Headteachers in difficult circumstances: A study of school leaders in post-conflict, post-disaster Nepal

Rupak Dahal
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Headteachers in difficult circumstances:
A study of school leaders
in post-conflict, post-disaster Nepal

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Rupak Dahal

Edith Cowan University
School of Education
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Abstract

School leadership in developing countries, with a particular focus on post-conflict and post-disaster, is an area of increasing importance to education researchers. However, this research has often been limited to the areas of educational achievement and outcomes, government policies and their impact on school systems, and comparing schools irrespective of their vastly different contexts.

This thesis reports on research into school leadership within Nepali government secondary schools, typically referred to as community schools. As a developing country, The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal (Nepal), faces crucial educational challenges due to its cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, and associated socio-economic disparities exacerbated by national restructuring towards a federal system. Critically, community schools have been further challenged by a decade-long civil war and two catastrophic earthquakes in 2015. Accordingly, secondary school students face inequality in terms of access, participation, and educational achievements. However, recent educational policy frameworks aim to minimise those inequalities by instigating equitable nation-building projects. These frameworks support affirmative, non-discriminatory initiatives in which secondary school headteachers carry out pivotal roles in meeting educational goals. To date, little research has investigated Nepali community school headteachers, their leadership styles, and their perspectives on the roles, responsibilities, priorities, and strategies that are implicit in mitigating the situational challenges in their schools. Through an in-depth investigation, this study aims to address this deficit, by exploring how community school headteachers managed their schools in different and difficult circumstances.
This research used a multiple-case study methodology, with the six community school headteachers as case study participants. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism underpinned the research, from the development of the research question, through to data-generation and data analysis. The findings revealed key historic and contemporary contextual challenges that the Nepali community school headteachers coped with at the individual and school levels. Given the diversity of their experiences, perspectives, and actions, together with the distinctive circumstances of their schools, three of the headteachers were found to be demotivated, ineffective, unenthusiastic, and under-resourced. Conversely, the remaining three were committed, highly effective, optimistic, and resourceful. The headteachers who demonstrated a better understanding of the historic educational contexts were more effective school leaders, recognising and responding to these challenges with more successful strategies.

The study and its findings are significant, shedding light on the management approaches that Nepali community headteachers used, along with their perspectives in relation to their schools, their students, parents, and the wider community that included school committees and local government agencies. The thesis concludes by identifying and discussing the important leadership implications for Nepali government community school headteachers and the ramifications for local municipal governments and key stakeholder groups.
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i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;

ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or

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Signed……………………..

Rupak Dahal
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Style and Acronyms

This thesis follows most conventions of APA 7th edition style, based on the APA Publications Manual (American Psychological Association, 2019). However, there are some modifications to this.

1. Some aspects of formatting meet Edith Cowan University’s thesis requirements.
2. Italics will be used for quotations from participants in Chapters 4, 5, 6 especially. This is to highlight the evidence provided by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAS</td>
<td>Constituent Assembly Secretariat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>Central Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPN</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDCU</td>
<td>Education Development and Coordination Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HREC</td>
<td>Human Research Ethics Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSEC</td>
<td>The Informal Sector Service Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>LKG</td>
<td>Lower Kindergarten</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoE</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
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<td>MoES</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Sports</td>
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<td>MOI</td>
<td>Medium of Instruction</td>
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<td>NEPC</td>
<td>National Education Planning Commission</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>NESP</td>
<td>National Education System Plan</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NPA</td>
<td>National Plan of Action</td>
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<td>NPC</td>
<td>National Planning Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTA</td>
<td>Parents Teacher Association</td>
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<td>SMC</td>
<td>School Management Committee</td>
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<td>SSDP</td>
<td>School Sector Development Plan</td>
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<td>School Sector Reform Plan</td>
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<td>TSC</td>
<td>Teacher Service Commission</td>
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<td>TSCE</td>
<td>Teachers Service Commission’s Examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>USOM</td>
<td>United States Overseas Mission</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nepal is one of the world’s most socio-economically diverse countries, with approximately 125 groups differentiated by caste, ethnicity, language, religion, wealth, and well-being (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2011). Implicit within this diversity lies significant inequalities and inequities. As research indicates, there is inequality in access, participation, and educational achievement in Nepal (Carney & Rappleye, 2011; Devkota & Upadhyay, 2016; Pangeni, 2014; Pherali, 2016; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Thapa, 2015). This impact is reflected in the inequality index in education report by the United Nations Development Programme (2016), in which Nepal was ranked 144\textsuperscript{th} out of 198 countries with a co-efficient index of inequality of 43.9\%.\textsuperscript{1} By way of comparison, Australia was ranked second with a co-efficient of 1.9\%. Furthermore, Nepal’s 10-year long armed conflict from 1996 to 2006, also known as the Maoist Insurgency, brought extreme disruption to the nation’s development and stability in every government service, including education (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCR], 2012). While the nation was dealing with this transitionary post-conflict period, two major earthquakes struck the country in 2015, resulting in thousands of deaths and the loss of billions of dollars earmarked for education, infrastructure, and household sector recovery (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2015). Accordingly, as a developing country, its responsibilities in terms of providing formal education to its young people was challenging and problematic on multiple levels.

\textsuperscript{1} The Inequality in Education Index is calculated by adjusting the Human Development Index (HDI) for the country in terms of the inequality in distribution of years of schooling based on data from household surveys (UNDP, 2016)
For nearly a century, due to political sensitivities, the Nepali Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) did not provide data related to the multiple levels of diversity and the existent disparities that existed. Given the inherent interests associated with different forms of government and macro-policies, societal difficulties arose in terms of cultural and social cohesion and coherence (Dahal, 2003). However, with greater recognition of contemporary issues, with data, and evidence-based information concerning Nepali diversity, recent developments in Nepal are largely attributed to: (i) the restoration of democracy in 1990; (ii) the decade-long armed conflicts between 1996 and 2006; (iii) the establishment of the Peoples’ Movement-II in 2006; (iv) the Mashes Movement that established the agenda of federalism, recognition and representation; and (v) the new Constitution of Nepal enacted in 2015. The constitution defines Nepal as “independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive democratic, socialism-oriented, federal democratic republican state” (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], 2015, p.3).

Community schools is the term typically used in Nepal for government schools, those funded entirely by the State. Of the research studies investigating different aspects of school education in Nepal, an increasing proportion of research relates to the management and administration of the government’s community schools (Bhattarai and Maharjan, 2016; Pherali, 2016; Singh & Alison, 2016; Thapa, 2016). Additionally, it has been argued that school leadership is crucial to the success of individual schools and overall educational reform (Fullan et al., 2006; Harris, 2008). In this context, Nepal’s School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP 2009-2015) provided a tactical plan to achieve the goals and objectives of community schools, establishing “the right to education, gender parity, inclusion, and equity” for all students (Ministry of Education [MoES], 2008, p. 2). With this plan, the tasks of enhancing
social inclusion and auditing its progress was allocated to School Management Committees, with community schools’ headteachers being the Member Secretary, a somewhat ambivalent position. As a strategic intervention, the SSRP (2009-2015) also allocated “incentives for schools recruiting headteachers… [for increasing participation for] equity and social inclusion” (MoES, 2008, p. 23). The most recent policy statement currently being put in practice, the School Sector Development Plan, 2016-2023 (SSDP, 2016-2023) proposed a separate service contract for community school headteachers to ensure its implementation, in which “equity; quality; efficiency; governance and management; and resilience” (Ministry of Education, [MoE], 2016b, p. 19) represent the core dimensions. These regulatory frameworks assume that headteachers, the widely accepted term for school principals in Nepal, adopt affirmative action plans and initiatives designed to address social disparity issues. However, contemporary research does not include any specific studies that explore how Nepali community secondary school headteachers carry out their roles, and, in particular, investigate how their perspectives and practices may or may not change in managing the challenges within their school contexts.

To remedy this identified research gap in relation to community school leadership dealing with socio-economic diversity in Nepal, the proposed research aims to remedy an identified research gap by gaining a better understanding of headteachers’ roles, responsibilities, and priorities during the year-long study. To achieve this aim, the overarching research question was:

**How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?**
Having provided an overview to the study reported in this thesis, the next section discusses the research problem. In turn, the research questions are discussed in terms of an interpretivist, symbolic interactionist study that was guided by O’Donoghue (2019). The aims of the study and the research design, methodology, and methods used to achieve these objectives are introduced. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.1 The Research Problem

Nepal is a socio-economically diverse country, a developing country that is distinguished by inequality in education. This unequal distribution of academic support relates to access issues, opportunities for participation, and educational outcomes that are influenced by available resources and provides a range of challenges for the government’s community schools. This nation requires significant financial, human capital, and infrastructure support from government agencies to resolve the problem of educational inequality. If its key stakeholders, teaching staff, students, and parents are to benefit, the roles of community school headteachers, and the leadership perspectives they hold and rely on within the government’s policy frameworks, are crucial to bringing about change. To date, there have been few studies that seek to understand the headteachers’ perspectives in terms of dealing with their immediate contexts in Nepal.

Social inequality and educational inequality are the long-established features in Nepal, with multiple causes and consequences. First, Pherali (2011) attributed this situation to the prevalent caste system, gender discrimination, and the educational system itself. In the past, education did not support the diversity of social class and ethnicity in Nepal, which, as some have argued (Carney & Rappleye, 2011; Pherali 2011) may have contributed to the
decade-long political conflict, known as the *Peoples’ War*. Secondly, these inequalities can also be viewed from a historical perspective, ranging from early views of education being available to particular groups of people, to the more recent tendency of external agencies exerting inordinate influences in government policymaking. In terms of the latter, studies have found that in the last quarter of the 20th century, neo-liberal strategies were enforced on the Nepali education system through foreign country donor agencies’ policy-making influences. However, these impacts failed to address the realities and real-world consequences of Nepal’s widespread inequality (Bhatta, 2011; Carney & Rappleye, 2011; Devkota & Upadhyay, 2016; Shields & Rappleye, 2008). Third, and most importantly, a burgeoning private primary and secondary school sector has become a driver of social and educational inequality (Koirala, 2015; Mathema, 2007).

Studies on Nepali education (Koirala, 2015; Mathema, 2007; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Subedi et al., 2014; Thapa, 2015) have found that students from private schools have considerably higher academic achievement levels when compared to those in government community schools. These studies also identified that many low achievers were from disadvantaged castes or ethnic groups. These study findings further confirm the reality that community schools are the sole destination for children of the disadvantaged groups, while the wealthier students who have access to greater resources are likely to do well, whatever schools they attend.

Although the broad societal question of inequality and its genesis in relation to education cannot be confined within the scope of this research, what can be investigated is whether school headteachers, as leaders, can contribute to minimising the effects brought about by the socioeconomic disparities. Gautam et al. (2015) argued that school headteachers
can help shape schools’ motivational cultures with “…larger community involvement, (and) intentional inclusion of society, parents and students” (p. 35). Similarly, Brooks et al. (2017) emphasised that headteachers do play crucial roles in introducing and promoting welcoming and inclusive school environments that also make strong and supportive connections with local communities and government agencies as key, external stakeholder groups. In dealing with change that addresses educational inequalities, progressing headteachers’ leadership strategies requires engagement with teachers, parents, and school boards, along with a positive relationship with the media (Mitchell, 2017).

It is important to understand what perspectives, priorities, and strategies Nepali school headteachers hold regarding their schools’ contexts, current policies, and teaching and learning practices. Set against historically contingent policies, Carpenter and Brewer (2014) argued that “the field of educational leadership must place more focus on researching the educational leader who, while desirous of educational advocacy, is implicated within the current policy context, and thus is unable to realize their democratic aspirations” (p. 303). In turn, a democratic school culture is related to social justice that acknowledges and inspires leadership roles in favour of diversity and equality (Woods, 2004). Although democratic cultures may convey contextual meanings in relation to particular educational times and spaces, those arguments emphasise the importance of a leader’s perspective.

A growing body of research into Nepali issues of educational inequality has critically evaluated educational policies and their formative processes, including the overall policy implementation in community school education (Bhatta, 2011; Carney, 2010; Carney & Bista, 2009; Carney & Rappleye, 2011; Khanal, 2011; Pherali, 2011; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Devkota & Upadhyay, 2016; Shields & Rappleye, 2008). However, relatively few studies
have explored headteachers’ roles and priorities in addressing the contextual issues within the community schools’ domain in Nepal (Khanal et al., 2021; Singh & Allison, 2016). More importantly, to fully grasp how school headteachers are doing what they are doing, and why, it is important to understand the historic contexts of the phenomenon being studied. This will allow the study to explore how social, economic, and political dimensions shape the school leaders’ perspectives and actions. Attempting to develop new knowledge in these areas is the foundation of this interpretivist research project that uses symbolic interactionism as its navigational rule (O’Donoghue, 2019).

1.2 The Research Questions

The central research question in this study was framed by two considerations, to address the research problem and to determine the understandings and strategies Nepali community schools’ headteachers used in managing their schools. The second consideration was framed in terms of O’Donoghue’s (2019) principles for developing research questions within an interpretivist, symbolic interactionist approach. O’Donoghue argues that there are two types of interpretivist studies: one a” frozen in time” study, where the research focuses on participants’ perspectives of a phenomenon at a point in time; the other a longitudinal study where the focus is on how participants ‘deal with’, ‘manage’, or ‘cope with’ a phenomenon over a period of time (O’Donoghue, 2019, pp. 31-32). These two types of study generate different research questions and different data-generation approaches. As the study reported in this thesis reflected the second type of study, the central research question was constructed around how participants were “managing” (O’Donoghue, 2019, p. 31) their schools and their educational contexts over a period of time. The core focus of this study became how community headteachers cope with or deal with the historic and current
situational contexts in which they operate. From these considerations, the central research question is:

**How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?**

In keeping with O'Donoghue's (2019), beneath this overarching question are four guiding research questions. To deepen the study and to focus more intensely on the potential nuances inherent in the central research question, the following three guiding research questions were developed:

i) How do the Nepali secondary community school headteachers understand the historic contexts of the schools in which they operate?

ii) How do the Nepali secondary community headteachers respond to the historic contexts of their schools?

iii) What leadership traits, values and perspectives influence the outcomes of the Nepali community headteachers?

**1.3 Research Aims**

In the light of the central and guiding research questions, this study aims to explore, in depth, the perspectives of headteachers hold on their roles, responsibilities, and priorities, particularly in relation to historic context of Nepali community schools. In doing so, this study will explore based on their perspectives, how they went about leading their schools. Collectively, these research dimensions investigate how they manage their roles as school
leaders given the complexities inherent in their schools. The overall aim of this study is to develop theory around how a small sample of Nepali community schools’ headteachers deal with their situational contexts, and what strategies, if any, they employ to mitigate these challenges.

This qualitative study of community headteachers employed a multiple case study methodology, involving semi-structured, open-ended interview strategies, as well as observation and relevant document analysis (Vogt, et al., 2012; Yin, 2014). Rather than carrying out a study on a broad cross section of headteachers, this study aimed to deliver greater depth in relation to the behaviours, beliefs, values of a small number of participants working in rural and urban areas in Nepal. Conducting interviews, privileging the words of the headteacher participants, generated findings that were underpinned by observations and document analysis. Accordingly, this approach would enable triangulation, serving to validate the analytical processes, research findings, and the resultant theory. In addition, using this approach enabled the research to dig deeply into the stated research problem and to discover the contextual realities that answered the research questions.

Given that the experiences, perspectives, and the worldviews of each participant differ in dealing with their situational contexts, these considerations shape their real-world understandings, the research paradigm underpinning this qualitative study. This viewpoint informed the choice of the study’s theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, generating “an understanding of the meanings that create, and are created by, interaction between human beings is essential to an understanding of the social world and the myriad phenomena which it contains” (O’Donoghue, 2007, pp. 16-17). Consequently, this is a study of the experiences, perspectives, and strategies used by Nepali community school
headteachers, a study that seeks to discover how they are dealing with, or managing, the current circumstances they encounter in their schools.

1.4 Statement of Positionality

I am a thirty-nine years old, Nepali male from a culturally and ethnically diverse district in Province 1, the eastern part of Nepal. I had the privilege of growing up in a Brahmin family, so called socially a class of highest status. However, I identify myself as someone who grew up and completed his school years from a rural community school and completed his higher education from suburban institutions. I completed a Master of Education with an English major from Tribhuwan University in 2006 and a Master of Philosophy in English Literature in 2014. During the periods of my higher education, and even afterwards, I worked as both a primary and secondary English teacher in a couple of schools and colleges, both community managed and privately managed.

My father has just retired from a career of almost thirty-five years as a permanent teacher in a community school in Nepal. My fondest memory of the early years of my schooling was that I went to the school every day with my father. This was the reason I was relatively advantaged -in the sense that I felt safe and accepted among my classmates and the senior students because I was a teacher’s son. However, the school itself was very rudimentary in the quality of education, student facilities, school culture and the overall learning environment. Some examples I can remember include: being inside classrooms that had partially damaged furniture; scattered bat droppings; and cold dirt floors and rusted metal roofs. At some point in my early years, I came to know there were private schools that were different to our school. People from rich families in the neighbourhood used to send their
children to private boarding schools. Some of our relatives’ children were also enrolled in those schools. Knowing that these children went to quality private schools with tidy ironed uniforms, and where they studied in English intensively, made me carry the thought for a long time that I was less equipped than them. I guess it was a type of inferiority complex. However, I now consider myself privileged because many of my classmates in our community school had to end up being unemployed, working as unfortunate farmers, or working at risks in Middle Eastern countries and East Asia. Whereas I am building a life and a family in Australia.

In choosing symbolic interactionism as the theory underpinning this PhD study (cite), my positionality as the researcher is my deep-seated practical interest to understand how community school leaders in Nepal are doing what they are doing, and the reasons why they are doing them. As a Nepalese researcher, I share many similar sociocultural interpretations with my Nepalese participants, for example, we share the same language, culture, geography and we have deep experience of community schools’ context and Nepal’s history. So, the foundation of this study was my continuing interest in the course of changing circumstances for my birth nation Nepal, in its post-conflict, post-disaster and reconstruction era of governance. I also realise that alongside my educational progression, my recollections of my experiences and thoughts in my childhood made me want to investigate possible ways to improve Nepali community schools. I hope we can better equip young children, especially from unfortunate families, with the knowledge and skills required to prepare them for future employment opportunities and further education.
1.5 Research Significance

From the outset, a study of Nepali educational leaders, community schools’ headteachers, was important and timely for several reasons. First, it would provide an up-to-date study situated on the cusp of Nepal’s educational reconstruction following the introduction of a decentralised federal system, developed after the destructive impacts of a ten-year civil war and catastrophic earthquakes in 2015. Equally important, this study generated deeper understandings of headteachers’ personal perspectives of school leadership and their actions as they went about their several roles and responsibilities. As a long-neglected area of educational research in Nepal, discovering and revealing headteachers’ understandings and strategies, the findings are likely to be useful to informing and developing other Nepali headteachers’ responses when instigating context-specific strategies in their schools. As the findings of this in-depth study demonstrate, while three headteachers are managing well, three are struggling to meet the objectives and expectations of their local communities and government. The findings may be transferable to school leaders and researchers in other developing countries that are similarly positioned in terms of social and educational inequality and the resultant socio-economic disparities that exist in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts. Collectively, these research dimensions are important considerations in contemporary educational research (O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2019).

Finally, in relation to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework for human development that covers micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem influences and life course transitions, outcomes of this research may provide input to policy framing and implementation, with findings and educational implications that inform engagement with key, local stakeholder groups that comprise students, parents, school committees. These research
outcomes may influence higher leadership levels in the government’s administrative structure, shedding light on headteachers’ perspectives on their roles, responsibilities, and priorities, and accordingly, how they perform them in the context of Nepali community school education. In meeting an established gap in the research literature, outcomes may inform best practice in similar educational settings. In summary, given the increasing number of achievements-based and comparative educational leadership research in this field, research outcomes may inform researchers seeking contemporary and distinctive perspectives on contextual issues, practices, and future applications of the findings.

1.5 Conclusion and the Thesis Structure

This chapter has introduced the research problem, the research question and the guiding question framework. In turn, the research aims, and the significance of this study have been discussed. In providing this information, an outline of the multiple case approach being used was presented. Chapter 2 offers a summary of the Nepali context, introducing the distinctive features of the country’s demography, geography, and socio-economic situations. It also provides background information related to Nepal’s post-conflict, post-disaster contexts that includes a brief description of the two major earthquakes that devastated Nepal in 2015. Importantly, this section provides an historical account of education in Nepal that includes the current community school system and information on relevant and current policies.

Chapter 3 provides a critical overview of both contextual and empirical literature that collectively positions and justifies investigating the study topic. The chapter begins with the conceptualisation of leadership, management, and administration. It also discusses the
relevant, selected models and dimensions of school leadership that were relevant to the perspectives and strategies used by the participants. In discussing why considering context is a critical dimension in school leadership research, literature relevant to post-conflict contexts and developing countries is also presented. This is followed by a review of relevant empirical educational and school leadership studies in Nepal.

Chapter 4 discusses the research design, methodology, and methods used in this study, considering the epistemology of interpretivism and its closely embedded theoretical perspective, symbolic interactionism. This section also provides details on the research sites; the participants and their selection; data-generation tools and techniques; and data analysis approaches. Importantly, discussion focuses on how ethical and quality standard issues were used throughout the research process.

Chapters 5 and 6 are the ‘data chapters’ that present the broad findings of this study. These chapters divided the six participants into two cohorts that are determined by their perspectives and actions. It then presents the findings under common themes that emerged from the data analysis. While Chapter 5 focuses on three community headteachers who were managing their schools and contexts with great difficulty, Chapter 6 concentrates on the community headteachers who were managing with great competence, relative ease and little difficulty.

In drawing on the previous two chapters, Chapter 7 presents a cross-case analysis and discussion under three broad themes: community headteachers’ understandings of their schools’ historic contexts; their responses to their contextual challenges; and their diverse and highly individual personal attributes and qualities. Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. In doing
so, the aims, findings, outcomes, and justifications are discussed. In discussing the significance of the research, including its limitations, the implications arising from the findings are highlighted. Most importantly, suggestions for future research are explored.
Chapter 2

Situating the Study: Nepal

The previous chapter introduced and provided an overview of the doctoral project and its central research question: *How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?* To address this question, this chapter provides the crucial contextual overview of Nepal that situates the study. The first section discusses its geography, demography, and socio-economic indicators. In turn, the second section provides details of two significant events in Nepal’s contemporary history, first being the protracted, decade-long civil war and the second the catastrophic earthquakes. Collectively, these post-conflict and post-disaster events resulted in significant loss of life and infrastructure damage, an important dimension in a study exploring how head teachers are currently responding to the impacts and outcomes of these twin crises. The third section of the chapter focuses on the educational context in Nepal, presenting a brief history of school education and administration, with a specific focus on its historical context. The fourth section provides an overview of educational policies and regulatory frameworks governing Nepal’s government secondary community schools.

