hawker. Initially, I was selected as a contract officer at the Institute of Medicine, TU in 2037 BS I later became a permanent officer in 2052 BS. Based on his experiences in temporary and permanent bureaucratic leadership roles, he values practical work and collaboration with colleagues.

Now, Ram serves as an administrator at Tribhuvan University. Coming from the ethnic community, "I am inspired by my mother, who instilled ethical values in me. Despite her lack of formal education, she emphasized the importance of integrity and discouraged involvement in corruption". She also emphasized the challenges of indecision and its consequences. Growing up as the first and only son of his father's four wives, Ram lived with his mother.

Ram's workday starts at 10:00 am and ends at 5:00 pm, and he is known for his punctuality. "I encourage my colleagues to be punctual as well, fostering a culture of timeliness in the office". Prior to his assignment in Pathashala, some staff had a lax approach to office hours. However, Ram's leadership and collaboration with colleagues motivated them to adhere to punctuality standards. The writer found that bureaucratic leadership characterized by the encouragement of distribution of power, and leadership abilities in administrative matters could encourage motivation to provide services and ultimately improve service performance (Lesmana et al. 2022).

Vision for Developing an Academic Environment

Developing the academic environment refers to the process of creating a supportive atmosphere within an educational organization. It involves enhancing teaching and learning environment, fostering collaboration, improving physical,

and encouraging continuous professional development among staff and faculty. A well-developed academic environment promotes student academic excellence and a better working environment to the staff, contributing significantly to the overall quality and reputation of the organization.

To make the academic environment in the campus, Ram said that: “I actively contributed to improving and maintaining the physical environment, with staff support in painting the campus building and managing drainage, tasks that had been neglected since the building’s construction in 1956 BS”. Ram’s leadership style aligns with the concept of collaboration with the staff (Lesmana et al. 2022) in higher education development. Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005) noted that, engaging in collaborative leadership focused on restructuring and vision in educational development. Ram’s motivation and commitment to enhancing the academic environment and campus infrastructure reflect his esteem and self-actualization needs, as outlined in Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). His dedication to investing personal resources in physical maintenance demonstrates transformational leadership behavior.

Ram's bureaucratic leadership at Pathashala was marked by efforts to cultivate a strong academic environment, which led to his recognition and appreciation by both teaching and non-teaching staff. This acknowledgement served as a motivating factors in his pursuit of transforming the campus environment. He exhibited a clear and strategic vision aimed at reforming and improving bureaucratic leadership processes.

The participant’s thoughts are unique. He expressed that “new thoughts and ideas emerge in a house with a clean environment”. He further emphasized the importance of not leaving mothers in old age homes during their old age, but ensuring they are well taken care of. “Just because one’s mother has grown old; it is not right to leave the mother in an old age home. Rather, we should take very good care of the mother”. He highlighted the vital role of Tribhuvan University in people’s daily lives, providing essential services and resources to meet their needs. He believed in being proactive and responsive to achieve goals and objectives. Quoting his mother’s view during the interview: “After being a human being, one should be able to act accordingly. It is good to assign work to others, but doing nothing by oneself is not good at all”. His mother’s perspective greatly influenced him. Consequently, he took the initiative to improve the external environment of Pathashala by painting the entire building and compound railing.

Additionally, he dedicated effort to gardening, proper drainage management, and addressing roof leaks. He and his colleagues incurred some expenses for these development projects, utilizing available manpower at reduced costs. His department leaders supported his vision and mission through official and personal contributions. Both teaching and non-teaching staff members praised Ram for his work and assisted him by providing financial and technical support. In this context, the significant role of his mother in promoting and developing leadership in his professional life is evident. Bureaucratic leadership influences employee performance either directly or through (Lesmana et al., 2022), Tribhuvan University service motivation. All the above indicate that the Ram's leadership is like a bureaucratic leadership. He collaborated with the staff, commitment, and administrative capabilities (Lesmana et al., 2022) for the development of the academic environment.

Vision of economy and transparency

A vision of economic and transparency emphasizes efficient resource utilization and governance. It aims to minimize waste, ensure fiscal discipline, and promote trust by making information accessible. Such a vision is crucial for fostering sustainable development, institutional integrity, and public confidence in the leadership.