2.1 Geography, Demography, and Socio-Economic Factors

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, to give it its full title, but usually referred to as Nepal, is a landlocked South Asian country bordered by China, the Tibet Autonomous Region in the north and India to the east, south, and west. Extending around 800 kms east-to-west and around 145 to 241 kms north-to-south. Nepal is a small country of 147,181 square
kms and has an estimated population of around 30.5 million (Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS], 2011). There are four distinct geographical regions which run from the east to the west: the Himalayas, the highest mountain range; the Mahabharat range, comprising high hills and valleys; the Siwalik and its low hills and shifting valleys; and the Tarai, plains and fertile land. In total, the mountains, high and low hills, and the plains areas cover 35 percent, 42 percent, and 23 percent of the total mass respectively. Importantly, 49.7 percent of the population live in mountain and hill areas, which are largely remote and difficult to access while 50.3 percent live in the plains which are very accessible. These statistics represent a significant discrepancy in the distribution of population as well as economic indicators, standards of living, and social characteristics; 17.1 percent of the population live in urban areas compared to 82.9 percent living in rural areas (CBS, 2011). The urban areas concentrate most of the economic activities, government services and facilities compared to the rural and remote areas.

As a result of recent restructuring of Nepal’s political system, the country has been divided into seven provinces, each representing the second-highest level of administrative authority, the Federal Government (the Government) being the highest. Each province consists of 6 to 14 districts out of the national total of 77 districts. There are six metropolises, 11 sub-metropolises, 276 municipal councils, and 460 village councils. According to CBS (2011), there are 125 ethnic groups and subgroups, collectively speaking 123 different languages in Nepal. In relation to religiosity, 81.34 percent of the population are Hindus, 9.04 percent are Buddhists, and 9.6 percent are members of other religions, animists, or those who do not to follow any faith (CBS, 2011).
In terms of inequalities, *The Human Development Report* (2019) published by the United Nations Development Program ranked Nepal at 142 out of 189 countries. By way of comparison, two South Asian countries, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan, were ranked 72 and 169 respectively. Nepal’s inequalities in human development included a life expectancy of 70.8 years; expected years of schooling as 12.8; mean years of schooling at 5.0; and per capita income equivalent to US$ 3457. With significant inequality across the Nepali population in relation to life expectancy, education, and income, the report indicated that 34 percent of the population lived in multi-dimensional poverty, while 11 percent was rated as being severe. The population shown to be living below income poverty line, those who earned less than US$1.90, was 15 percent while 33.4 percent comprised workers who earned below US$ 3.20.

### 2.2 The Backdrop of Conflict and Disaster

Understanding the Nepali context requires an understanding of two contemporary events that continue to impact on Nepal in the 21st century. The first was the protracted civil war that started in February 1996 and finished in November 2006. The second event were these devastating earthquakes on 25 April 2015 and 12 May 2015. In a little over 50 years, Nepal’s pathway to parliamentary democracy, that includes its current system of government, has evolved from different episodes. The first period, from 1959 to 1961, saw the first elected Government of Nepal dismissed by the authoritarian ‘Panchayat’ kingdom. In 1990, the so-called ‘democratic’ parties formed an alliance for agitation, referred to as the *People’s Movement One*, that culminated in forcing the late King Birendra to transition to democracy, a constitutional monarchy. During the period, the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist) signalled the start of insurgency, the goal being to dethrone the monarchy and establish a People’s Republic. However, as the Government could not quell the CPN-Maoist led conflict,
King Gyanendra dismissed the Government and seized power in 2002 and declared a ‘state of emergency’. In 2006, parliamentary parties and CPN-Maoists joined forces against the King and boycotted the local elections. This event became known as the \textit{People’s Movement II} forcing the King to restore the democracy. As a result, the insurgency concluded with a peace accord being made between parliamentary parties and the CPN-Maoists, with an agreement focused on electing a constitutional assembly. In May 2008, the assembly abolished the Kingdom of Nepal, and the country became known as the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.

During the civil war period between 1996 and 2006, the entire nation experienced conflict, hardship, and poverty. The report from United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR, 2012) described the direct or indirect impacts on the Nepali people, citing abuses and violations that constituted “unlawful killing, torture, enforced disappearance, sexual violence and long-term arbitrary arrest” (p. 4). The report concludes that:

Many individuals and families were displaced from their homes; there were large-scale disruptions to education, health, and basic government services across the country; economic hardships were further exacerbated by the conflict; and instability and a climate of fear were widespread. (UNHCR, 2012, p. 5)

The victim profiles as outlined in The Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), 2020 accounted for more than 10,000 human rights and violence cases, including 6,300 victims waiting for justice, more than 13,000 murders, and nearly one thousand cases of enforced disappearance during the time. In relation to school education, Pherali (2016) suggested
impacts that included: forcing the deployment of teachers and young people to boost political party and military strengths; both warring sides occupying, using, and destroying school buildings; inciting fear in the school environment; weakening relationships between schools and their local communities; and attacking teachers known to sympathise with the opposing party; and carrying out acts of violence on teachers and students that included abduction, murder, and torture.

After this destructive ten-year long conflict, the second major event involved earthquakes, one striking with a 7.8 magnitude on 25 April 2015 and another of 6.8 magnitude on 12 May 2015. These events delivered further devastation to already vulnerable Nepali communities. The aftermath of these events resulted in approximately 9,000 deaths; 2,2000 people injured; and 500,000 homes destroyed. Critically, the impact on education sector alone accounted for around US$ 30 billion, with an estimated amount of US$ 38 billion needed for recovery (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2015). Such was the collective devastation of these events, that at the time of the research reported on in this thesis being undertaken, the reconstruction program had not been completed.

In researching the impacts of conflict and disaster in the Nepali education system, Brewer et al. (2016) found that there was a relationship between schools’ disaster resilience and conflict experiences. The authors argue that conflict exposure played a role in lowering people’s resilience after the earthquakes. Similarly, another study that focused on mostly earthquake affected regions found that there was a considerable decrease in academic achievement when compared to previous year, the year that was associated with conflict losses, the death or injury of family members and subsequent economic hardship in family systems (Sapkota & Neupane, 2021).
2.3 The Education System in Nepal

Until the 1980s, the history of education and governance in Nepal was largely confined within religious institutions and ruling dynasties. For example, Vedic education based on sacred Hindu religious texts, along with and Buddhist-based educational programs practiced in monasteries, in shrines or stupas, are still in evidence in some parts of Nepal. The change to more formal administration of education dates back to the early 20th century with the establishment of a Department of Education by the ruling Rana dynasty (1846-1950) and the ministers of its oligarchic control (Sharma, 2012). However, during the Ranas’ rule, the administration either explicitly denied or limited access to education to people other than the palace circle, considering that an educated populace could pose a political threat to the rulers (Shields & Rappleye, 2008). Accordingly, the illiteracy rate among the general population of the time was determined to be approximately 98 percent (Whelpton, 2005).

Following the fall of the Ranas in 1950, Nepal experienced its first democratic Government that was in place until 1962. However, this democratically elected Government was dismissed by forces loyal to King Mahendra of the long-lasting Shah dynasty (1768-2008). The King established an autocratic monarchy, with a single party system, the Panchayat. During the time of the Panchayat, a centralised education curriculum was decreed by King Mahendra, part of a concerted effort to further legitimise his autocratic power, and to ensure service to the monarchy through the National Education System Plan (NESP, 1971). Shields and Rappleye (2008) criticised the NESP, arguing that:

... elevating the King, Hinduism and the Nepali language as the basis of national cohesion...this promoted social stratification according to an individual’s acceptance
of and conformity to this ideology, and for many socially disadvantaged groups – rural dwellers, low-caste Hindus, women, and indigenous minority groups – this was essentially to make them accept their own inferiority. (MoE, 1971, p. 268)

As Pherali (2011, p. 139) contended: “Throughout the educational history of Nepal, this dark ‘face’ of education has rarely been scrutinised, even while perpetuated by those who exercised power and (mis)used education as a tool to systematically achieve the unquestioning political compliance of the people.” Accordingly, the issues of socio-economic disparities and inequality in education are deeply embedded within the historical context of Nepal, one that traditionally focused on exclusion and elitism.

In more recent times, recurrent educational themes highlighted foreign country or Western influences and neoliberal concepts of development (Carney, 2003; Pherali, 2012). After the fall of the Rana dynasty, during the subsequent decade of the democratic Government, Nepal had developed a policy framework, the National Education Planning Commission (NEPC, 1955), that received both financial and technical assistance from the USA (Caddell, 2007, p. 10). Caddell claimed that “all major policy documents prepared through the 1950s and 1960s were devised with the financial and technical assistance of the United States Overseas Mission (USOM,) later renamed USAID.” During that period, the Nepali language was established as the medium of instruction, irrespective of and excluding other native and minority languages, the rationale being that:

The study of a non-Nepali local tongue would mitigate against the effective development of Nepali...If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic
language, then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result. (NEPC [National Education Planning Commission] 1955: 8/2).

Given the American financial and technical influences, imposing an official, single language under the guise of national integrity served to deprive and discriminate against minority language speakers while privileging Nepali-language speakers. These mid-20th century influences from donor nations continued to deepen and expand in diverse ways the practices within the Nepali educational system, including the post-Panchayat period.

The restoration of democracy in 1990 saw the return of a constitutional monarchy, a political compromise between King Birendra and a pro-democratic and communist coalition that was known as the *Peoples’ Movement I* After this change of government, foreign and donor communities, typically Western nations, once again became instrumental in shaping educational policy. As Carney and Bista (2009) argue, developmental agencies simply ‘imported’ technical reforms in the form of “a general global policy discourse” (p.3) in line with a liberal political agenda, rather than seeking genuine, real-world based educational solutions to the Nepali situation and its embedded inequalities. Bhatta (2011) held a similar viewpoint to Carney and Bista (2009), in relation to attempts to solve Nepali education problems by adopting the philosophy of universalisation of education, a concept that emphasise the global uniformity of education systems. However, Bhatta points to the futile core of national policymaking, contending that the Ministry of Education (MoE), which is supposed to frame national policy, did little more than perpetuate the role of merely managing aid and relationships with related donor agencies. As a result, Shields and Rappleye (2008, p. 265) described Nepal as an “uneven terrain”, maintaining that the presence of inequalities and prejudices in educational policymaking continued and
perpetuated the continuing problems in educational opportunities and outcomes. Put simply, due to foreign interventions, the capacity of Government secondary community schools to address educational disparities and inequalities is further reduced, serving mainly to benefit private schools, typically referred to as institutional schools (Carney & Bista, 2009).

With the restoration of democracy in 1990, the rapid growth in the number of private schools perpetuated the widely held belief that quality education resided only in the private sector. This viewpoint is considered as a major contributing factor that widened Nepali educational inequality (Caddell, 2006; Koirala, 2015; Mathema, 2007; Pherali, 2012; Subedi et al., 2012). As these private schools increasingly attract the urban middle-class students, the cynicism and distrust towards the public education system continued to grow, what Mathema (2007) referred to as “the regressive character of Nepali education system” (p. 31). Mathema points to the rising public examination pass rates in private schools compared to the Government community schools, which, to its critics, highlights deficiency in the public school system. The sense of competition between private and public schools, and the Government’s failure to make community schools more equitable in terms of access, participation, and improved academic outcomes, benefits the private schools as demonstrated by increased in enrolments (Caddell, 2006), a trend that has continued to this day.

Koirala (2015) pointed out that private schools are more expensive and concentrated mainly in urban areas, a situation that led to the further expansion of two social classes of children and the consolidation of the duelling schooling systems: “Due to unaffordable cost for poor and inaccessibility for remote areas children, a burning issue of equity arises in the education sector” (Koirala, 2015, p.7). Subedi et al. (2012) concluded that that policy
discourse was “likely to exacerbate social and economic inequality in Nepali society...This would inevitably produce a highly segmented and polarized society” (p.52).

The political dimension of schooling took a turn in 2007 when Nepal was declared a Federal Democratic Republic. As discussed, one of the reasons for change was the decade-long Maoist Insurgency that had thrived in embedding and exacerbating deeply entrenched socio-economic disparities (Pherali, 2012). This conflict between insurgents and the Government began in 1996, concluding with a peace accord and the adoption of the Interim Constitution (Constituent Assembly Secretariat [CAS], 2007). With the monarchy being abolished shortly after, the Interim Constitution declared Nepal to be a Federal Democratic Republic, putting into place a new on 20 September 2015. In reaffirming education as a fundamental right (CAS, 2015), it was held that: “Every citizen shall have the right to free and compulsory basic education, and free education up to the secondary level.”

This political change led educational policy reforms in the areas of decentralisation, community engagement, professional development opportunities for teachers, and overall school improvement (Regmi, 2017). Unfortunately, any semblance of optimism was shattered by the devastating earthquakes that struck Nepal in 2015. In claiming the lives of approximately 9,000 people and destroying an estimated 9,500 schools, the educational resulted in “leaving more than a million children without access to safe permanent places to learn” (MoE, 2016b, p.2). Crucial among the multiple spheres of reconstruction, educational matters at local, provincial, and federal levels (Pherali, 2016), constitute a current challenge in terms of disaster management and resilience.
2.4 A Legislative Overview of Educational Development in Nepal

Nepal’s *Education Act 1971, 8th Amendment* (2016) categorises Nepal’s school education into basic and secondary education. Basic education consists of classes from early childhood level to Grade 8, while secondary education covers classes from Grades 9 to 12. Within the basic and secondary framework, there are three types of schools: pre-primary (i.e., early childhood); primary (i.e., Grades 1 to 5 or Grade 1 to 8); and secondary (either Grades 1 to 10 and/or Grades 9 to 12). Importantly, this educational framework also provides two broad categories of schools that are determined by their governance and management. The first category, community schools are defined as being government or public schools. The second category, institutional schools, are privately owned and managed. In addition, the religion-based education includes Gumba/Bihar or Buddhist schools; Ashram/Gurukul or Hindu schools; and Madarasa or Muslim schools.

Among the statistics provided by the DoE (Department of Education) 2018/19 report, it indicated that there were 35055 schools in Nepal, of which about 79 percent were community schools and about 21 percent were institutional schools. In the 2015-2016 academic year, of the 7.4 million school enrolments, the community schools were accounted for 82 percent compared to 18 percent at institutional schools (MoE, 2016a). In terms of staffing statistics, 203,392 teachers were employed in community schools, while private schools employed 76,224 teachers (DoE, 2016), a significant discrepancy in teacher-student ratios. Accordingly, community schools had a ratio of one teacher for 30 students while institutional schools had a ratio of 17.5.
In relation to the management and administration of community schools at the municipal level, the Education Act 1971, 8th Amendment (2016) dictates two local agencies have responsibility for school management. The first is the Village Education Committee or Municipal Education Committee. These committees are constituted at the municipal government level and consist of members that include educational experts, educational professionals, social workers, local community representatives, and a member from District Education Committee. These committees are responsible for school supervision and improving coordination between schools in that area. The second local agency is the School Management Committee (SMC), a community-based governance body charged with operating, supervising, and managing community schools. Membership comprises the secondary school headteacher as the member-secretary in a committee of nine that comprises teachers, parents, and local community members. Key SMC roles include: the oversight of resources and operations; educational coordination with higher administrative authorities; putting in place a Parent-Teacher Association; and implementing the Government’s directives.

2.5 A Review of Educational Policies

In the recent past, a number of educational plans, programs, and policy frameworks sought to guide and regulate the Government’s community school sector. For example, Education for All (EFA), a program in place from 2004-2009 resulted in the Government implementing the National Plan of Action (NPA), 2001-2015 which was based on earlier initiatives, the Basic and Primary Education Project, stages one and two (Vaux et al., 2006; Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2003a). In positioning towards meeting the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, focus areas included: early childhood
development; reducing gender disparities; improving access for the disadvantaged groups; implementing initiatives designed to better meet students’ learning needs; and improving adult literacy (MoES, 2003b).

As the main donor for Nepal’s EFA programme, the performance report published by the World Bank (2015, p. 18), indicated that Nepal had made a “substantial progress toward enrolment and inclusion.” However, this report also pointed to lower net attendance rates compared with enrolment statistics and lower improvement in meeting the education needs of disadvantaged students. Importantly, in terms of school headteachers’ roles, the report noted, “High performing schools as well as high-functioning SMCs are still a function of dynamic Head Teachers” (World Bank, p.22).

Another significant initiative, the SSRP was in place from 2009 to 2016. In summary, its main goals were: (i) increasing equitable access and participation in high quality education; (ii) improving literacy; (iii) supporting professional development for teaching staff; and (iv) developing improved service delivery systems that supported the educational reforms (MoES, 2008). This program delegated the responsibilities for improving social inclusion and auditing methods to SMCs, with headteachers, as the member-secretary of a committee of nine, expected to play a proactive role in according to secondary school students “the right to education, gender parity, inclusion, and equity” (p. 2). Importantly, in terms of access and equity issues, a joint evaluation report published by the MoE concluded that:

The strategies for improving equal access and quality in education proved to be adequate, but implementation, especially at local level, shows many substantial
problems, mostly due to lacking management capacity. Nepal is a multicultural society where children from minority groups of children, children with disabilities and girls have fewer education opportunities ... There remain large disparities for disabled children or children from specific castes and ethnicities. The focused actions for disadvantaged groups have not yet shown enough effect and need to be continued and specified for the different target groups. (Poyck et al., 2016, pp. 95-96)

Given the increasing significance of technology in education, the MoE implemented the Information & Communication Technology in Education (ICT), Master Plan 2013-2017 that was designed “to expand equitable access to education; to enhance the quality of education; to reduce the digital divide; [and] to improve the service delivery system in education” (MoE, 2013, p. 13). The plan incorporated developing ICT infrastructure, improving teachers’ capabilities, and sourcing appropriate learning materials. In addition, the Plan delegated planning and implementation responsibilities to the SMC level and assumed that collaboration with parents, local community centres, local government agencies, and the private sector would follow.

The most recent initiative, the 2016-2023 School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), was built on the foundation and outcomes of previous pivotal plans that included EFA, NPA and SSRP that collectively noted both achievements and future developmental needs (MoE, 2016b). This is in line with the SSDP’s mission statement is “to produce the needed human resources to elevate Nepal’s status from a Least Developed Country by 2022 and to reach the status of a middle-income country by 2030” (MoE, 2016, p.17). To achieve this undertaking, the plan set the following goals:
To contribute to socioeconomic development and reduce disparities in the country through the continuous and inclusive development of its human resources capacity by facilitating all citizens with opportunities to become functionally literate, numerate, and to develop the basic life skills and knowledge required to enjoy a productive life, taking into account the diversity of context and needs and with regards to the forthcoming federalization of the country. (MoE, 2016, p.17)

To achieve this, it is remembered that the SSDP recognised five core dimensions of educational reform: “Equity; Quality; Efficiency; Governance and Management; and Resilience” (pp. 17-18). However, with the onset of federalism and further decentralisation of education, the plan realises that there must be structural and functional reforms that are underpinned by further policy and regulatory frameworks. In relation to equity issues, the plan endorses adherence to the Consolidated Equity Strategy that aims to increase access, participation, and academic achievement by focusing on the crucial elements of equity. These equality of education elements comprise: “(i) gender disparities; (ii) socio economic status; (iii) geographical location; (iv) health and nutrition status; (v) students with disabilities; (vi) caste and ethnicity; (vii) language diversity; and (viii) children belonging vulnerable groups” (DoE, 2014, p.6). Additionally, the SSDP’s strategies involve developing and monitoring incentive schemes such as scholarships and focusing on developing welcoming environment that promote inclusive education. In terms of school governance and management, the central SSDP strategy involves realigning the headteacher, SMC, and PTA roles and significantly, advocating “separate service contracts for school headteachers...based on the proposed reform plan and their capacity to implement them” (MoE, p. 59).
2.6 Conclusion

This chapter introduced key contextual considerations that situated the Nepali-based study. These considerations ranged from a discussion of the geography, demography, and socio-economic factors through to the aftermath civil war and natural disasters. As discussed, Nepali community secondary schools are responsible for educating a student population typified by diverse cultural, demographic, geographic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic factors. Set against this backdrop of complexity and diversity, at different times throughout Nepal’s history, efforts have been made to improve the Government’s community school system. While the country’s policies and directives acknowledge the real-world challenges existing in this educational context, it seems clear that school leaders, and in particular, headteachers, must deal with a myriad of contextual challenges, both historic and contemporary. In further situating the central research question: How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context? The next chapter examines contextual and empirical literature surrounding educational leadership and its current positioning in relation to the Nepali educational system.
Chapter 3

An Overview of The Relevant Literature

The previous chapter provided a crucial contextual overview of Nepal that situated the study reported in this thesis. This overview ranged from demographic and geographic material through to the implications of the nation’s civil war and natural disasters that continue to impact on current educational system practices. In further situating the study’s central research question, ‘How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?’, this chapter presents a critical review of educational leadership literature. Incorporating both contextual and theoretical literature, this material was crucial to conceptualising and designing the multi-case approach used in this study; formulating the data-generation methods; data analysis processes; and informing the findings resulting from cross-case analysis and discussion. This chapter comprises seven sections. The first section explains the differences and similarities within the concept of leadership, management, and administration. This discussion establishes a hierarchy within these concepts, with leadership being the pinnacle. As this is a qualitative study on school leadership practices, this term is clarified in the context of this study. The second section presents an overview of models and dimensions of educational leadership, while the third discusses the importance of contextual relevance. Accordingly, the multi-case study participants, community headteachers are essentially evaluated by their understanding of, and response to, the situations in which their schools are operating. While the fourth section evaluates school leadership literature in developing countries, the fifth section extends the review to include post-conflict or post-disaster situations. While many developing countries have experienced one or both of these contextual influences, as outlined in the previous chapter, Nepal has experienced both in the
past few decades. Having considered these broader contextual, country-specific issues, the sixth section critiques the available, extant theoretical literature dealing with school leadership in Nepal, with a particular focus on headteachers. The seventh and final section provides summary information that discusses the significance of this contextual and theoretical literature review and its relevance to the research area.

3.1 Conceptualising and Clarifying Leadership

The terms leadership, along with management and administration, are often used interchangeably and albeit loosely in theoretical literature. However, to ensure consistency in this thesis, it is important to clarify and distinguish between these terms. While this study is about school leadership, the terms ‘management’ and ‘administration’ are inherent in leadership discussions.

3.1.1 Leadership

Many eminent leadership researchers have conceded that owing to its complex nature and relativity, there is no universally accepted definition of the term. Among them, Cuban (1988) comments that no definition can adequately capture the understanding of leadership in being able to distinguish leaders from followers. Dimmock and Walker (2005, p. 11) validated with this view, noting that while leadership is an “elusive concept to define”, there is a general consensus among scholars that leadership is “the influence process between leaders and followers”, an influence which includes the act of setting common, longstanding goals of an organisation, and moving the organisation to achieving them.
In supporting research into evidence-based, pragmatic aspects of leadership based on school effectiveness and school improvement, Bush and Glover (2003, p. 5) provide a useful description of educational or school leadership, taking into consideration influence, vision, and value:

Leadership is a process of influence leading to the achievement of desired purposes. Successful leaders develop a vision for their schools based on their personal and professional values. They articulate this vision at every opportunity and influence their staff and other stakeholders to share the vision. The philosophy, structures and activities of the school are geared towards the achievement of this shared vision.

Unpacking Bush and Glover’s (2003) model of leadership, there are four key dimensions: developing and articulating a vision; influencing; having a strong values-base; and using available school resources to realise that vision. The first dimension of leadership lies in effective leaders articulating a clear vision of where the school must head. Decades ago, prominent figures in educational leadership such as Leithwood (1994) and Hallinger and Heck (2002) identified that school visions and their influence on school outcomes were positively related. Hallinger and Heck (1996) suggest that successful principals are guided by an educational philosophy that helps to identify and establish certain goals that are based on the perceived needs of the school community. Equally important, effective leadership is concerned with the articulating that vision, communicating the goals effectively and garnering collective support. Having and promoting a vision in school leadership is emphasised by empirical studies in recent times, reflecting its ongoing importance (Cruickshank, 2017; Kruger et al., 2007; Kurland et al., 2010; Mombourquette, 2017; Okilwa, 2021).
The second dimension of Bush and Glover’s (2003) model is the process of influencing attitudes and behaviours, with the individual or leadership group exercising guidance over other individuals or groups, with the intention being to realise specific, articulated, and mutually beneficial goals (Cuban, 1988; Yukl, 2002). Many theoretical models of educational leadership describe how educational leaders ‘influence’ the processes and outcomes of an educational organisation (Hallinger et al., 1996; Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003). Empirical educational leadership studies have also measured influence of principals on the areas such as teacher efficacy, classroom instruction and school outcomes (Hipp, 1996; Sebastian & Allenworth; 2012). The positive influence of principal leadership on teachers’ development and professional learning and pedagogic practices, along with resultant student learning has also been established (Karacabey et al., 2021; Kaso et al., 2019; Szeto, 2020).

In keeping with the third dimension, leaders act and influence those around them according to their personal and professional values. However, while these values can range from positive and enriching ones though to negative and destructive ones, the nature of these values is an important consideration. Leithwood (1999) pointed out that ‘value’ as a necessary element of a school leader, one which characterises their ethical administrative practices. Gold (2004, p. 3) defined values as an attribute able “to signify the core beliefs about life and about relating to other people that underpin understandings, principles and ethics about education.” In turn, Gold (2010) highlighted the importance of having clarity of purpose in leadership values that fosters a transparent organisational culture that informs leadership decisions and actions. Studies have shown that school leaders have distinct perspectives on values and that these values have connection with the way in which leaders define and promote themselves as leaders, their approach to work, as well as their intentional
or unintentional actions (Niekerk & Botha; 2017). As Eisenschmidt et al. (2019) observe, school principals’ roles and duties are essentially values-based, providing the motivation reach their stated goals and manage difficult situations ethically and honestly. Consequently, values-based approaches are considered integral components in leadership development and practice.

Finally, the fourth dimension of Bush and Glover’s (2003) model involves aligning the educational philosophy with the available resources, structures, and school activities to realise the communicated and shared goals. This aspect of leadership recalls conceptualisations of management rather than leadership. However, Bush (2019, p. 7) argues that “Managerial leadership has been discredited and dismissed as limited and technicist, but it is an essential component of successful leadership, ensuring the implementation of the school’s vision and strategy.” As argued, management without vision, and vision without implementation, are both inadequate strategies. nevertheless, managerial direction is an important function of effective leadership. This dimension of leadership is considered in greater detail in the next section.

3.1.2. Management and Administration

In the broader leadership context, Bose (2012) suggested that ‘management’ and ‘administration’ are considered in three different ways in the leadership literature. First, administration is recognised as higher-level function than management, in that administration involves setting major objectives and developing policies, while management requires carrying out the executive functions necessary to ‘get the job done’. Second, management is a general concept that refers to the executive controls in an industry, and therefore,
administration is a part of management which in turn is related to industry settings and procedural implementation. Third, while both terms are used interchangeably, ‘management’ is used to refer to the executive responsibilities and actions while ‘administration’ is generally associated with executive functions in government circles. In the area of educational leadership, Bush and Glover (2003) differentiated leadership from management and administration, although they argue that the latter two are similar concepts; British, European, and African literature prefer the term ‘management’ whereas American, Canadian and Australian literature often use ‘administration’.

3.1.3 Leadership, Management, and Administration

Two influential texts by American researchers Hoy and Miskel (2013) and Lunenberg and Ornstein (2021) reflect the prevalence of the term ‘administration’ being synonymous with ‘leadership’. In other contexts, administration, management, and leadership are more carefully considered in this theoretical literature review. Bush and Glover (2003) affirmed the positioning of Cuban (1988), in that a more precise description of management is related to maintaining everyday operations, whereas leadership is about bringing about change; the prevalence of either one of the terms depends on organisational setting and context. However, Day (2003, p. 167) argued that: “Leadership is essentially the process of building and maintaining a sense of vision, culture and interpersonal relationships, whereas management is the coordination, support and monitoring of organisational activities.”

Northouse (2019) makes it clear that leadership and management are distinct areas that overlap, and that this overlapping depends on the way in which each component plays out or functions in achieving organisational goals, arguing that:
While managers are involved in influencing a group to meet its goals, they are involved in leadership. When leaders are involved in planning, organising, staffing, and controlling, they are involved in management. Both processes involve influencing a group of individuals toward goal attainment. (Northouse, 2019, p. 14)

While these statements demonstrate a clear distinction between leadership and management, it also acknowledges the overlapping processes. In demonstrating the distinction between leadership and management, the statements also reinforce the importance of conceptualising the meaning of leadership as extending beyond management functions, and that their meanings can be appropriately captured in the study being reported in this thesis. In doing so, this school leadership research may serve to gain a better understanding of the concept of management that relates to the concept of leadership and management. It is important to note that O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) stated, “The model of school leadership for many years was focused on authority, power, structures, job descriptions, targets and performance management” (p. 54), which, according to the researchers, gave prominence to the centrality of an individual(s) in leadership roles but with recognition that it is no longer considered as being the only approach. In emphasising the drastically transformed nature of educational leadership in recent times, O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) highlight that, at present, “leadership is often situational and imbued with ethical, religious and historical influences” (p. 57).

While leadership has been described in various ways, in this chapter discussion, and throughout the thesis, leadership is considered as a higher-level function than that of management and administration in school situations. Consequently, in relation to secondary
school headteachers, leadership roles can be identified and differentiated from more procedural administrative and management functions. However, it is acknowledged that there may be an overlap in the meaning of those terms, at times, based on the participant headteachers’ individual school contexts, both historic and current. Having distinguished between ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ and having emphasised the importance of the former in this study. The remainder of this chapter focuses on six models of leadership that are considered relevant in the Nepali context of school leadership.

3.2 Leadership Models in Education

As a result of decades of research on educational leadership, several models have been proposed by scholars (Gumus et al., 2016). In learning from the accounts of variations in leadership models, O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) argued that there are no specific sets of leadership models that can effectively encompass the diversity of leadership. The researchers consider that with the increasing complexities in contemporary education, this factor serves to reinforce the significance of more recent leadership theories and models. In terms of contextual relevance, six models of leadership are discussed.

3.2.1 Managerial Leadership

School leaders are inevitably involved in a number of recurrent, everyday practices, largely associated with human and financial resource management matters. While these are essential aspects of school leaders’ duties, when these duties become the sole focus and main priorities, it is argued that they are following a managerial leadership model. Leithwood et al. (2000) provide a helpful definition: “Managerial leadership assumes that the focus of leaders
ought to be on functions, tasks, or behaviors and that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organizations will be facilitated” (p. 14). The focus of the school leader is to develop a rational organisation by way of implementing standardised practices, establishing clear lines of authority, and promoting an idealised bureaucracy. Key managerial management concerns involve specialisation, division of labour, authority with responsibility, discipline, unity of command and direction, and a centralisation of authority.

Duke and Leithwood (1994) identified as many as ten management functions that reflect the managerial leadership approach. These include: (i) the provision and distribution of adequate financial and material resources to maximise their usefulness; (ii) anticipation of predictable problems and the development of effective and efficient means for responding to them; (iii) management of the school facilities and the student body; (iv) effective communication with staff, students, parents, and district office personnel; (v) accommodation of district policies and initiatives in a manner that enhances progress towards school goals; (vi) buffering staff from disruptions to the instructional program; and (vii) handling conflict and the political demands of school functioning. In this catalogue of functions, the emphasis is on schools as rational organisations with the manager-leader as ensuring its efficient operation.

Bush (2019) considers managerial leadership as an approach that focuses strongly on ensuring competent actions, duties, and behaviours of the members of the organisation, collectively assisting members to each function efficiently. In doing so, this approach assumes that behaviour of these members is largely rational. In this process, the organisational hierarchy and formal authority allocated to its members exert the influence (Leithwood et al., 1999).
Characteristics of Northouse’s (2019, p. 450-451) South Asia leadership profile are reflected in the managerial model: giving importance to self-protection; emphasising charismatic leadership; and believing that others involved in leadership may be ineffective. With these characteristics the focus relates to implementing requirements and policies imposed by an external body or higher-level bureaucratic structure, considered as being convenient in a centralised education system (Bush, 2007). Nevertheless, Bush (2019, p. 7) argues that: “Even in decentralised systems, however, effective implementation of initiatives, whether externally or internally generated, remains important. Managerial leadership is a vital part of the armoury of any successful principal.” In providing both positive and negative observations on managerial leadership, Bush (2019) is critical of a ‘managerialist’ approach because it operates without vision, and on the other hand, having a vision can only influence change if it is effectively implemented.

3.2.2 Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is the first established model that connects leadership with learning, where the school leader’s main concern is on managing teaching and learning practices. Leithwood et al. (1999) recognised two variations of this leadership model. First, the narrow variation is associated with a school leader’s focus on teachers’ behaviour because teachers are directly involved in the teaching and learning activities that determine the academic development of their students. This variation emphasises that the school principal is responsible for effective teaching, supervision, and students’ outcomes. Second, this broader variation of instructional leadership is concerned with influencing organisational variables such as teachers attitudes and behaviour, and school cultures.
Hallinger and Murphy (1985) emphasised three areas of focus by an instructional leader: setting the school’s mission; managing its instructional programme; and improving the school’s climate. More recently, Hallinger (2005) expanded these views, discussing three dimensions and major functions of an instructional leader. First, the principal’s role is to set school goals that are focused on student progress and communicate these goals within the school community. Second, an instructional leader is required to supervise teaching and learning, manage curriculum matters, and oversee students’ academic assessment. Third, the leader should be focused on the organisational culture that is tailored to reflect the value of continuous development in school settings, student instruction, and teacher development.

Bush (2019, p. 6) asserts that instructional leadership differs from other models by “focusing on the direction rather than the process of leadership… It focuses on the ‘what’, rather than ‘how’, of educational leadership.” Accordingly, the main characteristic of instructional leadership is using all available resources to attain its instructional mission. As Bush (2013) maintained that teaching is the main priority within instructional leadership; therefore, instructional leadership is criticised for its ignorance towards learning and too much emphasis is placed on the role of school principals, which in turn overlooks the role of other leaders in the hierarchy. Several models of instructional leadership have been offered in the literature (Hallinger, 2005), with some attempting to broaden the area of instructional leadership by merging aspects with other models. One such version is proposed by Marks and Printy (2003, p. 371), described as being “shared instructional leadership”, an approach that emphasises active collaboration and shared responsibilities between teachers and their school leader on both instructional aspects and organisational culture.
3.2.3 Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership is defined as the model based on the transaction of rewards between the leader and their followers. This model is typically adopted in results-oriented organisations where there is an emphasis on employees achieving corporate goals, and in reaching these goals there is accompanying compensation or reward such as bonuses, promotion, or greater recognition. Conversely, failure to achieve corporate goals is associated with receiving organisational punishments. Northouse (2019) characterised transactional leadership as managers offering promotion to their employees in return for improved services and teachers allocating students a higher grade that reflected greater effort. This model contrasts with transformational leadership, in that transactional leadership is model that seeks less commitment from its followers. This ‘management by exception’ means that leaders only intervene in organisational processes when followers fail to satisfy the benchmarks and targets, is a feature of transactional leadership (Bass & Riggo, 2006).

Bass and Avolio (1990, p. 21) identified transactional leadership as a foundation for effective leadership. However, the authors criticised the model for basically focusing on “satisfying the requirements of the exchange between themselves and their followers” and not paying attention to the followers in terms of their professional development. Similarly, Harris (2003, p. 17) pointed out that the transactional leader approach focuses on people achieving the organisational goals, an effective approach in situations where “conformity rather than creativity is the norm.” However, Harris (2003) notes that dynamic schools require more innovative leadership styles that focuses on organisational change and improvement.
3.2.4 Transformational Leadership

The early works of Bass (1985) summarised transformational leadership model in terms of four major areas: idealised influence (i.e., a leader as a role model); inspirational motivation (i.e., a leader as a motivator for generating higher levels of commitment from followers); intellectual stimulation’ (i.e., a leader who emphasises and models innovation and creativity); and individualised consideration’ (i.e., a leader who develops supportive climates for individual followers). The foundation of transformational leadership consider that a leader can influence the followers by raising personal commitment and developing a greater capacity to achieve organisational goals that result in greater productivity (Leithwood, 1999).

As Bush (2019, p. 8) affirmed, “The transformational model is comprehensive in that it provides a normative approach to school leadership which focuses primarily on the process by which leaders seek to influence school outcomes rather than on the nature or direction of those outcomes.” O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) also make it clear that a transformational school leader focuses on the process of transforming, rather than achieving particular types of outcomes, and by supporting teachers to develop and improve their capabilities for achieving organisational goals. In this model, the role of a leader is to have a clear vision for the future, setting the direction of the organisation and inspiring, motivating, and transforming the followers (Hallingar & Heck, 2002; Leithwood, 1994).

Empirical evidence suggests that transformative leadership produces positive student outcomes (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016), enhances teachers’ job satisfaction and commitment (Wahab et al., 2014), and improves school cultures (Allen et al., 2015). However, the main limitation of this approach is that leaders may manipulate or impose their personal values on
teachers by subjecting staff to their visions and intentions; leaders may adopt a top-down policies, that uses the language of transformation, and abandons the vision and goals at the individual school level (Bush, 2019).

3.2.5 Distributed Leadership

In all models of leadership discussed in this chapter, the role of an individual as a leader is central. In relation to school leadership, these models assume that the central role of the headteacher is that of leader. Spillane (2005) argued that distributed leadership does not prescribe what a leader should do, nor does it provide a particular framework that can be applied in respect of school effectiveness. It is a perspective which may be useful in conceptualising leadership. However, there have been attempts to include the shared leadership approach in leadership discourse. Bush (2019, p. 10) contends that distributed leadership is one of the most preferred models of shared leadership in 21st century application, one which should be understood by aligning it with the idea of an authority of an individual’s position. Consequently, this implies that distributed leadership undermines a central leadership role for an individual, but rather, it emphasises shared responsibility of staff-members based on their expertise. In stating their view, Harris & Spillane (2008, p. 31) noted, “A distributed perspective on leadership acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice, whether or not they are formally designated or defined as leaders.”

O’Donoghue and Clarke (2010) argued that in contemporary times in which the roles and responsibilities of school principals have steadily increased in complexity, traditional ways of assigning tasks and functions to an individual are becoming “increasingly obsolete,
and in many cases beyond one’s resource” (p. 63). In summarising how school principals can distribute leadership among teachers, based on Leithwood et al. (1999), the researchers offer the following advice:

- Setting directions – vision building, goal consensus and the development of high performance expectations;
- Developing teachers – providing individualised support, intellectual stimulation and the modelling of values and practices important to the mission of the school;
- Organising and building a culture in which colleagues are motivated by moral imperatives and structuring, fostering shared decision-making processes and problem solving capacities;
- Building relationships with the whole school community;
- Promoting collaboration within and across the school through networking.

(O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010, pp. 62-63)

These approaches are designed to identify the specific areas and ways in which leadership can be distributed. In doing so, these approaches may align with Spillane (2005, p. 150), in that “From a distributed perspective, leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers and situation”. In keeping with the recommendations provided by Leithwood et al. (1999), the interaction between all three components can be identified. Clearly, such practices require a distributed approach rather than one based on the traditional, centralised role of a school headteacher.
Harris & Spillane (2008) suggest three key reasons why distributed leadership is gaining popularity. First, this approach to leadership has ‘normative power’ that allows overburdened school leaders to distribute tasks and responsibilities to teachers and other staff members. Second, this approach has ‘representational power’, meaning that with the growing complexities in educational sectors, changing school practices require expanded areas of expertise in the leadership domain. Third, there is strong evidence base that distributed leadership is associated with positive organisational change and student learning outcomes.

3.2.6 Contingent Leadership

The crucial premise within contingent leadership is that no leadership models are a complete or perfect ‘fit’ given the range of situational and contextual challenges (Bush & Glover, 2003; Bush & Glover 2014; Bush 2019). As Bush (2019, p. 13) suggests, “Contingent leadership acknowledges the diverse nature of school contexts, and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to the particular situation, rather than adopting a ‘one size fit all’ stance.” As research indicates, contingent leadership aims to counter the prescriptive ideas implicit in various leadership models that allow the leaders to analyse their situations and select the appropriate leadership response according to their school contexts.

Vroom and Jago (2007, pp. 22-24) examine the role of situational factors in leadership and offer three suggestions. First, the effectiveness of any organisation is characterised by its situational factors, situations that cannot be controlled by the leader of that organisation. Therefore, the approach should focus on the influence of leadership in considering particular situations. Second, leadership behaviour is shaped by the environment and the situation that leaders operate in. Accordingly, it follows that leadership theories based
closely on individual differences, without considering the particular elements of situational influences on the leaders, cannot fully justify resultant leadership behaviour. Thirdly and finally, the outcomes of a leader’s behaviour are influenced by situations, meaning that a different situation can totally falsify already verified effective leadership style in another situation.

The leadership models described in this chapter have provided a brief overview of leadership approaches considered to be important in evaluating the headteachers participants in this study (Bush, 2019; O’Donoghue & Clarke, 2010). However, Bush (2019) advises that the importance of leadership theory is two-fold: to understand and interpret how leaders enact their leadership; and to be used by the end-users (educational leaders) as the guidelines for leadership practice. Therefore, these models have informed this study by providing insights into how school leaders in Nepal perform their leadership roles and responsibilities.

In conducting this research, I worked to certain assumptions of leadership gained from this literature review. First, I assumed that the better-performing headteachers would exhibit evidence of transformational leadership, in that they would focus on revitalising their school environments and the local communities in which they operated. The headteachers would reveal a concern for instructional leadership, in that they would display a distinct focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning within the school itself; a vital aspect of raising the quality of education that students receive, along with expanding their future expectations. At the same time, headteachers would display contingent leadership qualities in terms of the ways in which they might respond more astutely to situations that impact on outcomes for students, teachers, and the local school community. It was considered that less effective
headteachers would be more likely to favour managerial leadership or transactional leadership.

### 3.3 Contextual Significance in School Leadership

In exploring early research on the importance of context in school leadership, Bridges (1977) claims that the literature placed unnecessary importance on leaders prioritising school outcomes, without considering their contextual constraints. Similarly, Gronn and Ribbins (1996) maintain that there was a need for theorising the importance of context which the literature to date had ignored, believing that in reconsidering context, this changed approach would become “a vehicle through which the agency of particular leaders may be empirically understood” (p. 454). These early voices emphasise importance of context, resulting in more relevant research associated with context-responsive leadership research in the 1980s and 1990s.

An increasing body of research has examined and identified that there are diversities of contexts and accordingly, various responsive practices are necessary (Dimmock & Walker, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2008; Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Walker & Dimmock, 2004). In studying the challenges faced by small schools “viewing it from the inside”, Clarke and Wildy (2004, p. 555) claimed that “the contextual complexity of small school leadership warrants attention from researchers, policy makers and system administrators.” O’Donoghue and Clarke (2013; 2017; 2019) continued this argument, highlighting the significance of understanding the issues and problems of unique school contexts in order that school leaders could reflect these situational differences and accordingly, generate better decision-making processes.
As the discussion in this chapter has indicated, in an era of mass education, school leadership may be undermined if contextual or situational analysis does not take place. In search of bettering understandings of contextual diversity, Braun et al. (2011, p. 588) proposed the four contextual areas:

- Situated contexts (such as locale, school histories, intakes and settings).
- Professional contexts (such as values, teacher commitments and experiences, and ‘policy management’ in schools).
- Material contexts (e.g. staffing, budget, buildings, technology and infrastructure).
- External contexts (e.g. degree and quality of local authority support, pressures and expectations from broader policy context, such as Ofsted ratings, league table positions, legal requirements, and responsibilities).

These range of contexts were proposed in relation to policy enactment in similar schools, where the researcher examined each of dimensions that can be considered interdependent, with each of them able to influence policy development and implementation at the local school level. In keeping with the contextual research by Braun et al. (2011, Hallinger (2019, pp. 292-301) provides five types of contexts, those of institutional, community, national and cultural context, economic, and political. The first of these relates to the first three sets of contexts proposed by Braun et al. (2011), while the remaining four types align with the external context provided by Braun et al. (2011). The value of these categorisations is that they serve to conceptualise the types of contexts that will be relatable to the headteachers experienced by the participant headteachers in this Nepali-based research.
Clarke and O’Donoghue (2013) analysed the influence of context extensively, bringing together various studies on post-conflict societies such as Angola, Ghana, Kenya, Kosovo, Lebanon, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, the Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, and Timor-Leste. Such context specific studies, according to the authors, are crucial in determining:

… the issues and influences that school leaders face as they perform their work, the nature of the context within which these issues and influences arise, the strategies school leaders adopt to deal with the complexities of their work and the reasons behind these strategies. (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2013, p. 192)

Clarke and O’Donoghue summarise the contextual influences under three main themes “organisational learning, teacher learning and student learning” (2013, p. 192). These influences relate to organisational capacities and situations; teachers’ professional development; and students’ learning and development, respectively. First, dysfunctional or deteriorating organisational cultures and infrastructures have direct influences on schools’ cultures and on leadership capacities to introduce, implement, and nurture improvements. Secondly, unstable contexts led to weakened professional and intellectual capacities at that school level and with higher-level administrative authorities. Thirdly, students, the intended beneficiaries, may experience traumatic adjustment difficulties, along with a sense of loss or exploitation. Collectively, these troubles may pose challenges in terms of their academic and social development. As a nation, Nepal, situated within a post-conflict and post-disaster context, is facing the similar challenges in its educational systems and processes, major drivers in term of investing this study.
3.3.1 School Leadership and Culture

Cultural influences and impacts have received considerable attention from educational leadership scholars from the early 1980s, an extension from the discipline of anthropology (Gronn, 1999). Culture has since been juxtaposed with the concept of globalisation, in that the former refers to established sets of values, beliefs, and practices, while the latter assumes the spread of similar policies and practices across cultural, geographical, and political borders (Dimmock, 2002). As pointed out by Hallinger (2019), leadership literature for many years had ignored the existence of national cultural contexts, only beginning to receive attention from the mid-1990s. School leadership studies, mainly in developing nations and East Asia, concluded that socio-cultural factors reflected many effective school leadership practices in their culturally embedded contexts. Walker and Dimmock (2002), along with Dimmock and Walker (2004), championed the importance of understanding culture as an essential requirement in investigating leadership practice and quality. This is particularly relevant in the Nepali context as each successive chapter in this thesis demonstrates.