The economic aspect is one of the most powerful aspects of development in higher education. TU is an autonomous institution. TU receives funds from the University Grant Commission (UGC) as per the budget allocation of the government of Nepal. The internal resources include student fees, rent collection from lands and buildings, affiliation distribution to new campuses and subjects. Similarly, national, bilateral, and multilateral companies provide financial support to different fields of TU. Pathashala has been collecting money from internal sources and the budget provided by the central office of TU.

The participant expressed his aim to reduce Pathashala's expenditure so that a higher balance of money could be collected in the bank. This would enable the payment of contract staff and part-time teacher salaries from the account interest. By doing so, Pathashala could become economically stronger. He stated that Pathashala would not need any extra budget for expenditure from the central office of TU. He further stated: "If I reduce the department's expenses and increase the balance, it won't be necessary to ask the central office for money. Therefore, Pathashala must accumulate a significant amount of money in the bank and generate some interest. The salaries of contract staff and part-time teachers have been increased, which has

made it hard for the department. A good teaching environment for the students and the teachers is also to be made”. This quote reflects a constructive transformation. In this context, Kotter (1990) asserted that leadership is about creating constructive changes. Similarly, as per the Lesmana et al. (2022) view, Ram also has a clear vision for the development of a self-reliant organization. Ram works for the fulfillment of his vision to develop the Pathshala.

The participant is more conscious about Pathashala’s economic condition due to the decreasing number of students. The semester system has been in place at TU since the academic year 2070 B.S. The student numbers have been declining each year compared to the previous year. Consequently, internal resources are limited. On the other hand, Pathashala’s expenditure is increasing as the workload of teachers has increased in the semester system. Each professor now bears a workload of nine credit hours as assigned by the authority, whereas they had to teach twelve periods in the annual system. Teaching practice and practicum were not previously considered a workload, but it is now included in the semester system. This imbalance between income and expenditure makes it challenging to maintain economic stability.

The participant shared his views on the office hours of non-teaching staff, emphasizing that their duties should start promptly during office hours, i.e., 10:00 to 4:00. He believes there should be a homely environment for staff and teaching professors to engage in academic discourse while at Pathashala. Access to the internet, individual tables, and chairs should be provided to motivate them. He mentioned: “The department’s staff should work from 10 to 4. The teachers should also engage in daily work here. Internet access and individual tables and chairs should be provided in every department”. Since most teachers are involved in teaching, research, reading, and supervising students’ theses, they require access to different books and articles from the internet for their academic activities. Proper management of the academic and physical environment can lead to a sense of accomplishment for working at Pathashala. Ram added, “Creating an environment where teachers and staff feel proud to work at Pathashala is essential.” He is dedicated to the well-being of Pathashala, believing that a friendly atmosphere and collegiality help promote the institution. The students, teachers, and staff organize various programs that require funding. However, the budget is not sustainable. Ram is concerned about managing the financial sustainability of Pathashala, especially considering the need to pay part-time teachers and contract staff from internal sources. The internal source and expenditure of Pathashala are the fees paid by the

students. Collaboration (Lesmana et al., 2022) among students, teachers, and staff is essential for organizing programs and maintaining financial sustainability.

Vision of Academic Atmosphere Management

Teacher is himself a leader of a classroom from the beginning, whereas doctors and lawyers practice under their senior leaders in their profession. Ram has a long experience of administrative leadership in the Tribhuvan University teaching hospital, Maharajgunj. He expressed that the medical institution cannot run properly if the doctors or other medical personnel are absent. Similarly, he also expressed that junior doctors work under the command of their seniors. They learn many things from the senior doctors. Junior lawyers also start their job by learning from the beginning. Senior lawyers guide them at every step of difficulty. New lawyers listen to the discourse in the court that builds up confidence within them. But in the case of teachers, they go to the classroom without any command or help from the senior teachers. So, students earning an education degree should be more accountable than other professions. This is why Ram argued to provide a good academic learning and teaching environment for the students. He states: “Junior doctors work under the command of senior doctors, so they get the opportunity to learn. Law graduates learn by preparing legal documents, observing and listening to court debates, and gradually learning. But education graduates have to start teaching directly in the classroom. Therefore, we should create a suitable environment for the students who are pursuing education”.