While culture is a difficult phenomenon to describe or measure, Walker and Dimmock (2002) proposed that it can be conceptualised at two levels that are based on structure, processes, and practices, together with organisational culture and societal culture. The authors maintained that it is possible for leaders to manage the organisational culture within their schools through deliberation and practice because it is superficial in nature and includes the modification of practices at organisational level. However, as argued, collective societal cultures are based on enduring beliefs and values that override those of the individual, and accordingly, are beyond an individual’s control and abilities to modify. As Walker and Haiyan (2019, p. 315) advise, “Deep structures, usually non-tangible and less
readily identifiable, exert substantial influences on school leaders”, a stance that reinforces the importance of undertaking in-depth studies that are targeted at understanding cultural influences in relation to school leadership.

Literature indicates an increasing number of studies aimed at exploring school leadership that incorporates cultural and societal perspectives. It is important to note the increasing international attention being paid to high-performing Asian education systems in Shanghai, Singapore, and South Korea and the reasons behind their academic success stories (Walker & Haiyan, 2019). However, most Southeast Asian countries continue to lag behind Western countries in terms of the number and depth of school leadership studies that consider cultural impacts (Walker & Hallinger, 2015). Although there is a vast difference between countries in Asia in terms of culture, economy, population, and political systems, South Asia remains one of the least represented regions in terms of generating empirical research relating to school leadership (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). With reference to Nepal, while there is an increasing amount of school leadership research being published, this material is limited.

The study being reported in this thesis is informed by investigating cultural realities and by understanding how community secondary school headteachers manage their schools, rather than relying alone on universally accepted models of school leadership. This research positioning reinforces the view that those who do not consider the cultural considerations in school leadership are outsiders, and those who view school leadership through the prism of cultural perspective are insiders. Outsiders may be influenced by culture in two ways:

1. Outsiders tend to be distracted by apparent cultural differences and attempt to refer to these differences as ‘lessons from elsewhere’.
2. Myriad contextual factors influence school systems and educational leadership. Culture alone cannot explain why an educational system is successful (or not). Any schooling or leadership practice has to be examined in its own social-historical-cultural context. (Walker & Haiyan, 2019, p. 321)

Walker and Haiyan’s argument consider that the positions that ignore cultural perspectives are at risk of undermining its societal role, along with other contextual factors which help shape school leadership processes and practices. Put simply, ignoring these perspectives makes it almost impossible to evaluate the quality of the leadership that is being investigated. However, there are other insiders’ risks given studying school leadership through only ‘culturalist’ perspective does not provide opportunities to identify shortcomings in their own cultures and education systems (Walker and Haiyan, 2019).

3.3.2 School Leadership and Diversity

While the issue of diversity has been a central topic in educational policy and practice discourse, it is often connected with the concept of inclusion (Lumby & Morrison, 2010). For Lumby (2019, p. 207), diversity in general refers to “a range of differences within a group or population.” However, the authors add that there are several contested meanings of diversity, with some that emphasise and prioritise diversity much so than others and some based on the perceived degree of differences. Similarly, conceptualising inclusion also varies given it emphasises a range of views across issues such as social justice, integrated society building, and economic equality (Lumby, 2019; Wang, 2016). Despite differences in the definitions of diversity and inclusion, there is general agreement that leaders and teachers should
acknowledge, appreciate, and value their students’ differences and be prepared to respond positively to these differences (Hernandez & Kose, 2012).

As research undertaken by Pollock and Briscoe (2019) found, school principals may hold four contrary understandings of student difference and diversity. These views comprise: (i) that all students are the same; (ii) that there are observable differences such as culture and ethnicity; (iii) that there are concealed differences such as academic and socioeconomic status; and (iv) that there are both visible and invisible differences. The researchers also found that the implications of these understandings varied, ranging from having no effect or impact on their leadership practices, to being one of the most important influences.

A key leadership dimension in recognising student diversity is referred to as cultural competence, the headteachers’ abilities, knowledge, and skills to readily understand and respond to diversity. To understand principals’ cultural competence in their situational contexts, Figure 1 uses the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and scaling that is based on Bennett (1986):

**Figure 1**

*Scale of Approaches to Diversity: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnocentric Orientation</th>
<th>Ethnorelative Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Adaption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 assists in understanding the concept of cultural competence at the individual school leader’s level, providing a way to analyse at what point they are in the intercultural sensitivity continuum and how that best reflects their leadership approaches. According to Hernandez and Kose (2012), the first and the most ethnocentric orientation is the scale of denial where an individual may refute and/or ignore the fact that there could be any cultural differences, as well as failing to consider that these differences have an influence on their own cultural identity and that of others. Defence encompasses those who believe in the supremacy of their culture compared to others, with minimisation involves minimising differences, working on the basis that people are broadly similar. The three scales of ethno-relative orientations to the right of the diagram are related to understanding, accepting, and appreciating others’ cultural values and changing the behaviour of self or helping to change the behaviour of others to encourage a more integrated society. The model proved to be particularly helpful as it provided a solid framework to understand the participant headteachers’ understandings of and responses to the multiple levels of diversity within their student populations, a unifying feature of Nepalese community school contexts.

### 3.3.3 School Leaders and Contextual Differences

Significant inequality in education due to socio-economic disparities is a worldwide phenomenon. As recent Nepalese studies investigating these areas have indicated, the intensity and complexity of inequality is intermingled with broader societal problems. For example, Devkota and Bagale (2015) discussed the problem of disparities in Nepal on the grounds of caste and ethnicity, class, gender, geographical regions, and religiosity, explaining and situating the problems of inequality in education in the light of cultural capital and social reproduction. In a broader but equally relevant context, Novelli (2016) demonstrated how
cultural, economic, and political injustices are related to pervasive inequalities in the global South, which includes developing Asian countries, and how education can improve the situation:

While education cannot resolve all of the inequalities outside its gates, it does not have to merely reproduce them. Instead, it can act as a beacon of inclusion, equity, justice and tolerance, and educate a new generation of citizens committed to social justice and solidarity whilst simultaneously equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for employment success. (p. 858)

When analysing the post-conflict situation in Nepal in relation to educational reform, Phareli (2014) urged stakeholders to correct “the legacy of ethnic, linguistic and caste-based marginalisation” (p. 49). In another study that focused on gender inequalities, Panthhe and McCutcheon (2015) showed that educational attainment levels were higher, and gender discrimination was less prevalent, in the urban areas compared to the rural areas of Nepal. This was because urban areas had more accessible schools with more adequate infrastructure and resources. These studies support the view that education can be both the means and the end for either intensifying the problems or providing pathways to resolution as “Schools, it must be remembered, can do harm as well as good in the development of people and societies” (Philips & Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 98).

The issues of inequality and marginalisation in relation to education not only trigger problems in Nepal and similar developing countries, but they have also been identified in developed countries. “Reaching the excluded and the marginalized actually involves educational initiatives in relation to the majority of the world’s people, the marginalized
majority” (Brock, 2011, p. 67). It is considered that Brock’s term ‘marginalized majority’ is applicable in Nepalese society. As Brock (2011) contended, this category is extensive. It includes people living in extreme poverty, as well as experiencing modern day slavery, and people who are economically exploited in working conditions. It also includes socio-economically marginalised women; orphans; vulnerable children; poorly trained teachers and the parents relying on them; illiterate adults and indigenous communities. Collectively they can be described as the majority of people in this world. Consequently, socio-economic disparities, in both global and local contexts, represented a multi-faceted research focus in this study’s research into educational leadership.

In relating socio-economic disparities to school education, there have been attempts to in research to address the issues of inequality in different parts of the world. For example, studies focusing on socio-demographic attributes, such as unfortunate populations living in deprived and geographically disadvantaged areas, revealed lower social mobility, lower academic attainment in secondary schools, and reduced performance in higher education (Parson, 2013; Rolleston & Krutikova, 2014; Thiele, et al., 2016). Similarly, a study by Engel et al. (2016) indicated that disadvantaged populations in the United States of America (USA), a developed nation that has substantial gaps in educational attainment and income when compared to similar countries, raised concerns about schools’ abilities to ‘close the gap’. In discussing the segmentation of private and public schools, Saravi (2015) pointed out that his research uncovered “what undermines the expectations of equal opportunity placed on educational inclusion. It also implies deep differences in students’ social experiences and meanings of education” (p.159). Similarly, in an urban context, Rhodes and Warkentien (2017) maintained, “Metropolitan patterns of racial residential segregation interact with
families’ resources and constraints to reproduce racial inequalities in educational opportunities across suburban districts” (p.169).

However, Chiu and Walker (2007) argued that school leaders can act to reduce inequality in schools and promote social justice by developing “understandings of their own value stances and those within their communities” and using strategies that serve as “change efforts simultaneously on structural and cultural mechanisms” (p. 732). The strategies required, the researchers argued, include developing caring environments in schools by building academically-positive, student-teacher relationships; widening the reward structure for teachers and students as a way to support efforts to improve students’ academic and social achievements; flattening the status hierarchy at both ends of the continuum; communicating clear sets of goals and standards that acknowledge inequalities; and adopting more transparent and democratic ways of decision-making.

In addition to the details of Nepali context of education in Chapter 2, the literature in the previous paragraphs has provided valuable contextual and empirical evidence to understand the perspectives and actions of community school leaders in Nepal. The study reported in this thesis does investigate how Nepali community school leaders understand and respond to the situated context of unique setting, culture, diversity and disparity in the school and school community they operate. It is particularly important to understand the headteachers’ situation from their own perspective and identify what makes them, or does not make them, context-effective leaders.
3.4 School Leadership in Developing Countries

School leadership in developing countries has received relatively little attention in research literature until the late 20th and early 21st century. From the available research, many of the conceptual models and school leadership theories were shaped according to Western world connotations of social and institutional systems, viewpoints that continue to dominate this field (Oplatka, 2004). The reasons behind the lack of research into school leadership in developing countries was acknowledged by Simkins et al. (2003) as researchers considered that research in developing countries failed to focus on the change and improvement at the individual school level, concentrating their research on investigating “top-down, system-wide change” and “highly bureaucratized education systems” in which schools gave little importance to headteachers’ leadership roles (p. 276).

Among these researchers, Harbor and Davies (1997) advise that six dimensions characterised developing nations’ educational contexts. These are: demographic (i.e., illiteracy and gender discrimination); economic (i.e. families in poverty, and lower levels of, or non-existent, social welfare); resources (i.e. lack of school facilities and educational materials); violence (i.e. schools affected by conflict); health (i.e. malnutrition and diseases); and culture (i.e. traditional beliefs, corruption, and nepotism). Many or all these situations, according to Oplatka (2004), continue to exist, to varying degrees, in developing countries, extending the argument that such patently different contexts cannot be adequately addressed through Western models of leadership. Oplatka contends that these issues should be addressed through context-effective leadership.
In identifying a list of constraints that hinder school leadership in developing countries, Bush (2008) included: limited budgets for school and principal preparation; underqualified principals; lack of capacity in institutional structures for recruitment and development of effective school principals; lack of support and supervision for teaching staff working in rural areas; and shortages of qualified teachers and support material. Bush’s suggestions to deal with these problems, that are based on contextual needs rather than the application of specific models of leadership development, can be summarised in three key strategies as: i) a provision of in-service training for principals utilising limited resources for newly appointed head teachers that helps them get ready for the roles and familiarise them to the specific settings; ii) complementary ‘train the trainer’ courses, possibly linking the training to a qualification for those principals for their motivation and better status in the communities; and iii) the development of precise job descriptions for the principals and requirement of additional job experience of the candidates.

Although evidence from one developing country cannot always be generalised to other developing countries as their situations may differ (Oplatka, 2004), two developing countries in South Asia, Pakistan, and Bhutan, were found to have more robust systems in appointing headteachers. In Pakistan, there is a clearly defined qualification requirement for the recruitment of headteachers which includes a post-graduate qualification combined with a relevant educational degree (Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018). Similarly, Beri and Tenzin (2019) described a rigorous process of recruitment in Bhutan where the qualification requirement requires a Master’s degree in a relevant area or a Bachelor’s degree with additional requirements. However, Moorosi and Bush (2011) reiterated findings in terms of the inadequacy in principal preparation and pre-service training for school leaders as enduring problems in school leadership in the developing countries.
In a review of school leadership studies in developing countries, Oplatka (2004) identifies discrepancies in school leaders’ views on particular management styles and issues. More prominent views included adopting an autocratic leadership style; focusing on day-to-day managerial tasks, and maintenance rather than leading school change; lack of attention to staff and curriculum development; and, most importantly, reluctance towards adopting an instructional leadership approach. However, a separation of views was observed in the case of Southeast Asian countries compared to African, Mexican, and Middle Eastern countries, in that some principals had prioritised instructional leadership, setting goals, and sharing visions (Oplatka, 2004).

In relation to school leadership in developing countries, Wolhuter et al. (2016) argued that organisational improvement and effective leadership cannot be achieved without fully understanding the local context and challenges. The researchers contended that school principals would also strive for school improvement given educational changes in the global context, arguing that:

Educational leaders in developing countries are not only challenged to keep up with developments in the world, just as their counterparts in more developed parts of the world might be, but they have the additional task of taking account of both intra- and extra-institutional contextual developments that might be unique to their particular situations as leaders of schools in developing countries. (Wolhuter et al., p. 6)

Given the minimal research literature available on leadership in post-conflict, developing nations that Clarke & O’Donoghue (2013) noted nearly a decade ago, there
appears to be a growing interest (Hallingar & Walker, 2017). As a developing country, Nepal is experiencing a period of reconstruction in all areas, including education. This reconstruction is overdue, in part from its decade-long civil war and from the natural disasters of 2015. Given this post-conflict and post-disaster context, it follows that directing research attention to investigating how school headteachers are coping with the ongoing impacts of historic contexts is vital in gaining current perspectives of issues that school leaders encounter in their schools. The following section provides an overview of the literature in this important area.

3.5 School Leadership in Post-Conflict Contexts

It is generally accepted that conflict in any society tends to have significant, educational systemic impact on students, teachers, and the local school communities. Trauma and anxiety, displacement, destruction, loss of life, unemployment, decreased productivity and anarchy are some common aftermaths of the conflict, which are evident in various parts of the world (INSEC, 2020). Insights into how school leaders in such situations cope with the multiple levels of diversity is important as it can “serve as a precursor to engaging in empirical case-study research to generate robust examples of school leadership exercised in post-conflict environments” (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2013, p. 205).

Although it is well known that there are immediate impacts of conflict on school leadership, there has been little research on how headteachers of schools in their contexts cope with the aftermath of conflict at the individual school. The few available, published research studies on the post-conflict in developing countries includes Cambodia (Kheang et al., 2018); Kenya (Lauritzen, 2016; Wanjiru 2018); Rwanda (Karareba et al., 2018); and
Uganda (Crary & Miller, 2017). These studies demonstrate the growing research interest in providing snapshots of country-specific, theoretical perspectives as well as the practical implications implicit in context-based research in post-conflict situations.

In undertaking a study in post-conflict Angola, a country in Southern Africa, Davis (2013, p. 38) discussed four main challenges in school leadership that included “lack of initiative; lack of collaboration and of democracy; acceptance of violence or immunity; and shaky teacher professionalism with a less than motivated teaching force”. These challenges reflected the cultural, economic, and political context of Angola (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2013). In a study of post-conflict Rwanda, a landlocked African country, Earnest (2013) described challenges, and factors such as resilience and optimism, that school headteachers experienced after 18 years of genocide. This study also explained how the school principals carried out both organisational and community functions, emphasising the importance of their active participation that extended well beyond organisational responsibilities. Overall, these studies highlight the implications for post-conflict societies’ contexts in the areas of school reform, professional development for teaching staff, and students’ learning outcomes.

Clarke and O’Donoghue (2020) suggest several research considerations as a result of studies undertaken in the post-conflict nations of Cambodia, Rwanda, Serbia, and Timor-Leste, all of which incorporate historical backgrounds of, and the latest developments in, primary school leadership. In the study of Rwandan school headteachers, the key research issues identified were dealing with conflict prevention, the degree of staff members’ professionalism, parental disengagement, inadequacy of educational resources, and declining student enrolment numbers. In addition, research indicated that school leaders were using managerial leadership strategies to deal with these issues Karareba et al. (2017).
In the Cambodian study, Kheang et al. (2018) observed three major issues challenging school headteachers which included administrative issues such as political influence; instructional issues such as teacher shortages; and curriculum-related issues such as peace education. In turn, Rebeiro et al. (2020) found headteachers’ four main areas of concern in post-conflict Timor-Leste related to: teaching and learning processes (e.g., language of instruction); inadequate textbooks and large numbers of students in all classes; infrastructure problems (e.g., no school fences and working in damaged buildings); and absence of leadership development opportunities (e.g., typically practising distributed leadership approaches to deal with school management matters).

3.6 Empirical Literature: Educational Leadership in Nepal

Nepal, as described in Chapter 2, is both a developing country and a country that has experienced conflict and major natural disaster that resulted in significant national and local costs and consequences. In the Nepalese context, there has been limited educational research activities in the crucial area of educational leadership. Hallingar and Chen (2015), in their systematic review of leadership literature, argued, “Asian scholarship in educational leadership and management remains in the early stages of development. Knowledge production is highly uneven across the continent, with only a few pockets of research excellence” (p.5). According to the researchers, in comparison to other parts of Asia, South Asia has fewer research communities.

In Nepal, there were few studies on educational leadership, especially in relation to headteachers’ leadership approaches, until the restoration of democracy in 1990. However,
the research output in this area is gradually increasing. For example, Amatya et al. (2004) studied headteacher leadership in relation to school effectiveness, finding that: they self-initiated promotional activities designed to increase access, enrolment, and participation; that they became involved in various fund-raising programs for school improvement; that they sought to improve the quality of education by maintaining discipline, motivation, supervision, and providing additional support and collaboration; and that they had developed strategies for engagement with local communities and external organisations. Although this study did not focus on the perspectives and priorities of these headteachers, the research findings provided greater understandings of exemplary headteachers roles and responsibilities in bringing about change and improved leadership performances in Nepal.

In carrying out a leadership study on middle-level leadership roles (i.e., vice-principal, co-ordinators, and teachers-in-charge) in private Nepalese schools, Kafle (2013) discussed the level of distributed leadership practices being used and note that their roles in decision-making were limited. Rajbhandari (2011) conducted a case study of a community school in relation to public-private partnerships, identifying key areas that needed improvement. These included the School Management Committee’s leadership roles, infrastructure development, and the delivery of quality education. In another comparative study of schools in Nepal and Finland, Rajbhandari (2013) revealed that a transformational leadership approach was successful in generating considerable reforms in relation to improving schools’ environments, achieved by adopting specific, task-oriented and outcomes-oriented, flexible leadership approaches.

In undertaking a comparative study of private schools in Nepal and Singapore in relation to the preparation of school principals, Pokharel (2014, p. 15) concluded that,
“Nepalese private school principals should contribute to collective professional knowledge, through an experience and idea generated from Singaporean private school principals”. In this study, Pokharel argued for greater autonomy for teachers’ decision-making and participatory decision-making, emphasising the significance of distributed leadership approaches. However, this study did not incorporate any aspects of public schooling within broader societal contexts. Pokharel’s (2015, p. 35) second study related to private school leadership found that “school leaders act as an actor that helps in formatting school vision in a transformative way” (Pokharel, 2015; p. 35). In this study, considerations were given to the theoretical assumptions of transformational leadership that did not include any contextually relevant issues that aligned with the community school system in Nepal.

With literature on the Nepalese educational system and school leadership beginning to attract national and international scholars’ interest in the early post-conflict period, Shields and Rappleye (2008, p. 91) argued:

…throughout the conflict formal education in Nepal has simultaneously presented many faces: on one hand it contributed to the conflict by reinforcing social inequalities while on the other it mitigated the effects of the conflict by maintaining social cohesion and mediating between opposing sides.

With these words, Shields and Rappleye argued that education had played dual roles, constructing the background for, and of enduring, conflict in Nepal. Accordingly, the view that educational reconstruction should address the existing social inequalities is evidence-based (Pherali, 2011; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Standing & Parker, 2011). In a study on school headteachers and teachers, Pherali (2016) studied the impacts of Nepal’s armed conflict
between 1996 and 2006, investigating how schools dealt with direct violence within their schools and in their local communities. The researcher discovered that school headteachers were traumatised and victimised in several ways that included abductions by the rebel groups, financial extortion, physical threats, and harassment by the Government’s security forces.

Khanal (2011) studied community school management focusing on the impacts of decentralisation in teacher management, pointing out some of the limitation of headteachers, for instance, insufficient authority in decision-making in terms of teacher management. The researcher concluded that both political and educational system needed to focus on the specific characteristics of individual schools and their local communities if efficient school management was to be achieved. In examining another area, as the literature on school leadership confirms, one of the shortcomings is the lack of parental and community participation. Since the inception of decentralisation practices and structural reforms within Nepal’s local school authorities, building community capacity required parental involvement, an issue largely ignored by local political parties with educational governance responsibilities (Edwards, 2011; Khanal, 2013).

Given the post-conflict situation within Nepal, Neupane (2017) found that students from ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups, including girls, had lower school attainment outcomes, the main reasons for this being that they were required to fulfil household tasks. This research finding was underpinned by factors such as the educational level of their parents, families having inadequate land as a source of income, inadequate student-to-teacher ratios, and ethnic diversity in the community.
More recently, Neupane (2019) has proposed a five-step model for policy development targeting the decentralised authority at local levels. This model requires significant effort and resources in dealing with the multiple levels of diversity in the community (e.g., ethnic groups and resultant inequalities), recognising barriers to school attainment (e.g., socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructure), policy development and implementation based on the first and second steps, improved decision-making flowing from the previous steps, and assessing the societal and educational outcomes. The findings of Devkota and Upadhyay (2016) aligned with those of Neupane (2017), in that school attainment and educational inequalities in Nepal were determined by socio-demographic and economic factors that included income levels, urbanisation, and the remoteness of many schools. However, these studies focused on wider policy contexts rather than educational leadership at the individual school level.

Singh and Allison (2016) studied headteachers from higher-performing and lower-performing schools, concluding that the former were more adept in setting goals focused on learning outcomes, developing positive school cultures, managing resources, working in teams, maintaining positive relationships with parents, and demonstrating a strong commitment towards academic success. The headteachers in lower-performing schools seemed overwhelmed by the challenges confronting them in their environments. In a study of three award-winning community schools in Nepal, Khanal (2019) identifies successful headteachers as being proactive, collaborative, open and approachable to parents and teachers, focused on employing highly qualified teachers, and committed to reducing politicisation in schools.
Given the expansion of private schools in Nepal, determining the benefits that they provide and the impact of this sector on community schools has been a focus of research interest. A study by Koirala (2015) argued that access and equity were the key disparities between private and community school systems. As private schools are expensive for parents with limited incomes to access for their children, the researcher suggested that a solution may be reached by developing private and community school partnerships. Subedi et al. (2012) indicated the increasing number of private schools operating is due to the lower quality of education provided by community schools. Similarly, Thapa (2015) conducted a comparative analysis of the performance of students with similar academic abilities and achievements as listed in board examinations, finding that private school students’ results were higher than community school students. In turn, Ezaki (2018) identifies an interesting pattern in student enrolment whereby some similarly aged students had to start at a grade more than two years lower when they transferred from community to private schools. Conversely, if former private school students transferred to community schools, they were upgraded by one or two years.

In another study of the private school sector, Joshi (2019) explains that private schools in urban areas were diverse in size, educational range and had a range of fee structures according to grade levels. On the other hand, private schools in regional areas were smaller in terms of educational range and had similar fee structures regardless of grade level. However, the data demonstrates that private schools in both in urban areas and in regions were thriving. In contrast, the government-funded community schools had suffered a considerable decline in terms of student enrolments. A series of recent media reports highlighted the plight of community schools, claiming that one school had only one student, irrespective of staff numbers; that there was little evidence of sound, systematic community
school management processes in relation to maintenance and operation; and that leadership was lacking or non-existent (Tripathi, 2018). In a Nepalese study comparing the headteachers’ expected levels of competency and the realities, Thapa (2017) found that community schools’ headteachers had lower competency levels than anticipated and that these levels were considerably lower than those of private school headteachers.

3.7 Contextual and Empirical Literature Review Summary

Augmented by the contextual information provided in Chapter 2, the literature reviewed in this chapter has focused on the key themes that situated the study at its outset and were also important in later stages, through data-generation and data analysis, to inform the research findings. The relationship between difficult and diverse contexts and school education and its management, while specific to Nepal, also reflect broader, worldwide concerns. Globally, dealing with both historic and contextual issues have been found to have wide-ranging, across-domain impacts that include cultural, economic, educational, and political matters. However, as educational leadership approaches are used within particular contexts, there is a requirement to investigate these approaches in equivalent contexts.

It seems clear that the present context of existing disparities is deeply embedded in the historic contextual realities of Nepal. Caste discrimination; marginalisation of indigenous groups, their languages, and their communities; ongoing post-conflict and post-disaster situational impacts; and political interests of different ruling governments represent the major historic factors. Additionally, the influence of universalisation of education, external Western donors’ influence in policymaking, and the growing number of private schools may have contributed to, even exacerbated, the situation. At present, the circumstances in Nepal reflect
a myriad of diversity issues and the multiple disparities within it. Community schools in Nepal are a part of that context, and as such, there are manifold challenges in relation to their management and operational systems. Similarly, the complexities of the Nepalese context are increasingly challenging for community school headteachers as they endeavour to manage their schools, often with limited resources to meet their communities’ expectations. Importantly, the problems of operating within the current, confusing, and convoluted policy frameworks have been intensified by decentralisation in the post-conflict period.

Many of regulatory and policy frameworks guiding school education have been modified and changed in response to the historical changes in the ruling systems in Nepal. However, these changes have become more frequent and broad ranging since 1990 due to major political developments and their aftermaths. Subsequently, the issues of disparity and inequality have been at the core of targeted, policy-level reforms. However, the experiences from previous educational plans demonstrate, that effectiveness of those policy implementations have not been fully achieved. Currently, the main educational reform plan in effect, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), incorporates strategies to deal with the issues of access, equity, participation, and inclusive education, the realisation of an equitable education system. In line with the spirit of federalism and further decentralisation, these strategies signal greater roles for the local school-governing and school management agencies. However, in doing so, this policy context contributes to the complexities that headteachers in Government community schools must deal with.

In summary, gaining a better understanding of community headteachers leadership approaches represents an under-researched area despite the steadily increasing number of studies undertaken in Nepal. In most of the school leadership research studies which have
concentrated on comparing community schools with schools in other, dissimilar contexts, mere academic achievement and policy identification alone may not be sufficient to understand community school leadership at the individual school level. As the overview of literature indicates, studies that focus specifically on how headteachers give meaning to their historic contexts, and how they respond to these contexts according to their understandings are necessary. In undertaking an in-depth study of headteachers perspectives, among the first of its kind in Nepal, will generate evidence-based findings that contribute to knowledge-building and theory development in the crucial area of school leadership.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the contextual and theoretical literature review that has comprehensively situated school leadership and informed knowledge-building in this Nepal-based study. As the purpose of this study was to develop theory, these contributions maximised opportunities to address and investigate how participant community headteachers’ managed their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in their post-conflict, post-disaster contexts. The next chapter discusses in detail the research design, methodology, and methods used in this qualitative, multi-case study.
Chapter 4
Research Design, Methodology, and Methods

The previous chapter concluded the contextual and theoretical literature review that comprehensively situated school leadership in this Nepal-based study. As the purpose of this study is to build theory, these contributions from literature maximised opportunities to address and investigate how participant community headteachers managed their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in their post-conflict, post-disaster contexts. In turn, this chapter discusses the research design, methodology, and methods used in this study. The structure of this chapter is based on the four dimensions of Crotty’s (1998) scaffolding processes or research framework, epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Logically connected with one another, these dimensions offer researchers “a sense of stability and direction” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

According to Crotty, a theory of knowledge is embedded in the philosophical stance that informs the design of a research study, which in turn influences techniques and procedures used to generate and analyse data. In keeping with this framework, the first section explains the epistemology and theoretical perspectives underpinning this research inquiry. The second section describes the methodology that aligns with the philosophical considerations purposefully chosen to address the central research question and the subsequent guiding questions most effectively. The third section provides details of the methods that were used in data-generation and how the data was analysed. The fourth and final section discusses the importance of establishing and maintaining research quality standards and ethical considerations, how they were considered, and how they were addressed throughout the research stages.
4.1 Epistemology and Theoretical Perspectives

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge with which a researcher establishes “how knowledge is generated and accepted as valid” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 9) in line with the research purpose. The epistemology underpinning this study was constructionism, based on the view that “truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). According to Crotty, meaning can be wide-ranging and manifold, enabling the researcher to explore “a process of interaction among individuals... [focusing on] specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). As this study aims to explore the context, worldviews, and experiences of the Nepali Government’s (the Government) community school headteachers in coping with the multiple levels of adversity and diversity in the school situations, the epistemology of constructionism is justified. This positioning is also in line with an interpretivist theoretical perspective that justifies qualitative inquiry (Crotty, 1998).

Gibson (2017) argued that the epistemology of constructionism and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism are so closely aligned that many researchers often combine them into a single statement or paradigm. In this study, these components are separated in that the theoretical perspective is likened to a lens through which the researcher explores the research topic. One theoretical perspective embedded with interpretivism is that of symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998). As symbolic interactionism positions the theory in the design framework of this study, it is important to recall Blumer’s (1969) three premises. The first premise considers that humans assign their own meanings to people and/or things, and that they act towards people or things based on the meanings they hold for them. The second
premise considers that these meanings are derived from, or arise out of, social interaction and that these symbolic meanings may be further customised through continuous processes as consequences of their interaction with other people. As O’Donoghue (2007, p. 19) noted, “Meaning is acquired from one’s experience of the world and because one is constantly interacting with the world that meaning may be confirmed, modified, reinforced, or changed”. The third premise involves the customisation of these meanings, encompassing “an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Through this process, “individuals align their actions with others and with groups... [and] shared meanings are attributed to the full range of objects that comprise the human experience” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 19).

O’Donoghue (2019) further suggests that taking a symbolic interactionist view directs researchers to one of two types of studies. The first study aims to generate theory based on the perspectives which participants hold with regards to something. He refers to these as “frozen in time” studies, in that they are concerned with the meanings that people hold towards the phenomenon under investigation at a given point in time. The second type of study aims to generate theory based on how participants “manage”, “deal with”, ‘or “cope with” a phenomenon (p. 30). O’Donoghue refers to these as “longitudinal” (2019, p. 32) in that they are concerned with meanings that may develop or change over time.

The study reported in this thesis reflects the longitudinal approach of this study as the focus of the research is on how different community headteachers in Nepal, whose schools’ contexts are embedded in circumstances of trauma from conflict and catastrophe, give meaning to their situational contexts over time. As managing and leading a school is a
continually changing and constantly evolving set of processes, the longitudinal nature of this study is crucial.

O’Donoghue (2007) claimed that the value of considering symbolic interactionism as a theoretical approach within a research study is that “it can uncover people’s perspective on a phenomenon... [and] the actions that people take in the light of their perspectives” (p. 20). As this research investigates the perspectives of community school headteachers in Nepal, the following theoretical questions or principles were fundamental to inquiring into their perspectives in relation to: how they assigned meaning to their roles; how they interacted within their school contexts and other people in relation to their roles; and what interactive processes were involved in the customisation of their meanings and, in turn, their actions. In adopting O’Donoghue’s (2019) research framing processes, this research constitutes the second type of study, which aimed at generating theory around Nepalese community schools headteachers’ leadership perspectives and practice. Given this research design, a theoretical positioning that is underpinned by symbolic interactionism, the central research question is:

**How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?**

In turn, the subsidiary or guiding questions were developed to inform the data-generation methods used in this study:

1. How do the Nepalese community school headteachers understand the historic contexts of the school in which they operate?

2. How do the Nepalese community school headteachers respond to the historic contexts of their schools?
3. What individual leadership perspectives, traits, and values do the Nepalese community school leaders hold, and how do they influence the outcomes of dealing with their school contexts?

**4.2 Research Design: Multiple-Case Studies**

In line with Crotty’s (1998) research scaffolding framework, the third dimension is the research design that “is not only a description of the methodology but also an account of the rationale it provides for the choice of methods and the particular forms in which the methods are employed” (p.7). De Vaus (2001) classified four types of social science research designs, any one of which essentially has the ability to frame social science research: experimental design; longitudinal design; cross-sectional design; and case study design. From these four designs, this research employed a case study design, and in this case a multiple-case study.

Yin (2014) defines a case study as a method of inquiry for an in-depth analysis of a case, the phenomenon being studied. According to Yin, case study design refers to both “single- and multiple-case studies” (p. 18); the latter has value as it can be employed for cross-case conclusions. The reasons for choosing multiple-case studies as the design for this research lay in Yin’s (2014) three central guidelines. First, using a case study approach is useful in central and guiding research questions that seek the answers to the ‘how’, ‘what’, or ‘why’ questioning. As will be recalled, the central research question in this study seeks to discover how community school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities. Second, Yin (2014) argued that such an approach suits the circumstances in which a researcher cannot control the participants’ behavioural actions and responses. The
qualitative study in this thesis aligns with these viewpoints in that the research is concerned with describing reportable or observed behaviours, not interventions. To better understand community school headteachers’ aims and intentions towards their educational leadership roles and priorities, the perspectives of these headteachers constitute collective responses as individuals, their understandings of their roles, organisational processes, governing policy frameworks, and their interactions with stakeholder groups that include management committees, teachers, and students. Third, Yin considers that using case study approaches is useful in research that involves “direct observation of the events being studied, and interviews of the persons involved in the events” (Yin, 2014, p. 12). Collectively, Yin’s three case study guidelines justify the selection of a multiple-case approach, given that the perspectives and experiences of six Nepalese community school headteachers at six different school sites are being sought as they manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in post-conflict, post-disaster contexts.

### 4.3 Research Methods

The fourth dimension of Crotty’s (1998) research scaffolding involves the research methods used in this study, the substantial planning that included identifying the research sites, participant selection and sampling size, data-generation techniques, and the most appropriate analytical approach and interpretation. Below are the subsections to describe these methods.
4.3.1 Research Sites and Participants

A research site in qualitative studies is usually prearranged, based on “the research purposes, the need for the research, what gave rise to the research, the problem to be addressed and the research questions and sub-questions” (Cohen et al., 2010, p. 174). With these considerations in mind, six community school headteachers were selected from Province 1, one of seven in Nepal. To date many of these provinces remain unnamed. This province is located in the eastern-most region in the nation and continues north to south from Mount Everest, including many of the highest Himalayan peaks, down to the riverine plains of the Koshi River. It is an ethnically diverse region with at least 14 different groups or castes among a population estimated at 4.5 million people (CBS, 2011). This region with its demographic, geographical, and socio-economic diversity was considered ideal in meeting the aims of the study seeking a better understanding of how the community school headteachers gave meaning to the complex contexts in which they worked and lived.

Among various purposive sampling procedures, Palinkas et al. (2015, p.3) argued that maximum variation sampling involves and should be used “for the purpose of documenting unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions, and to identify important common patterns that cut across variations”. In keeping with these considerations, the six participants were selected from six different community schools providing education from Grades 1 to 12. In Nepal, such schools are known as secondary schools.

The criteria that enabled variation in this study were: the location of the secondary schools in which the headteachers were currently working; their professional experience;
their gender; and their ethnic background. In terms of school locations, three were
headteachers employed in rural secondary schools in disadvantaged areas, while the other
three were employed in suburban areas. By way of explanation, districts within Province 1
contain two contextual levels; one was disadvantage and/or remoteness, and the other one of
urban or suburban. Remote or rural schools differ from the semi-suburban schools in that the
former are either relatively inaccessible or are in poor communities, and these might have
impacted heavily on the resources available to the school headteachers. These contextual
categories are representative of most community schools in Nepal. This range of case study
locations and school settings enabled data-generation from purposefully choses participants,
information that would not be possible from randomly selected participants (Maxwell, 1998).
Table 1 below outlines the six participants in terms of the context they were drawn from and
other demographic features.

Table 1 Demographic Information of the Participant Headteachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headteachers</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Schools' Name</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Experience (teaching)</th>
<th>Experience (headteacher)</th>
<th>Student Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samira Giri (Mr)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Motherland Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>10 years +</td>
<td>150 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamal Tamang (Mr)</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Hillview Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>25 years +</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>450 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teknath Baral (Mr)</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Greenfield Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>30 years +</td>
<td>3 years +</td>
<td>1400 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganesh Acharya (Mr)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Forest Secondary</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>35 years +</td>
<td>2 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanashyam Niroula (Mr)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Lakeside Secondary</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>5 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogendra Pokharel (Mr)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Highway Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>20 years +</td>
<td>4 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A significant consideration in participant sampling, and for choosing specific research
sites from one province, was for reasons of convenience, purpose, and accessing context-
specific data. As I live in Province 1, I was familiar with the physical geography, the different
cultures, ethnic groups; and with the languages spoken in this province. Given budgetary constraints, and restricted travel timelines, the areas in Nepal in which I could study effectively and efficiently were limited. Using my local contextual knowledge, I was able to approach community schools that would provide a diversity of case study participants, and in turn, a range of unique perspectives and experiences in the data-generation methods. Initially, the aim was to invite and select three headteachers from three different districts in the province. However, when going into the field, with future data-generation in mind, it seemed clear that a broader range of potential case study participants was necessary, each working in unique contexts. Therefore, to maximise data-generation with a cross-case study analysis in mind, six community secondary school headteachers from three different districts were selected as the participants of this study.

4.3.2 Data-Generation Methods

Aligned with the interpretive nature of this study and the tenets of qualitative research, data-generation involved: interviews, informal participant observation, and document and physical artifacts analysis. Of these approaches, interviews were the main data source, while the others contributed to enriching research findings that emerged from data analysis.

4.3.2.1 Interviews

In line with constructionist epistemology and a symbolic interactionist-underpinned theoretical perspective, interviews were crucial in exploring the perspectives and meanings that the different headteachers held in relation to their school contexts, students and their parents, and their local communities. Cohen et al. (2010) emphasised that qualitative, guided,
and open-ended interview questions fulfill the purpose of obtaining information about an individual’s worldview, explaining that interviews are “flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard” (p. 249). In using a case study approach, using guided conversations is single, most important source of evidence (Yin, 2014). Therefore, a guided conversation, also referred to as a semi-structured interview, follows the pattern of a purpose-based inquiry, making use of conversational, open-ended questions.

Semi-structured interviews may also be referred to as in-depth interviews because these interviews aim to discover the interviewees’ own perspectives, rather than the researcher’s concerns (Bryman, 2008). Using interviews in a semi-structured format is a flexible format, as opposed to following a standard set of questions to be asked with the designated interview framework. This flexibility helps to create positive rapports with the participants, a way to encourage headteachers to issues that are important to them in their school settings.

A copy of the interview guide designed to ensure that the direction of the conversation was targeted to achieving the answers in keeping with central and guiding research questions is provided in Appendix C. Importantly, the interviews allowed participants to elaborate on matters meaningful to them, providing the opportunity to give detailed answers in their own way and in their own words. This interview approach was successful in identifying additional significant issues that emerged during the interviewing. For example, the majority of participants described in detail the challenges in competing with private schools, citing unethical practices and intrusive sentiments, regardless of directly asking these issues. Moreover, based on participants’ responses, further prompts or queries were also made.
Therefore, the interview guide was in the form of an ‘aide memoire’, guiding the researcher over specific topics that were oriented towards the research problem and questions. The sequence of questioning and wording of questions were similar in each schedule, but the direction of each interview, once underway, was never identical, reflective of the conversational dimension of each interview and the rapport established with each participant.

As the medium of communication with all participants, all interviews were conducted in Nepali language. Although some headteachers were more than competent in English, when asked about their language preferences prior to the interviews, Nepali was preferred. Using the Nepali language enabled them to feel more comfortable during the interviews, seemingly more open and franker in their responses, and better able to provide detailed reflections using their own cultural imagery, metaphors, and terms. My Nepali nationality and local knowledge were essential in understanding and interpreting the participants’ perspectives and reflections.

Interview questions were based on the research problem, which in turn, were informed by the major themes identified in the literature review. The themes explored in the interviews included: (i) the historic contexts of the schools; (ii) their views on the restructured systems of educational governance, (iii) the internal and external challenges they identified; (iv) the strategies they used to cope with these challenges; (v) their perspectives on community relations; (vi) their perspectives on job satisfaction; and (vii) how they understood and evaluate the performance of their community schools. As the nature of this study was to be descriptive rather than exploratory (De Vaus, 2001), in line with the research questions, taking opportunities to engage the participants in lengthier, more detailed, and descriptive answers was crucial. Based on the participants’ responses, prompts and related questions were essential in exploring new foci.
For participants’ comfort and convenience, and to meet Edith Cowan University’s Human Resource Ethics Committee requirements, the participants chose the place and time of the interviews. Of the six participants, five participants chose to be interviewed within their school premises; three of those chose their own office as the venue, and two chose quiet, empty classrooms. However, one participant eventually chose to be interviewed in an office of an external organisation of which he was a member. While pleasant to conduct that interview in an air-conditioned room on a very hot summer’s day, the participant considered the venue as being “less noisy” and “more comfortable”. The duration of all interviews ranged from 45 minutes to over an hour. During the interviews, three participants seemed relatively more articulate and confident, while other three seemed somewhat cautious, reluctant, and more discrete or diplomatic. As the research findings later indicated, these two types of interview responses aligned with the two, distinct school leadership styles.

All interviews were recorded on a digital, audio-recording Smartpen™. The advantages associated with this assistive technology device included: its substantial recording capacity; allowing me to write reflective field notes while recording the interview; and it was less obtrusive than a standard recording device. These features contributed towards making the participants more at ease and open to discussing points raised. Following each interview, safeguarding the data source resulted in creating and storing PDF and MP4 versions on a password-protected laptop prior to the transcription process.
4.3.2.2 Observation

Observing participants in their school contexts was another important, and useful data-generation tool. These observations were conducted by limited ‘shadowing’ of the participants in their work, done, of course, with their express permission. The observations allowed the researcher to gain and gauge information about important occurrences and events as the participants went about their leadership roles and responsibilities, along with the strategies they used in their school contexts.

A non-participant, unstructured observation process was used. In such observations, observers are “in the social setting being observed but rarely participate in what is happening... to record in as much detail as possible the behaviour of participants with the aim of developing a narrative account of that behaviour” (Bryman, 2008, p. 257). These informal observation practices enabled the researcher to notice the details that contributed to the narrative account of each cases study. In this research situation, the purpose of observation was not just for triangulation purposes; rather, observing phenomena was also used to generate more questions in the subsequent informal chats that generated ‘thick data’ (Geertz, 1973) from the participants.

With the participants’ informed consent, observations were conducted across each research sites 45 minutes before the interviews. I made sure that observations were as unobtrusive as possible. Important descriptions, events, actions, and processes were recorded in field notes. Importantly, I was permitted to take photographs of these case study sites, material that was used in conjunction with analysing interview data obtained from each of the
six participants. Selected photographs are included in the findings chapters as relevant illustrations that accompanied research findings and theoretical development.

I was privileged to have been able to observe some occasions which reflected how they go about their work. For example, I could observe how one participant, Baral, managed, with great authority, the heated exchanges among a group of people over a dispute involving the school’s property rental. In a later informal chat, he apologised for the incident and for his combativeness, describing the issue respectfully by saying, “You cannot work here [in this school] unless you are rude and straightforward at times”. Observing this incident generated valuable evidence for recognising his range of verbal communication skills and the authoritative tone he took. Similarly, in my presence, another participant, Tamang, made a telephone call to a voluntary teacher who was a replacement teacher covering for a teacher who was absent due to sickness. This call demonstrated how Tamang was managing teachers’ absenteeism, a challenge for most community headteachers in Nepal. All the participants provided me with a tour of their schools, providing opportunities to view their school facilities that included: their offices; classrooms, libraries, and laboratories (i.e., computer and science laboratories, if they had either of these facilities); drinking water services, toilets, and any construction being undertaken.

The significance of these observations and the ease with which the schools accepted my presence as a researcher in their schools was reflected in two episodes, one amusing while the other disturbing. In the first episode, on a hot summer’s day and while I was awaiting Pokharel, the headteacher at the Highway school to arrive for his interview, an administrative staff member was caught napping at a small desk with a fan. At the same time, a security guard who also appeared quite sleepy was standing outside Pokharel’s office. I was worried
that he would fall asleep and fall over the short veranda railing that extended only up to his waist. More disturbingly, in two of the case study sites, I saw teachers walking to their classrooms and holding punishment canes. This incident revealed that physically punishing school children continues to be a disciplinary measure in this school. Surprisingly, the teachers made no attempt to hide this incident from me. Witnessing these episodes assisted in the overall data-generation processes and understanding and making sense of the data with a greater sense of precision and importance.