The participant noted an increased presence of politics within TU. This political involvement makes it more challenging to satisfy both the human resources and the students. All factions within the institution, including students, staff, teachers, and leaders, exhibit dissatisfaction when their interests and expectations are not met. These unmet interests and expectations hinder the maintenance of a conducive educational environment and academic quality for students. Meeting everyone's needs and interests proves arduous for bureaucrats. Thus, the participant emphasizes, “In TU, politics has increased a lot. It's difficult to work here. Everyone needs to understand each other. Without understanding everyone's needs, no one can pay attention to education and academic quality”. This sentiment resonates with the ideas of Bennis and Nanus (1985), who assert that leadership entails “doing the right things”. Effective leadership within an organization entails actions geared towards

its improvement and human development. Ram, as much as possible, endeavored to maintain low expenditures and implement high savings or balancing strategies.

Initially, the Participant was interested in managing the external academic environment because there was an additional staff member in the same position as deputy administrator. However, there weren't enough budgets in Pathashala. Therefore, voluntarily, he began working with professors, leaders, and his followers. He requested the head of Pathashala to beautify the external environment, believing it would contribute to the development of the academic atmosphere. Despite encountering opposition from some staff members, he persevered in the hope of resolving everything positively, stating, "I enjoy working on outdoor tasks. Due to the lack of funds in Pathashala, I have volunteered to collaborate with followers, teachers, and the head to beautify the external surroundings to enhance the academic environment. Some individuals oppose my efforts, but that's okay".

The participant further expressed that when there's a good relationship among academic institutions' neighbors, they emulate each other's positive actions. Conversely, if not, they relocate elsewhere. Similarly, because Pathashala has been performing well, other departments are also striving to make changes in their offices. He has a positive reputation among TU staff, leading some TU officers to request his transfer to their offices, but he declined. Regarding this, he states: "If they want a good companion, they should stay together; if not, they should scatter. Now that the education department's environment is favorable, other departments are also improving. I was invited to two or four places in TU because of my good work, but I didn't go". This notion aligns with the concepts of Bass and Riggio (2006), who argued that the professional atmosphere and individuals' sense of ownership are key factors in their motivation. Ram is driven to manage the academic environment of Pathashala. Usaini, Abubakar, and Bichi (2015) found that students' academic performance is influenced by the college environment, with a positive environment leading to better performance. Therefore, Ram is conscientious about managing the academic environment.

From the Ram's administrative leadership, it is found that he mostly follows the indicators of bureaucratic leadership. As mentioned by Lesmana et al. (2022), to become a bureaucratic leadership leader must follow the indicators of bureaucratic leadership. The indicators are power distribution, building clarity, commitment, capacity to build relationships within the bureaucracy of organization, administrative

capabilities, and coordination of resources (Lesmana et al., 2022). Most of these indicators are marked in Ram's bureaucratic leadership. He actively engaged in this leadership to fulfill his personal and professional goals, which align with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). His basic motivation was the overall development of the campus environment, and the resulting progress contributed to his sense of satisfaction, consistent with the levels outlined in Maslow's theory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the participant exemplifies bureaucratic leadership within administrative bureaucracy, meticulously following institutional protocols while fostering punctuality and positive change among staff. This bureaucratic leadership style catalyzes transformation both at the individual and organizational levels. Effective leadership remains paramount in higher education institutions, often relying on bureaucratic structures to ensure procedural adherence. Leaders must cultivate a supportive environment that addresses the needs of all stakeholders, fostering continuous improvement and development of higher educational institutions.

A leader background and experience shape their vision, guiding consistent efforts for institutional advancement. Collaboration with senior figures, faculty, and students is vital for successful leadership, with incentives provided for exceptional performance. Challenges may arise, but prioritizing institutional welfare over personal gain aids in overcoming them. Academic leaders have to respect institutional authority while soliciting input from staff and motivating their support for collaborative work and professional development (Lesmana et al., 2022). Ultimately, selfless leadership contributes to both the physical and transformative growth of higher education institutions, cultivating an environment conducive to academic excellence.

The participant in this study is committed (Lesmana et al., 2022) to upholding the academic integrity of Pathashala through his dedicated efforts. Such selfless actions align with Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, focusing on esteem and self-actualization, and contribute to organizational success. This study holds value for administrative leaders seeking self-improvement and the advancement of educational institutions.

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