4.2.3.2 Document Study and Physical Artefacts

Some participants provided their school management plans which were very useful in understanding their priorities and strategies. For example, two of the participants, Baral and Tamang came to the interview with these management plans. Baral provided me with an electronic copy after interview, whereas Tamang provided the original plan so that I could have it photocopied and returned. When I asked Acharya, another participant, if I could sight his school’s plan, despite having computer in his office, which had, apparently, not been used for some time, he said that it was on an external drive at his home and agreed to send it to me electronically. Although I discreetly followed up this agreement, he never sent it. Baral and Tamang occasionally referred to their management plans during their interviews, details of which were later examined. These plans presented their school’s vision, strategies, and future course of actions, including budgeting and resource planning, some of which had already been achieved. Again, this co-operative, data sharing approach became significant later when Baral and Tamang were found to be in the group that reflected higher levels of professionalism in their leadership approaches.
Documents such as Nepalese educational policy frameworks, government directories for school management, school records, and news clippings and media articles or reports were also important data sources. *The Education Act 1971 (8th Amendment)*, and associated policies, directives, and educational data available from the Government’s Ministry of Education and Department of Education websites provided information relevant to community schools and their management. In relation to physical artefacts used in this study, these represented cultural features and technical operations that were useful information resources. For example, the aesthetic and physical details of participants’ offices and schools provided an insight into their cultural backgrounds, their personal traits, and their individuality.

In summary, data-generation, as the research findings will demonstrate in the next three chapters, along with the approaches to obtaining this data, proved to be extremely successful. The interviews were long enough and ‘rich’ (Geertz, 1973) enough to enable and identify distinct patterns among the six research participants, with this pattern becoming clearer even before the more formal analytical processes began. The data from each participant was generated ‘easily’ in that they were prepared to share information, although as mentioned earlier, some were more generous with their information than others. Collectively, all data sources were relevant, proving to be invaluable in constructing the multiple-case study and generating findings using a cross-study analysis.

### 4.3.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The first operation after data-generation involved transcribing interviews and translating documentary sources in this study. One of the major concerns in data analysis and
interpretation was using the Nepali language during data-generation. As previously explained, although participants were offered the choice of conducting the interview in English or Nepali, all chose the latter. At the same time, the use of the Nepali language was used in observational activities and in documents study, including those related to physical artifacts. The data was first transcribed into the Nepali language and then translated into English language by the researcher for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. To avoid potential loss of participants’ meanings and subsequent analysis, the researcher used the Nepali language for as long and as much as possible (Van Nes et. al, 2010). To ensure and guarantee that the texts and transcripts were as true and accurate as possible, these documents were assessed by a Nepalese college lecturer who was highly competent in both English and Nepali languages. Before these verification processes began, the confidentiality of data was ensured by anonymising participants’ identities.

The analytical and interpretive processes followed the framework suggested by Miles et al. (2014, p. 12), which involved three activities carried out in a synchronised flow: “(1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification”. First, the activities such as summary writing, coding, theme or category development and memo-writing involved conceptualising and consolidating the data. The resulting codes, categories, and themes became part of the analysis, creating the foundation for data display and the early identification of relationships and further questioning processes before drawing conclusions. In the second phase, data display involved a process of organising a large volume of data into more manageable forms such as charts, figures, and tables. During these processes the use of NVivo 12™ was invaluable, with its functionality allowing the production of explicit representations of data and findings. These processes also aligned with helping to further analyse the data, draw conclusions, or to move to further analysis. The third phase involved
Thematic coding in NVivo 12™ was the major strategy for data analysis and interpretation. This involved labelling chunks of the data with specific, descriptive terms. Richards (2015) states that the purpose of coding in a qualitative research study is not only labelling the transcripts and documents but “to learn from the data, to keep revisiting data extracts until you see and understand patterns and explanations” (p. 104). As this research aimed at building theory around community school leadership in Nepal, the analysis and interpretation of the data followed a rigorous coding process until conclusions and theoretical statements were reached. Figure 2 illustrates how the coding processes led to theory building.

Figure 2 below shows the succession of coding techniques applied during the coding cycles, and in doing so, combining the guidelines of Miles et al. (2014), Richards (2015) and Saldana (2016). The coding processes, as suggested by Miles et al. (2014) involved the “First Cycle and Second Cycle coding” (p. 73). In this process, descriptive codes were first generated from the data in the first cycle, which were then assigned topic codes in the second cycle. Second cycle then involved consolidating the data into analytical codes, which finally led to theory building.
Figure 2

Cycle of Coding Process Used in this Study

4.3.3.1 First Cycle Coding. In line with these guidelines, in the first cycle, the large volumes of data generated from the different sources in each of the six case studies were conceptualised into few words or short phrases. These concepts became the descriptive codes that reflect the ‘attributes’ within the data, such as the participants’ experiences, qualifications, and locations (Richards, 2015). In using these coding processes, the large volumes of data were broken down into distinct ideas and names that represented the area...
being represented, assigning different codes to the parts of the data. To illustrate the first cycle of coding, Figure 3 below is provided.

**Figure 3**

*First Level Coding with References to the Interview Transcript*

![Figure 3](image)

*Note.* The diagram is reproduced from NVivo 12™ when the interview transcripts from all six participants was first uploaded and later coded individually. Wherever the codes matched with the pre-existing codes, the codes were merged, generating different references from different interview transcripts for the same codes.

In Figure 3, the left-hand side lists the various descriptive codes generated from the data, while the section on the right-hand side includes a section of the data from the interview transcripts, from which the codes were generated. A significant advantage in using NVivo 12™ was the ability to use descriptive codes from one case study analysis to inform the coding of next one, along with references to the original data source. Additionally, Figure 3 shows way in which the ‘managerial perspective’ generated in Acharya’s interview transcript
informed the coding of Pokharel’s interview data, listing the number of references points in the initial coding processes.

4.3.3.2 Second Cycle Coding. This first cycle of coding generated approximately 348 descriptive codes. On completing this phase, the second cycle analytically identified the descriptive codes relating to one topic, as well as their relationship across the topics and case studies. In doing this, the codes were grouped into patterns in which “a smaller number of categories, themes or constructs” (Richards, 2015, p. 86) were identified. The topic codes that emerged during this analysis numbered 17 and reflected the coding processes as moving from the concrete to the abstract, and from the specific to the more generalised. In addition, an interpretation of emerging “patterns, explanations, casual flows, and propositions” (Richards, 2015, p. 13) led to deductions being made and verifications of the findings from each of six case studies in this research project. Figure 4.3 below illustrates how the child nodes, the descriptive codes, were sorted to create the parent nodes which, in effect, became the second level, topic categories.

Figure 4 below explains the development of the higher-level codes from the descriptive codes and how these codes were sorted to related topics. For example, the descriptive codes such as ‘Unaware parents, ‘Students in poverty’, and ‘Parents’ extra payment’ were first level codes. It became clear that these codes were related to a new topic code that could be called ‘School community and parents’. Therefore, the category ‘School Community and Parents’ became the collection point for those codes under a new single, parent node. Similarly, other first cycle, descriptive codes were arranged into parent/topic nodes such as ‘Context and Diversity’, ‘Resources Management’ and ‘Historical Context and Impacts’.
Developing analytical codes, followed similar sorting and decision-making procedures. Topic codes were reviewed, re-analysed, and subsequently placed into higher-order codes, referred to as grandparent nodes in NVivo, aligning with Richards’ (2015) analytical coding processes. This is illustrated in Figure 4 where six topic codes ‘School Community and Parents’, ‘Resources Management’, ‘Historical Context and Impact’, ‘Economics’, ‘Context and Diversity’ were combined into the single analytical code, that of ‘School Context’. Figure 5 below, demonstrates in greater detail the levels of coding within the development of the Analytical code, that is, the grandparent node, in this instance, ‘School Context’. In this figure the six topic codes that comprise the analytical code and its descriptive codes are situated under each topic code.
Figure 5

*Conceptualising the Hierarchical Development of an Analytical Node: School Context*

![Diagram](image_url)

*Note.* This figure shows the three levels of nodes accompanied by a number of coding references. This conceptualisation was useful in quickly identifying if some nodes had more coding references than others, and in turn, in identifying prominent themes emerged from the sequence of coding cycles.

The data display, as recommended by Miles et al. (2014) in Figure 5, uncovers the proportions of each of the descriptive codes that collectively makes up each topic code. This display also depicts the proportions of each topic code creates the analytical code. However, in Figure 4.5 below, this representation demonstrates that the participants’ discussion focused on their school communities and parents more so than discussing the economic dimensions, as a result of their schools’ historical contexts. Four analytical codes were developed in the ways described as taking place in Figure 6. These were: ‘School Context’; ‘Leadership’; ‘Administration and Governance’; and ‘Politics and Education’. These four analytical codes, the topic codes that they comprised, and some of the more prevalent descriptive codes are displayed in Figure 6.

96
Figure 6

Coding References Leading to Thematic Analysis

Note. The detail in this figure is reproduced from NVivo 12™. The four distinct colours represent the four major thematic areas with the number of coding references.

As can be seen from Figure 6, there were four overarching themes that encapsulated all the other codes that existed previously. These thematic areas were: (i) the participants’ understanding of their schools’ contexts (i.e., gold-coloured); (ii) the participants’ perspectives on administration, management, and educational governance (i.e., blue-coloured); (iii) enacting leadership, in terms of traits, values, and priorities (i.e., orange-coloured); and (iv) external influences such as party politics and private schools (i.e., grey-coloured).

Within each of these four themes are a number of topic codes. For example, under the theme of ‘Administration and Governance’, there are three second-level categories,
Governance’; ‘Administrative’; and ‘Head Teacher recruitment’. In turn, within each of these second-level codes there are a number of first-level codes. For example, under the second-level code Administration are ‘formal roles’, ‘informal roles’, and ‘internal challenges’. Figure 7 below these codes are the first cycle codes which number 384. More comprehensive coding cycle captures from the NVivo software are included in Appendix D.

**Figure 7**  
 *A Sunburst Depiction of Hierarchical Node Coding in Thematic Analysis*

*Note.* The coding representation is reproduced from NVivo 12™. It complements Figure 6 in demonstrating the hierarchical visualisation of the data. The outer ring represents the child nodes which lead to the 17 parent nodes in the second ring, and the third ring represents four broader thematic areas.
Figure 7 provides another display of the three levels of codes and illustrates the outcomes of the coding process, with approximately 384 descriptive codes making up the outer layer. These codes were then condensed into 17 topic codes, which formed the second concentric circle layer. These analytical processes culminated in the emergence of four major thematic areas or themes which constitute the third, innermost concentric circle. It is important to note that these 17 topic codes were not mutually exclusive, in that some had linkages and overlaps with others. Consequently, in outlining the individual case study findings, the topic codes that were related were further consolidated, analytical processes leading to the emergence of ten themes. These ten themes will be discussed in the upcoming two chapters.

4.4 Research Quality Standards and Ethical Considerations

Determining the criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research studies has long been contentious (Tracy, 2011). Tracy points to traditional criteria such as validity and reliability, which, she argues, reflect the influence of positivist approaches to research, and which are redundant for evaluating qualitative research emanating from traditions like symbolic interactionism. Also recognising this difficulty, Miles et al. (2014) proposed five criteria to judge the standard of a qualitative study and its conclusions. These were: “confirmability”; “dependability”; “credibility”; “transferability” and “application” (p. 311). Taking each in turn, this section relates these criteria to this study.

Confirmability is related to the extent that researchers reduce their bias by being explicit about how they conducted their research. Thus, it seeks clarity and openness, not only in research methods, data collection, analysis and conclusion-drawing, but also in the self-recognition of the researcher’s own biases. In this research, the issue of confirmability
has been addressed by providing the undertaken research procedures in detail, with supporting data displayed to reach conclusions. It has also included a statement of positionality in the introductory chapter.

The second criteria, dependability, refers to “whether the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 312). The measures employed to address the issue of dependability in this qualitative inquiry included clear research questions and a compatible design, as described in this chapter. Dependability is also enhanced by making explicit the researcher’s position and role and the prespecified “basic paradigms and analytic constructs” (p. 312) that underpin the study. This is supported by Punch’s (2009) emphasis that there needs to be a consistent relationship between research questions and research procedures. Dependability of the study was thus further supported by following the interpretivist symbolic interactionist approach (O’Donoghue, 2019) within a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2014).

To address the issue of credibility, Miles et al. (2014) suggested that the researchers should make sure that “descriptions are context-rich and meaningful” (p. 213). As this study was based on the community school leadership in unique contexts of six different schools, in-depth interviews of the headteachers, informal observation, and documents and physical artefacts helped to collect ‘thick data’ which the forthcoming data chapters will explore. The data chapters also provide separate, detailed accounts of each of the cases, as well as a detailed cross-case analysis, thereby enabling the readers to make holistic sense of the data. Furthermore, cross-case analysis of the headteachers showed certain similarities and differences across the cases. This allowed the triangulation of data from each cased obtained through different sources.
Credibility is further enhanced by transparency; this is making explicit all the processes employed in the study. Tracy refers to this as “being open and honest about the activities by which the research transpired” (p. 234). Tracy recommends transparency in describing, and being honest about, access to scenes and participants; interactions with the context; and the methodological design and level of detail in the transcription. For a qualitative study, transparency is particularly important in outlining the data analysis sections of the research processes. From Tracy’s list of areas demanding honesty, complete transparency has been the aim in the details of this chapter, especially in describing the data analysis involved.

The fourth criteria, transferability, is related to whether the findings and conclusions are transferable to other contexts. Miles et al. (2014) are careful to separate transferability from generalisability. Transferability refers to “readers intuitively believ(ing) that research findings correspond to something significant in their own world…” (Tracy, 2011, p. 239). In this study, I will argue, in the conclusion, that the findings are transferable to other worlds of community-school head teachers in Nepal, at the least. However, literature on leadership in developing countries suggests that the findings and conclusions are transferable to other contexts and individual cases in developing countries.

Generalisability from qualitative studies is more difficult. One of the limitations of this study was that there were only six participants from three districts in Province 1 of Nepal, thus making for a small sample. Therefore, the generalisability of the results may also be limited. However, to address this limitation, Miles et al. (2014) suggested, “The characteristics of the original sample of persons, settings, processes, and so on, are
sufficiently fully described to permit adequate comparisons with other samples”. In the study reported here, this is aimed to achieve by the ‘thick description’ offered in the study reported here. The maximum variation sampling described above also allowed the participation of HTs from diverse backgrounds which may also help to increase the applicability. On the other hand, Burns (1994, p. 327) argued about “reader or user generalisability” by which he referred to the relevance to the reader, meaning that readers can evaluate and decide whether they can apply the findings and conclusions to their contexts. O’Donoghue (2007) supports Burns when he said that the results from a qualitative study may be transferrable because readers can make use of the knowledge derived from such studies according to their situation.

The final criteria suggested by Miles et al. (2014, p. 315) is application which refers to the evaluation of a study in terms of “the worth, legitimacy, or goodness of actions or meanings”. In order to achieve application, this study provides details of ethical considerations in detail; it will be made available for the potential readers; it is hoped that it will provide intellectual ideas or usable knowledge to the readers; and by drawing on the findings and implications according to relevance to the situation of readers, it can help with the ideas to enhance school leadership policies and practices. The ethical practices which guided this study are now considered in detail in the last section of this chapter.

4.5 Ethical Matters

There were important ethical considerations pertaining to this project because “ethical behaviour helps protect individuals, communities and environments and offers the potential to increase the sum of good in the world” (Israel & Hay, 2010). According to Tracy (2013), there are three major ethical areas which a qualitative researcher needs to consider: “(a)
procedural rules and procedures; (b) the specific ethics of the context we are studying; and (c) the ethics of working – sometimes quite closely and intimately – with research participants” (p.242). All three areas were considered throughout the duration of this research.

As a part of the organisational procedure, the procedures outlined in the proposal for this study was approved by Edith Cowan University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) before the commencement of this research. According to the nature of this research, there were four major considerations imposed by ECU’s HREC. These included: informed consent: confidentiality and anonymity; doing no harm; and fairness.

At first, when I approached the headteachers employed in community schools, they appeared challenged in that most of them seemed to be hesitant and concerned, perhaps because they had never participated in any research. Meanwhile, it was important for the researcher to ensure that any potential participant should not feel pressure or obligation to take part in the research. Therefore, I first tried to build rapport with them by calling over telephone and briefly explaining my aims and intentions. Further, I also promised to explain my intentions in the meet-up before asking for their consent. After they agreed, I explained the nature of my research in greater detail in simple Nepali language to make sure they fully understood the process and outcomes of their participation. Then, I provided them with Information Letter and Consent Form (Appendix B) were provided to obtain their signatures. The Information Letter gave a brief outline of the research; the duration of the interview; and assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. The Information Letter also contained the information about their voluntary withdrawal at any stage of the research without a penalty.
Confidentiality and anonymity of each participant was always maintained throughout the duration of this research. For this purpose, during and after transcribing and translating the data, all the participants were assigned pseudonyms. Constant checking has ensured that the final documentation and any subsequent publications will not disclose any identifiable information related to the participants. For the security of data, all hard copy materials such as interview transcripts and field notes have been secured in a locked cabinet, and the soft copy materials have been stored in a password protected external drive. The access to the data has been limited only to the research team which includes the principal researcher and the supervisors. Any material that are not deemed important after the conclusion of the study will be shredded, seven years after the conclusion of the study, following ECU’s data disposal procedures.

Another major consideration was that the research site for this project is Nepal, and therefore, cases under this study and participants were Nepalese. Although there was a lack of a regulatory body and guidelines for research activities in Nepal, this project was undertaken following the norms of research integrity, cultural values, existing laws and conventional practices.

While anonymity of the participants has been carefully maintained throughout this research project, some of the works of the headteachers were exemplary, which may increase the scepticism of their disclosure of identity. For example, one of the participant headteachers was found to involve his school in a community’s ‘water project’, including some other outstanding works. There may not be many community schools in Nepal which are directly involved in such projects, and therefore, it may seem to increase the likelihood of the headteachers being identified. However, because of the nature of this study, it was worthy to
bring into light such exemplary works, or else the study would not fully capture the perspectives and actions of a successful school leader. The balancing ground for this suspicion is that the school is in a remote hill area, and it is considered unlikely that the findings of this research will be accessible to the particular school community.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter encapsulated the methodology and methods applied to answer the overarching research question: ‘How do community school headteachers in Nepal envisage and go about their roles, responsibilities and priorities in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts?’ As the study aimed at understanding how headteachers manage their schools in their own unique contexts, a qualitative multiple-case study design was used. The design was informed by a constructionist epistemology and a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the main source of data collection, and these offered opportunities to delve into deep understanding of headteacher’s perspectives and actions. Further to the interviews, informal observation and relevant document analysis added richness to the data. The use of NVivo 12™ proved to be invaluable for overall operation of the project, particularly in handling the data, coding, categorising, and developing themes using its tools such as text search, visualisation, and comparison matrices.

The next two chapters, the data chapters, will present the findings of six cases within two distinct groups, in a way this can be seen as the first attempt at a cross-case analysis. The six participant headteachers were divided into two groups since they differed entirely in terms of their perspectives and actions. The discussion chapter that follows these two chapters will combine the cases of both groups for analysing the similarities and differences in the findings and will critically evaluate them in line with available leadership literature.
Chapter 5

Group One Case Study Stories and Research Findings:

Demotivated School Leadership in Lower Resourced Schools

The previous chapter discussed the research design, methodology, and methods used in a qualitative, multiple case study that sought to answer the central request question of *How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context?* Answering this question was positioned within the paradigm of Crotty’s (1998) scaffolding processes or research framework, the epistemology underpinnings of constructionism, and the theoretical perspectives of interpretivism and symbolic interactionism. With in-depth interviews being the main data-generation method, NVivo 12™ software package was used for data analysis and interpretation. Consequently, the collective processes generated ten consolidated themes.

This chapter is the first of two that presents the findings that resulted from the research processes described in the previous chapter. With six research participants representative of six case studies, across-case findings identified two distinct leadership groups. Determining these groups involved four analytical criteria: common school circumstances; participants’ shared attributes and perspectives; observations of individual case study participants; and further analysis that grouped the participants for descriptive and theoretical purposes. As a result, two distinct groups of the headteachers were identified, those who were demotivated and those who were dynamic. For example, Mr Acharya and Mr Baral were identified in two different groups because their school circumstances which
included physical infrastructure, resourcing, student number, and local settings were very
dissimilar. Furthermore, they differed in terms of their perspectives and actions where
evidence showed that Mr Baral was proactive and dynamic whereas Mr Acharya was
accusatory and pessimistic. Observations of the settings, events and processes of each case
further helped to understand the leadership pattern and thus to categorise two distinct groups.
Finally, categorising the participant headteachers was important from theoretical and
descriptive point of view which was backed by the analysis of the overall data.

This chapter discusses the first group, those demotivated school leaders employed in
low socio-economic areas, in schools that represented inequality in terms of educational
opportunities given inadequate resourcing on multiple levels. The first group comprised Mr
Ganesh Acharya\textsuperscript{2} from the Forest Secondary School; Mr Yogendra Pokhrel from the
Highway Secondary School; and Mr Bikash Niroula from the Lakeside Secondary School.
In discussing each of these three case studies, headteachers’ perspectives have been
consolidated into the ten, second level themes derived from the data-generation and analysis.
These themes were: school backgrounds; personal profiles; historical and present contexts of
the schools; school communities and the parental engagement; headteachers’ levels of job
satisfaction and activism; administration and resource management; decentralisation of
educational governance and accountability; community versus private schools; political
influences and their impacts on principalship; and leadership strategies as influenced by their
worldviews.

\textsuperscript{2} All headteachers and their schools have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and
protect identities.
5.1 The ‘Ineffectual’ Principal: Mr Acharya

5.1.1 School Background

The Forest Secondary School was situated in a rural area of Province 1. Historically, the school community comprised victims of a devastating flood elsewhere. Historically, this school was one of the oldest in the region. Established nearly 60 years ago as a primary school, it gradually developed to a lower secondary school and finally became a full secondary school in the early 21st century. The school ran classes from pre-primary level to Grade 10. The number of students were around 400, and there were around 30 teachers and five non-teaching staff. At the time, Mr Ganesh Acharya (subsequently Acharya) was the headteacher of the school. Figure 8 below provides shows how the school buildings were developed at different times in the history of the school, from oldest on the left to newest on the right of the photo.

Figure 8

*Acharya's School Buildings and his Office*
5.1.2 Headteacher Profile

Acharya had more than three decades of experience as a teacher since joining the profession in the mid-80s. His formal qualification was Proficiency Certificate Level, which is equivalent to an Australian Year 12, high school qualification. Such a pathway – from school-leaver to teacher – would be unlikely now. Although the school was a secondary school, the school had not been allocated any permanent secondary teacher postings. Acharya’s official ranking was a permanent lower secondary level teacher. Because only lower secondary level permanent teachers were allocated to the school, as the most senior teacher, Acharya had been appointed as the headteacher. He had been in this role for around two years.

5.1.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

One of the main findings in the case of Forest School was that it had been established with minimal resource allocation; in particular, it lacked the one resource that is often donated to most schools, and which schools can exploit economically – a parcel of land. As a result of this resource scarcity, this was very poorly resourced school. This was exacerbated by the relative poverty of the school community population, who had arrived here after displacement following a flood elsewhere in Nepal. Acharya described this as follows:

...on the basis of geographical location and population density, people living in this area have fragile economic conditions. Most of the people around here, those parents who are within the range of our service area, had been flood victims from [one of the rivers], who were later settled in this area. As the stakeholders are already in a fragile
economic condition, it is not surprising that our school’s economic condition is also fragile.

Clearly, Acharya believed, and was correct, in saying that the historical context of the school and the school community was poor; the school was still struggling to even manage small funds for particular programmes. For him, then, astute allocation of resources was to put aside some funds allocated for another program, as he described below:

We have somehow managed the school, saving the funds out of other funds which are available for various other purposes from the state. While building physical infrastructure, the state provides the funding. When the task reaches one stage, and if a little amount remains from spending, we spend it for another purpose. Sometimes it is adequate; some time it is not. At present, it is not possible to collect any moneys from parents to build infrastructure.

Acharya also emphasised that if they had access to other resources such as land, they could plan and conduct more “projects”. Acharya presented an example of a community school having more land than his, and explained how that school was utilising its resources, and how it could make difference in school management:

[Management] depends on the income source of the school as well. For example, a school in [Eastern Nepal] has around 10 hectares of land. Through its income, it has also some shares in a factory. Those schools which have better resources, they can conduct projects utilising their own income.
Here, Acharya was judging the internal resources of community schools in Nepal simply by the amount of land it had. For him, there were differences and/or inequalities between community schools, which determined how they were operating. He pointed out that this historic inequality of land ownership was one of the main aspects of the context that his school was running on.

Another distinguishing characteristic of Nepali community schools lied in the extent of diversity within the school communities. Acharya’s school community was ethnically, culturally, linguistically, religiously and economically diverse: “Yes, there is a mix in our society. There are Rai, Jhagad, Bramhin, Chhetri, Limbu, Tamang and so on. They have their own cultures. They grew up in a mixed culture. However, they respect each other’s cultures.” Similar to this perspective about mutual respect, he had a view about linguistic differences: “Yes, they have their mother tongues, but they don’t use it here. Here in Nepal, most of them use Nepali language. They may use it at home though.” Reflecting this indifference toward students’ mother tongues, he also remarked on the economic disparity of the community as “…it is a kind of mixed; however, the majority of them are poor... Those who are in immense poverty may be around 40%. Overall, around 60% are poor.” When asked about whether such diversity influenced the way the headteacher worked, he replied:

Linguistic background has not had an effect because the community they live in uses Nepali language as a mediating language. They may use their mother tongue at home, but I am not sure. Therefore, the medium of instruction for teaching is Nepali language, except for a particular English language course. They assimilate with Nepali language speakers. Even if there are students from other than Nepali mother tongue, it has not affected us.
According to 2011 census of Nepal, there are 123 spoken languages used as mother tongues. Although education in mother tongue is promulgated by the constitution of Nepal, Nepali language remains the main language used in community schools. On the other hand, inclusivity does not necessarily mean that all or the majority of the 123 languages are used in all parts of the country. In Acharya’s case, while he recognised that there was linguistic diversity in the school community and students, it had no impact or influence on teaching and learning, nor on management because the Nepali language was used by everyone. Neither did he acknowledge whether the students actually used their mother tongue in their home. He symbolised Nepali language as the ‘lingua franca’ serving as a tool for assimilation. Similarly, Acharya admitted that different religious viewpoints were not an issue for his school:

*In religious aspects, there is no discrimination among our students. They respect their different religions, festivals and culture. Because of this, there is no conflict among students. In my [decades] of service, I have not known this [any conflicts]. In this aspect, this school is good.*

Acharya claimed that there was a sense of collective respect in the community despite the linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, and differences had little impact in managing the school. The following section further explores Acharya’s perspectives of the school’s context.
5.1.4 School Community and Parent Engagement

One of the main aims of this research was to investigate the meanings Acharya held towards the school community and parents. The assumption here is that the meanings toward the school community and parents by the headteacher drove his attitudes, practices and interactions as a school leader. Acharya argued:

_I do not know if it is their weakness, or Nepal government’s weakness, or lack of awareness. They do not have the sense that the school is our property and that we need to conserve it. They think that school belongs to teachers; they should teach; and their children should be knowledgeable. They do not recognise that they also have their responsibility toward school, and it is their own school as well. The reason may be lack of awareness and thinking._

The headteacher’s accusation here was that the school community and parents displayed either ignorance, naivety or indifference towards the school. However, he apparently did not seem to recognise the reasons behind it. Unquestionably, schools in difficult contexts may have little support, if any, from the community or parents. Initially, Acharya had tried to understand the situation after the beginning of his role as a headteacher:

_When I became headteacher, I selectively called some of the parents of the students and also some of those who were not parents of our students. I tried to understand their views. What I found was that their thought was just that the school belongs to teachers. Teachers should take care of the school. If a tree beside the school falls, or_
a branch gets broken, they do not care about it. Rather, they think that teachers should manage that.

The statement above showed that Acharya was familiar with the attitude of the school community and the parents, and that he was making efforts to apprehend the reasons more clearly. As he believed that parents did not pay adequate attention towards their own children and the school, he attempted to call meetings with selected parents on occasion. On the other hand, he recognised a single strength of the community and parents when he said, “…if there is a major problem in the school, and if we reveal it to them, they come to school, collaborate with us and help us resolve the problem.” This showed that the school community was prepared to take collective action ready for collective effort in case of a ‘major problem’.

Acharya’s perspective could be summed up in his own words: “The parents are not well educated and therefore they are not aware of their responsibilities toward their children. This obviously has an effect.” He continued:

I have already said that the structure of our society is a bit different. They spend hours drinking tea at tea shops and point finger toward the teachers. They do not understand their duties. They do not have the concern that the school belongs to them, and that they need to take care of it. It may be understood later though since we are trying to make them understand.

Once again, Acharya referred back to his own views of the inability of parents to give proper attention toward the school. For him, the parents were wasting time in unproductive and casual meetings and accusations, rather than trying to understand the school’s situation
and acting responsibly to support and improve their community school. However, he expressed his hope that the situation would get better because the school team was trying to help them understand:

*Others say school has three members, but I say there are four members: teacher, students, parents and also other members of society even if they do not have their children in our school. These four members make our school, so we should not point fingers to the teachers alone. We should not put all responsibility on to teachers for weak students’ performance. If one member from the mentioned four groups is weak, the learning of the students, the standard of the school and the economic condition of the school will worsen.*

From the point of view of Acharya, the school’s overall performance would improve if all the “four members” (teachers, students, parents and community members) of the school were accountable. But he himself was more critical toward parents compared to other headteachers. He also remarked that school administrators needed to help parents understand that the teachers were only employees and could retire and go back to their own place; but the parents would have to stay in the same place forever. He mentioned that he had initiated communications with the members of school community and parents and had found some changes in their attitude between one meeting and the next. His understanding about the parents was that they had become more open to discuss the issues they had because of his continuous questioning and “bold comments” made against them. He illustrated this as:

*Nowadays, the way they used to talk while walking down the street, or in a tea shop has changed. When they used to talk negatively, at times, I used to ask them, “The*
teachers did not teach, but what did you do? How many cups of tea did you finish? Did you go to the school to see the school’s situation? Did you try to know whether the teachers are teaching, or playing cards, or just chatting with each other? Why don’t you go around the school using the time you spend for cups of tea in order to understand the things such as whether there are any problems; whether children are studying; and what the staff are doing?”

Acahrya’s questions in this statement help to understand his perspectives toward the parents. but there was no evidence for the accuracy of his views. Overall, his main concern was that parents were not as responsible as he thought they should be. In this context, then, it was necessary to question Acharya how he was conducting his day-to-day administration of the school with minimal support from the community, and with minimal resources.

5.1.5 Administration and Resource Management

From the previous two sections it was clear that the community school was in an adverse situation. However, it was important to explore what meanings Acharya gave to his formal and/or informal roles, and how he was making use of the limited available resources at his disposal. First, in talking about his formal roles, he mentioned:

*I must carry out all the works as assigned by regulations. I have to conduct the school in a peaceful environment, without any conflicts within. Here, we are 22 teachers and along with administrative staff we are 27 altogether. These 27 staff have 27 ways of thinking. I have to assimilate these 27 ways of thinking by ensuring peace and avoiding conflict.*
Acharya appeared reluctant to talk about all the formal roles expected of his position in the Education Act. His main focus was maintaining stability – “peace” – in the school. This was because there were more than 25 staff who could have a number of views, or in his word, “thinking”. From his perspective, it was one of the highest priorities to maintain a smooth environment where there were as many views as the number of staff members. Nevertheless, he emphasised improving the “educational achievement” and “economic condition” of the school. Foregrounding the importance of a holistic approach, he added, “I need to set programmes. Thus, I need not only work on a single aspect but also have to run the administration, maintain relationships with community, and increase the quality of education.” He then went on to describe specific programmes that he and his team had introduced for the smooth administration of the school.

Before talking about the new approaches that he had applied, Acharya noted that he had only been headteacher for a short time – two years. In that time, and involving his team, he first introduced the “class diary”. This was a diary that student could record a particular teacher’s attendance and class timings, which according to Acharya helped to monitor teachers’ accountability. The next “programme” he initiated was “gate closure” after 10:00 am in order to stop late arrivals of the teachers; according to him, this had improved the situation. The third practice he applied was a “pass system”, which controlled the number of students taking breaks during the school time because there were only two “passes” each for a boy and a girl for each classroom. The next one was an attendance system, recorded twice in the day, i.e., in the first period and the last period, on a board hung on the wall of each classroom. Finally, there was a “display” of the academic calendar and attendance record in the staff room in order to regulate and record teachers’ presence and absenteeism.
Acharya had also allocated certain responsibilities to a particular committee of teachers to distribute administrative tasks. This was his strategy to involve teachers and staff in decision-making and make the process more transparent, explaining that:

For economic transparency, I have formed an internal auditing committee. Various committees work for a range of works. For a particular task, we ask the coordinator of a particular committee who cooperates with other colleagues as well. Then, we decide something from the meeting in coordination with the head of the particular committee.

Economic transparency could be a major issue among parents’ and the community members’ even when there were minimal resources. This was because there had been incidents in community schools where headteachers were accused of corruption, and at times proven guilty. Therefore, Acharya formed separate committees to assign distinct roles and got those committees decide on a particular issue. Other than these administrative roles, he talked about one major informal role as well:

I have to cooperate with the community. There are various stakeholders in the community. At this moment, people belonging to various political parties are using the freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. People from these various parties also have various ways of thinking. I have to assimilate all these for the overall development of the school.
Throughout the interview, Acharya’s views swayed intermittently toward political or ideological viewpoints. He explained how outside multi-party-political ideologies were directly or indirectly influencing community schools. He also recognised that that his colleagues had several different viewpoints. When asked about his informal roles, by cooperating with community, he said that he had to perform a balanced role “to assimilate” a number of political views. This came easily to him because he was cognisant that community members were practising the freedoms promulgated by the constitution.

Acharya had already mentioned the limited resources available because of the lack of land, being an economically poor school community, and limited budget allocations by the government under certain titles. There were almost no areas where he mentioned a specific strategy to manage resources. Rather, he mentioned the challenges for resource management:

In fact, what major things we need now is that even if the government wants us to provide a library, a lab or adopt information and communications technology [ICT], we don't have space for that. There are some spare rooms upstairs, but the room is too hot. Students do not want to stay in those rooms. It is also not possible to keep them there in such a hot place. On the other hand, there is a problem for seminar hall. If we need to do a seminar, we need to put up a tent in the playground or need to empty a room.

This clearly showed that the school lacked even the basic infrastructure of a library and a lab. Properly ventilated and temperature-controlled rooms were far beyond the reach of the school. Even if the government proposed to provide financial support to set up information communications technologies (ICT) or establish a library, they did not have
rooms available. He explained that when government provided such a grant, the budget was not provided in the form of a gross amount for the physical building and all the facilities. Rather, the government approved the grant bit by bit under certain titles. As a result, some of the school’s infrastructure was in a dreadful state of repair as shown in Figure 9 below.

**Figure 9**
The Ceiling, State of Facilities in the Acharya’s Computer Room, Drinking Water and Student Toilets

Acharya thus lamented about how poor community schools, like his, faced problems in developing infrastructure and services. The following section will continue to explore his perspective on educational governance and policy framework that he thought could be a reason for the current situation or provide hope for the future.
5.1.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability

The perspectives of the headteachers on the decentralisation of educational governance and accountability concerns was a major area of inquiry in this research because the nation was going through a transitional period as it implemented the new constitution of 2015. The constitution affirmed a restructure of the country into seven provinces in a federal system of power-sharing. Consequently, there were numerous changes at all administrative levels; at the time of study, the government was still bringing in new laws and changes to the existing acts. In particular, most of the governance roles of community schools were handed over to municipal governments. Those governing roles, which had been the responsibility of higher bureaucracies in the past, had now been transferred to the locally elected governments. However, Acharya did not notice much difference in the way his school was governed before and after this fundamental change:

_In my opinion, the federal government planned a particular type of structure; however, when it came to the local government [municipal], they formed it in their own way. It should have been made on the basis of the former one, but this has not been implemented. There is a policy, for example, that the Ward President would have those particular roles, but at this moment this is not in effect. It is running in the same format as of the past._

In expressing concerns about the changes proposed by the new restructuring, Acharya felt that the local government had misinterpreted what was originally proposed and was working on its own understandings. He described the current situation as disorganised and said that the previous system was better. He described the situation as follows:
The Education Act, including provincial acts, have proposed to make the local
government strong, giving authority to them. But what happened is that local
governments have made their own types of acts. An act should be based on one
particular procedure, but they acted on their own. For example, a municipality in
Ilam transferred a teacher by itself. It happened in Gorkha district as well. The
dissatisfied teacher lodged a case in the court. The court suspended the decision...

There has been a tendency to create new regulations by local governments in a hurry,
acknowledging that all the authority has come to the local governments.

Clearly, it was a transitional phase in the country, and the local governments were
either not fully aware of, or were misinterpreting, the new regulations. However, Acharya did
not mention exactly what changes were meaningful for his community school. Indeed, he felt
that there was a limited connection between the municipal government and his management
of the school:

There are not too many things to do with municipal government. They work for a
salary, but when we need teachers or other staff, they don’t have this authority. We
need to go to the District’s headquarters, the Education Development and
Coordination Unit [EDCU], formally called District Education Office. We are not
contected with the Province for any matter.

As far as he was concerned, EDCU was still the authority for the major administrative
tasks such as recruitment, affiliation and transfer of teachers and staff. The role of local
government was to provide recommendations for these, but they also included managing
those salaries of teachers and other staff. Acharya, however, did describe in detail his banking problems in relation to collecting and distributing teachers’ and staff’s salaries. His main issue was that the local government was unable to secure a convenient local bank that could provide the services for not only salary management but also additional responsibilities for government employees such as provident funds, insurance, and taxes.

Despite that, Acharya was optimistic that there was a better policy framework that the local government could implement in future. According to him, the municipality would have to wait for directions from the EDCU and follow their amendments, if any. As he had read the draft of the educational plan of the municipality, he indicated a possibility of “drastic improvement”, but at the same time he expressed uncertainty about how well it would be executed:

If it is not monitored, it will be just like it was in the past. The act was there in place in the past as well, but even the District Education Officer did not know each school's locations. School Inspectors also did not know that. In the same way, if they just remain seated in their chairs and only commute to and from home, it won't change. What I think important is that members of local governments should monitor all schools, each once a week in rotation. This would make teachers accountable. If they could come without notice, monitor for some minutes for attendance and negligence, it would be even better. But I don't think they will do that because they have not come yet.

Acharya believed that the previous governance plans and policy framework did not work in the past because the implementing authorities were not fully accountable. He
recommended that if those plans were well executed and, most importantly, supervised effectively, then the situation would improve. He believed that mere restructuring and changes in policy had little impact on his school’s context. Neither did he show any optimism about the future because, for him, the governing body, the local government, had not shown any initiative yet.

In relation to teachers’ accountability, he was worried why there needed to be a certain system of teacher transfer. Acharya argued that the existing teacher transfer policy was not as good as that for bureaucrats because the bureaucrats could be transferred within a short period, but teachers could be forced to stay in a school indefinitely. For him, this did not help to make teachers more accountable because they could take advantage of relationships with, and favours from, community members, even if they were doing something that was unethical. Acharya argued:

*The situation here is that there is a School Management Committee [SMC] and the people working in it have been doing so for many years. These committee members are from the same community. If teachers of the same community do something wrong, the same members tend to ‘save’ them. That's why they do not have any fear.*

Acharya’s core argument was that teachers were not accountable and ethical because they belonged to the same community groups that the members of the SMC belonged. The teachers tended to continue working in a same school for decades. According to him, this was indirectly affecting the quality of education because even if the teachers were not doing things right, they could use their relationships to get support and be saved from the community members.
5.1.7 Headteachers’ Job Satisfaction and Activism

For much of the time Acharya talked about the adverse context of his school, including the inadequacies of the school community and parents, and a transitioning and ineffective municipal government. Naturally, the question arose as to whether he had experienced any successes. The first thing he was proud of was that his school had been awarded a district level recognition among other schools for improved learning achievement. It was based on students’ participation rates in Grades 9 and 10, and success rates in the Secondary Education Examination. Students’ participation rates had increased because a smaller number of students had dropped out in that particular year. He said that the common reasons for dropping out students could be, “either marriage, migration, desertion of youths to abroad and many other reasons.” He then mentioned the improvement brought about by administrative procedures such as “gate closure, class monitor, class pass and class diary.” Another thing he was proud of was that he was supporting the participation of students in extracurricular activities. He mentioned:

*We have also participated in various extracurricular activities. We have not ignored these programs even if we have economic problems. There are programs from such as Red Cross, Youth Red Cross Circle, Youth Club, including sports in other locations far from here. Other schools sometime hide the notice, for example, this year they hid the letter… We managed basic things as per our ability such as transportation, not asking them [the students] for any expenses. This is also a matter of pride because other schools have hidden that information.*
Acharya was clearly supportive of his students for their participation in sporting and/or extracurricular events. At the same time, he berated those schools that did not disclose notice about the events to their students, so that they could avoid the hassle of managing such events. But, apart from these positive aspects, he did not mention any other success stories or optimistic plans. Despite interview prompts about taking part in, or leading, any campaigns for any specific agenda of the school, he provided no instances.

5.1.8 Community Versus Private Schools

A major issue in public education in Nepal was the threat to community schools from private schools, also known as institutional schools. While some community schools’ headteachers occasionally criticised the private schools or referred to the quality of their own school’s education and improvement, Acharya did not directly enter any accusations or comparisons. He did indirectly acknowledge that there was a certain level of comparison and competition. He explained:

*There have been some changes in the system implemented by the local level. As I showed you earlier, there has been a few changes. Community schools are trying to change by bringing in different programs. They want to improve quality of education to be able to compete with private schools. They have provided a grant for English-medium books for those schools which have English medium classes for Grade 1, 2 and 3.*

According to Acharya, the medium of instruction in private schools was English language, and community members were attracted to English medium classes. Therefore,
some community schools in the region had started to deliver English medium classes following the path of private schools. The community schools believed that it could improve the quality of education and make them more competitive. This was also recognised by the municipal government, and therefore the schools conducting English medium classes in basic levels were getting grants for English-medium books. In another instance, Acharya explained how the parents were discriminating their own children in terms of schooling:

There is still discrimination between son and daughter in our community. They tend to educate their son in boarding [private] schools or in the school with better facilities. At times, they tend to think that because you have to send your daughter to someone’s home after their marriage, just to make them literate is enough.

Saying this, he was referring to the fact that there were slightly higher number of girls than boys in his school and this was due to gender discrimination in the children’s own families. He gave an example of a female student who used to arrive at the school late. After his inquiry, he found that she used to first drop her brother to a local private school first and then come to her school. He described how he dealt with the incident as follows:

I thought about it and sent someone to call her parents to our school. I said, “Please do me a favour. Don’t educate your daughter which is the easiest solution. Keep your daughter at home. Then she can take your son to where he needs to go. Otherwise, we must scold your daughter daily. Why would you want to make your daughter upset? If she is always upset during the school hours, what she can learn?”
He argued that he had experienced several similar incidents where some parents were choosing private schools for their sons and community schools for their daughters in the belief that private schools were better than community schools.

5.1.9 Political Influences and Their Impacts on Principalship

In the current Nepali context, most of the general public, government representatives and government employees were attached to a particular political party or another, and community schools’ teachers were also active members of those political parties. This had affected the regular and ethical administration of many government responsibilities and services, including education and public schooling (Pokharel, K., 2017). In this context, political influence could start from the headteachers’ recruitment right down to each level of school operation.

When first asked about the process of his own recruitment, Acharya said that it was a “fair” process. However, he accepted that teachers had been involved in some type of political activity saying that: “School administrators do face external challenges though. As I said earlier, there is a multi-party system in the state. As per that there are various parties. A teacher may also be affiliated to, beyond duty hours, somewhere.” He said it was customary for a headteacher to be involved in, face, and manage political challenges, but he was unsure whether government employees should be involved in active political activities. However, he portrayed the situation as something that happened quite often:

There are opinions now that teachers are not supposed to [be involved in active political activities]. But until now, it is in practice. If they stop it in the future, we will
need to stop it. However, in our society, they are well identified as who and what they belong to. Even if we remain silent, they identify us. It is not necessary that we need to carry their flag or chant their slogans. Further, you are identified in your neighbourhood from everyday talks as well.

Being identified as someone belonging a particular political party, there were obvious impacts, according to Acharya. Politicising each activity had impacted directly on the school and its staff. He explained, “…if there are some mistakes from the headteacher or other teachers – I am talking about minor mistakes that are forgivable, not the major ones – the nature of the mistakes is magnified.” He thus suggested the probability of conflict and bias between the school and the community, and even within staff members, was a result of political views that individuals carried with them.

5.1.10 Leadership Strategies and Headteacher Beliefs

Despite the school’s context Acharya believed he was doing his best for the administration of the school and improving its situation. The key was in developing cooperation among teachers and staff, enacting decisions made in staff meetings and taking decisions to the SMC for approval. For him, there were no issues or any role conflicts within his colleagues and staff. Next, for supporting and motivating students from very low-income families, the school had managed to acquire some stationary items and uniform. Moreover, he had some thoughts about seeking help from its alumni for further help.
In addition to queries about how he was coping in the situation, one of the main aims was to find out whether the school leaders believed that public education could substantially help students to improve their situation in the future, Acharya responded:

*If the same procedures and provisions are in place, it won't make any difference.*

[Uplifting students’ situation] *is not possible. In the same way, let's not think about filling the economic gap in the society, it won't even lessen the ratio. This is because until and unless the income source and income level of poor families are increased, this is not possible. By increasing their income means increasing the ability to earn. Until now, the main concern is that most of the products of the existing education system are unemployed.*

Acharya expressed his absolute pessimism about the current public education addressing the current needs of the society. His main concern was that the community school education had not prepared students for even basic technical skills which they could use for employment in future. He added:

*Let's suppose, if a student passes Grade 10 and then 11 and 12, then the question is what he/she is going to do. They do not have technical skills. They may have to go Middle East counties for work. If they want to stay in Nepal, there is no employment.*

Acharya referred to thousands of youths going to the Middle East countries in search of unskilled labour because of failure of the current school education. He described other few alternatives for the school products such as civil service, which, for him, was riddled with inconsistencies. He expressed his dissatisfaction about the “quota system” – reserving
government jobs for candidates from marginalised ethnic groups to ensure equal representation – because even the capable students from the so-called mainstream ethnic groups were not getting opportunities. He recommended implementing technical education at the school level, which could ultimately help to lessen the economic gaps in the society and make citizens more productive. He concluded:

What the state could have done is implement technical education. They would have learnt technical skills, and even if they wanted to go abroad for work, it would have been in a technical sector. They could have earned more than general labourers. Even if they wanted to stay within the country, there would have been opportunities for employment such as electrician, civil and mechanical engineers because our societies are developing, and urbanisation is on the rise in different places. That would be their income source and they could earn from their profession for a long period of time. That would help increase their income and savings as well.

Acharya described some of his efforts to mitigate the contextual challenges, and he believed that the school had shown some improvement during his job tenure. He believed that necessary improvements could not be achieved in a short term and that it was a long-term and a continuous process. He did not seem much concerned in his practice about the realities of inequality and diversity of what was a typical Nepali community. Rather, he argued that he was acting in his way because the context was dominant factor, and he was doing whatever was possible with very limited resources. He was very critical of the school community, parents and local government. However, when asked about success stories and future plans, he seemed unsure. Although politicising education had been one of the major concerns in community schools, Acharya seemed to accept the situation and expressed his hope for
mutual respect among people having different political views. Overall, though, his views were pessimistic; Acharya did not believe that public education in Nepal at present could substantially help young people in shaping a successful future.
5.2 The ‘Reluctant’ Headteacher: Mr Pokharel

5.2.1 School Background

The Highway Secondary School is a community school established around 50 years ago and located near a major highway. It was located in a relatively developed urban area which made it the most accessible school among all case study headteachers’ schools. It was providing all levels of schooling, including basic education and secondary education, which included senior secondary level, Grade 11. There were 350 students, and approximately 30 teachers and staff. Figure 10 demonstrates the school Pokharel’s school and his office.

Figure 10
Pokharel's School Buildings and his Office

5.2.2 Headteacher Profile

Mr. Yogendra Pokharel had a great deal of experience as a teacher first joining the profession while waiting on the results of his high school qualification. He had been a headteacher for approximately four years. He held two postgraduate qualifications in two
different courses, one of which was education. According to Pokharel, he became the headteacher of the school when his colleagues and community members had asked him to take on the role after the retirement of the former headteacher.

5.2.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

Historically, the Highway Secondary School was established by local community leaders and social workers donating parcels of land. However, according to Pokharel, those parcels were scattered in various locations because people either donated to the school or helped to register vacant land of different locations under the school’s name. Altogether the school had around 1.6 hectares of land. In that respect, the school property is relatively larger than many other community schools. However, Pokharel mentioned that the school had lost control over a considerable section of its property during the time of the decade-long conflict:

The scattered parcels of our land were encroached upon, and they [people] built homes and began living there. At that time, political parties, especially the party involved in the conflict, encouraged the move to settle homeless people on the government’s land. Perhaps, they stayed there under their protection. At present, we have not been able to displace the people and restore the school’s lands.

It was clear that the school was not able to use all its land, which is also used by other community schools as an extra resource. Pokharel added that the past conflict also influenced and added to the Nepali community schools’ deteriorating image and people’s rejection of public schooling. When he had come to this school as a teacher more than five years ago, he had found the school’s situation even more intimidating, pointing out that:
There has been increasingly less interest from parents regarding community schools and growing interest in private schools over the past three decades. And then, because of the ten years’ conflict, parents sent their children to private schools. Therefore, the situation of the community schools reflected an anarchism, smaller numbers of students, increased inattentiveness, and the lack of government’s supervision and school inspection. Because of these reasons, the school’s deteriorating situation continued to worsen.

Pokharel indicated that, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, people became more interested in private schooling. During the conflict situation, government organisations, including community schools and their employees had become the main targets of the opposing political party, the CPN-Maoist. This led to a situation where community schools could not maintain adequate administration and management. For the government’s part, the regular “monitoring and inspection” became infrequent. For Pokharel, all these historical events had affected community schools in general, and his school in particular. He shared his first experience in this school when he was transferred as a teacher:

There was a first term exam, an internal test. I had taught them for around two to three months. When I entered the examination hall as the English teacher, students happily repeated “the teacher came, the teacher came.” The reason behind their happiness was, I thought, that there was an expectation of receiving assistance from the subject teacher. They started asking about questions such as “Sir, question No. 1 or 2”. They were expecting clues to the answers from me ... I felt terrible.
Pokharel explained that most of the students were from extremely poor family backgrounds and that their school attendance was infrequent. Even when they came to school, they used to leave the school during the break times. According to him, the present context was also not much different in terms of students’ background, adding that, “In terms of economic backgrounds, the children from middle-class families were not coming. We have students from those families who have low level incomes such as construction workers, mechanics, drivers, labourers, and farmers.” In the present Nepali context, wages greatly vary among professions. Pokharel accepted the impacts of these situations, saying that, “The economic conditions do have impacts on them because their parents cannot afford necessary school materials and uniforms.” While he accepted that there was linguistic and socioeconomic diversity in the student population, he did not mention any influence exerted by the diversity:

The communities such as Bramhin-Chhetri, Damai-Kami, Sarki, Chaudhari, Mushahar and Jhagad do not necessarily have many cultural differences.

Linguistically, children from Tharu community speak their mother tongue and use their language at home to some extent. Apart from them, other ethnic groups such as Rai-Limbu, Newar, Dhimal, and Mushahar have started to use the Nepali language more than their own languages. However, other groups’ native language is Nepali. Overall, in terms of linguistic diversity, the students from ethnic groups do not experience any communication barriers while using Nepali language in the classroom.

In addition to the comments about differences in language and ethnicity, Pokharel also talked about a social taboo, the caste system, saying that the discriminatory system had
bestowed higher social status to certain family names. While the caste system had been abolished by the law, its influence continues to influence people’s attitudes and provided the following example of an indirect influence:

There is no discrimination as such because of the caste system in the school.
However, those castes which are the so-called lower castes are economically disadvantaged. There may be other social factors that we don’t know about. We have the castes such as Damai, Kami, and Sarki that are considered ‘a bit backward’.
There is a lower level of awareness in these parental groups toward health and education, perhaps because economic status and educational awareness usually develop together.

Pokharel mentioned that the parents from marginalised groups were often uninformed about the benefits of education for their children. He gave an example of scholarships provided to students from those groups. Even though it was a relatively small amount of money, the Government was providing scholarships as an “incentive” or “motive”. The parents enrolled their children in the school, took the money, and then disappeared, apparently using the educational money to buy food and drinks.

5.2.4 School Community and Parents Relations

The section highlights the typical characteristics of Pokharel’s school community, using his perspectives in relation its management and administration. While his school community comprised mostly low-income families, Pokharel explained that there were no
specific measures in place to calculate and determine the relative level of poverty in his school community. In discussing the school situation, he used emotive language and imagery:

They [the students] are apparently poor when we look at them. When we look at their personal hygiene; when we see their clothes; when we find them without shoes; when we find them only in slippers; when we see them wearing old torn clothes repeatedly for many days; when we see them wearing old torn clothes; when we see them carrying old bags with broken zippers; and when we find them without pencils and papers for long periods of time. We understand their economic situations and their disadvantaged backgrounds.

Pokharel acknowledged that the economic condition of the entire nation was well below that of developed countries, especially in rural regions suffering extreme economic stress. As economically advantaged parents did not send their children to community schools, it was taken for granted that his school community was economically disadvantaged. While he pointed out that the government supported these students by providing free schooling and textbooks, the parents in his school community were unable to afford the basic school requirements such as stationery, meals, and uniforms for their children. In this context, one of the major problems he was facing was parental engagement:

The problem is that in order to achieve “effective teaching” and “effective outcomes”, we need the commitment of teachers, students, and parents. While we educate students during school hours, parents should play an important role as well because education is a shared responsibility. When we ask parents to attend school meetings, their participation is rare.
Pokharel made his views about parent’s inability to attend meetings clear, arguing that, to him, parents were bound to their own situations for their need to work and earn for their everyday living expenses. He explained, “If they could participate in these meeting, we could advise them of their home responsibilities, about health, study, food, books, stationery, and uniforms.” He expressed his discontent that he was unable to discuss students’ situations and their educational needs with their parents, while also explaining how parental involvement could assist teaching staff and improve the school community. In putting forward another view, Pokharel highlighted the relationship between parental involvement and their educational differences, saying that well-informed parents usually displayed greater interest in their children’s education:

"Parents from a particular class of society evaluate and choose schools carefully before enrolling their children. They are diligent and interested in their children’s education. The parents in our school community are not in that situation. Therefore, the educational efforts of teachers and the school cannot completely contribute toward some children’s learning outcomes and quality education unless we encourage the parents to participate."

According to Pokharel, the motivation behind the more conscientious parents was planning for their children’s future. Only these parents could see the value of education. In contrast, the parents in his school community did not have “that vision” for their children. These parents were sending their children to school because of the government’s compulsory requirement under the “education for all” programme. Pokharel was cognisant that there was a need for the parents to become more aware of the school’s program, especially regarding
students’ attendance, stationery, and home study environment, adding that: “I know the situation, but I have not been able to do anything until now.” In thinking about future school plans, he considered providing additional classes in the morning if the children were unable to study at home. He explained that he had contacted Grade 1 and 2 parents asking them to send their children to the school for a nominal fee. However, according to him, half of the parents sent their children to the school; continued for two months; paid the first months’ nominal charge; and then stopped coming from the third month onwards because they owed the second month’s fees. In summary, Pokharel believed that overall educational improvements would only be possible if they could change parental perspectives and find ways for the parents to manage the fees and be able to take time off work to help with school activities.

5.2.5 Administration and Resource Management

In line with research findings about how Pokharel managed his school’s resources, he described his major headteacher role as carrying out the “day-to-day administration” that included monitoring teachers’ attendance and whether they arrived on time. In his role as the Member Secretary of the SMC, it was his responsibility to schedule the SMC meetings. While asked about these committee activities, Pokharel explained that his school’s SMC was not “particularly active” because its volunteer community members were involved in their own “professions and affairs” and that “because they would just arrange for school meeting attendance in their free time, they don’t see these meetings as a priority.” However, Pokharel acknowledged that the SMC had legal responsibilities in terms of decision-making processes and documentation, adding that:
The headteacher does need to carry out executive roles such as preparing agendas for meetings; having discussions about proposals; ensuring they [the SMC members] understand things if they don’t readily understand the importance of decision making; working with them to make decisions; implementing the decisions; writing reports; and submitting reports to the committee and other higher-level authorities.

In addition to the SMC roles, the headteacher is responsible for developing yearly and five-yearly school plans, carrying out regular assessments on teachers’ performances and recommending teachers for promotion. Pokharel explained his other duties:

The headteacher needs to submit requisition forms on behalf of teachers, forms that included their salary and allowances to the municipal government. Other roles involved distributing salaries; corresponding with higher-level agencies; lobbying for infrastructure development with governmental and non-governmental organisations; writing proposals and implementing them if approved; and evaluating and monitoring daily school administration and finances.

Pokharel discussed the complications that could arise in the daily administration of his school, mentioning that it was his responsibility to deal with the school’s financial matters. However, it was a struggle for him because calculations could be technical and complex for someone without any accounting training. Pokharel argued that as someone who studied “language and literature”, these responsibilities were well beyond his level of expertise. In spite of the record keeping responsibilities of an administrative staff member, Pokharel expressed his concern that he was held personally responsible for any mistakes in calculations, accounts, and record keeping, making the point that:
While preparing bills and vouchers, keeping records intact, submitting economic reports to municipal government and auditing, I do not even know the specific language that should be used, for example, “washalaat” [balance sheet]. This is because there is no staff with an accounting qualification in the finance section [of our school].

While talking about how he was managing his school’s resources, he expressed his satisfaction over the school’s physical infrastructure and teacher staff, acknowledging that many community schools have insufficient buildings, classrooms, and reliable power supply. He said, “We have adequate buildings; enough classrooms; concrete buildings; there are rooms with windows, doors, and ventilation; we have fans in every room; we have managed solar power supply to avoid load shedding; and we have enough human resources.”

However, he had problems with ICT infrastructure, expressing his concern about the technological inadequacies in the school, adding that, “We have not been able to manage technology”. There are a few computers which we can only show to the students in “theoretical” classes. However, in general, there is a lack of technology.” Although the school was conducting classes for computer-related units, there were no computers available for students’ practice sessions. While he did not mention any specific plans for developing ICT infrastructure, he mentioned a tendency for some community schools to send proposals to foreign diplomatic missions, mostly to the Indian Embassy, seeking development grants:

Although it is the matter for the future, we have submitted a proposal to the Indian Embassy. The proposal has progressed from the Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration Issues through Finance Ministry to the Indian Embassy. If the
proposal is approved, we will have a well-equipped building worth approximately NPR. 35,000,000 [equivalent to around AUS 43,500].

Pokharel made it clear that the Indian Embassy had been providing grants for small projects, including community school development, and that the Nepal Government had recently started to monitor these procedures to track, manage, and maintain transparency processes. As Pokharel noted, he had used the Government’s practices in sending the proposal and that he was optimistic that it would be approved. Another challenge for him was managing the school’s land and finding ways to regain land that had been infringed, section by section, in the past. To Pokharel, this was a major challenge because it involved collaboration with the municipal government, different political parties, and security bodies. However, at the moment, there had been no management moves in this direction.

5.2.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability

The Government’s recent decentralisation of educational governance and accountability framework presented significant challenges to Pokharel. In obtaining his perspectives on this new framework, he contended that there were both advantages and disadvantages for headteachers because it was a transitioning phase, and most were unaccustomed to the new context. As the aim of this research was to find out about the headteachers’ perspective and about how the new context was influencing his roles, responsibilities, and priorities, Pokharel had relatively more complaints than praise about these new arrangements. He described the situation in the following way:
Well, the change came from the demand of the certain people and political parties. They longed for the republic and the federal system. However, from our perspective as someone working in a community school, we are feeling uncomfortable. I am not sure whether this is the by-product of going through the transitional period because we do not fully understand the initiative or because the necessary rules, regulations, and legislations are not yet developed and in place.

Pokharel’s body language, his facial expressions and gestures, while talking about the new changes in relation to the municipal government, showed his disappointment about how the school was governed. He frequently compared the current regulations negatively against the previous ones. Given these inconvenient regulations, Pokharel’s first concern was budget allocation, their billing processes, and record keeping. He pointed out that previously the budget was allocated directly by the District Education Office and that the school could directly submit related documentation. He explained how difficult it now was to cooperate with the local government in that regard:

There is a concept of a ‘book corner’ in a classroom nowadays. Let’s suppose they [the local government] allocated us NPR 15000, or other amounts for other titles. What they do is they deposit money into our account, and it is deemed as income. If there is income, we need to show the expenditure, provide all the original bills that need to be submitted to the municipality. An auditor will also come to us [the school] the next day. This amount is considered to be an income by the school auditor, but the school will not have the original receipt. I am not sure if the municipality has misunderstood, or we have misunderstood.
The problem with the billing arrangements and voucher systems was that the municipality was directly depositing all the budgets into the school’s bank account. This budget would then be deemed as the school’s income. When the school would spend the amount, it would require submitting the original bills back to the municipal government for their audit. The school also had to conduct another independent audit as an organisation. In the school’s audit, he would not have the original receipts. As Pokharel pointed out, “If there are two original bills, one bill is duplicate.”

Pokharel gave another example of inconvenience from the experience of another community school headteacher. An engineer from the municipality had first estimated that five fans for the school would cost NPR 3000 each. Then, the school was required to find the fans priced at that price, which would not be always possible. Consequently, the fans priced at 2000 had been bought, using the pricing difference to purchase more fans than the original estimate. However, when that school submitted the original receipt, the municipality did not accept them. This disagreement was referred to the engineer who provided an assurance that he would “accommodate” the receipt. As Pokharel explained, “Engineers have a lot of bills in their drawer from various businesses. Now you must make duplicate bills, and without these duplicate bills, you cannot work with the municipality. In such context, you are unable to do the right things.” To him, it was not only a tedious process but also a loophole for corruption. He described another problem:

Let’s suppose, the safety tank of a toilet was full and that you needed to clean it immediately. There was no budget for this work at that time. Let’s suppose that there was a grant for buying chairs, but you didn’t need them immediately. If we spent that grant money to clean the toilet’s safety tank, they don’t accept that. You need to go to
a business and request a duplicate receipt. You need to ask for a receipt that includes specific amount matching the grant.

Clearly, from Pokharel’s perspective, there is a coordination problem between the school and the municipality. To avoid the previously described inconveniences, he suggested, somewhat ironically, an alternative, that “the municipality can use the amount themselves, buy book corner themselves, bring and place it in the classroom; take the accounts away; and do the auditing themselves.”

Pokharel appeared desperate and furious while providing these examples, subsequently talking about a recent incident in which the municipality had proposed a new condition on teachers’ salary:

I just received a call that we have to submit all the plans, bills, and vouchers for book corner, portfolio, the details of children in childcare and new enrolments in order to obtain salaries of the teachers and staff. What they are saying is we first need to submit all the bills and documents from last year, only then can they send the salaries. We are of course not a contractor. You can say to contractors to submit invoices for the payment. We are teachers who teach the children.

In addition to some examples of corruption and coordination problems in the community school system, Pokharel made more serious accusations against the municipal government. Clearly, he was dissatisfied with the municipal government staff and their procedural matters. He also complained about disrespectful and abusive treatment during these business processes, saying that he had to make several visits to the municipality office
for one job, and they tended to “throw” the headteacher’s files at them when identifying some mistakes or pointing out further requirements in the file. He stated that headteachers were frequently “persecuted” by municipal officers and that he once overreacted to the situation by saying that he would, “never come to the municipality office”, sharing another experience:

Last time, I had gone to the municipality office for some reason, and I met some colleagues from other schools who also felt that they were being persecuted. I said that if someone carried out a terrible crime and if you had to confront them, I would offer a curse along the lines of “may you have to go to municipality office frequently.” That’s the extent of harassment we are facing.

From Pokharel’s perspective, the reasons behind this situation resulting from the decentralisation of authority to the local level, was the belief that municipality employees had total power in controlling everything and everyone in their jurisdiction, including teachers. Pokharel did not discuss how this problem could be resolved, nor did he express any optimism regarding future improvements in relation to the municipal government processes.

5.2.7 Headteachers’ Job Satisfaction and Activism

This section discusses the research findings about how satisfied and motivated headteachers felt and whether or not he had made attempts to reach out to the community in any promotional initiatives as a school leader. At the beginning of the interview, when asked how he became the headteacher, Pokharel recounted: “I became teacher accidentally. I did not have any goal of becoming a teacher. However, I was awaiting the exam result of Intermediate Level, so, in the meantime, I joined a school to pass my time.” He described it as
having become entangled in the job of teaching over a course of time, saying that he sat the Teacher Service Commission examination for a permanent position and was successful. With many “ups and downs”, he continued teaching and finally became a headteacher because the former headteacher had retired and teachers, staff, and community members asked him to accept the vacant position. Figure 11 shows the state of school facilities.

**Figure 11**

*School Facilities Including the Typical Classroom, the Library and the Computer Room*

Interestingly, he expressed the view that teachers could use roundabout ways to become community school headteachers in Nepal. However, in his case, he had originally wanted to continue working as a teacher, considering that he had not chosen to be a headteacher as a result of “sustained effort, investment in the teaching profession, halo effect, or consent from all.” Although he seemed reluctant to make any politically obvious
comments, he was perhaps referring to the political influences that other headteacher had used in order to obtain their positions. As Pokharel made clear, the main reason that he did not want to become a headteacher was that he was more interested in teaching than administration and management, describing it this way:

*After you become a headteacher, you teach less, and you must do more administrative jobs. By administrative works, I mean, you need to order school purchases, and you need to motivate those around you to work efficiently. I feel that it is difficult to influence and motivate other people. I feel that it is easier to work when ordered to by others. I love completing my job. Therefore, I was disinterested in becoming an administrator. Rather, I used to think that it would be easier to work as being a colleague.*

From Pokharel’s point of view, becoming a headteacher was an obligation for him, “*I had to become the headteacher.*” With these comments and others, it was relatively easy to deduce that he was disinterested in motivating other, preferring others to motivate him, and that he was demotivated in carrying out his leadership roles, responsibilities, and priorities. As Pokharel comments confirm:

*The former headteacher had not guided teaching staff well. It may have been their practice to come school late; to try to escape their school responsibilities by arranging for leave under a number of guises; not to go to the classes on time; to finish classes before time; and sometimes not even go to the class at all. It is my responsibility and authority to correct them, but I cannot say that I did that. Therefore, I do not feel that I have been able to work well as a headteacher yet.*
While Pokharel was cognisant of his school’s context and accompanying accountability issues, he was unable to establish a minimally functional administrative environment. He also accused the former headteacher of failing to rectify teachers’ negative “habits”. Occasionally, Pokharel made comments about his own attributes, his personality, and his leadership style. He acknowledged that some of his personal traits included an inability to give direct instructions and an inability to take immediate actions. Perhaps because of these weaknesses, he believed that his leadership tenure had not been effective. The only success stories he mentioned were “painting the school” and “instigating Year 11” recently. Throughout the interview, he failed to mention taking any proactive school stances, any involvement in promotional activities, and lobbying or campaigning for school resources, except for conducting a door-to-door school enrolment campaign.

5.2.8 Community Versus Private Schools

In the discourse of school education in Nepal, the dichotomy of community schools versus private schools is one of the most contested and controversial topics. While talking about the school’s context, Pokharel also referred to the declining reputation of Nepal’s community schools over the past decades. Pokharel believed that there were specific reasons why more parents were attracted to private schools over this period. The main reasons he cited was the Maoists-led, ten years of armed conflict from 1996 to 2006 against Nepal’s ruling system. Among the areas most affected by the conflict were the Government’s institutions, including community schools. During the conflict period, private schools had attracted parents because of relative safety of children in private schools in comparison with those in community schools; inadequate management of community schools during the
resultant chaos; and the overall low quality of education being delivered to students. On the other hand, private schools continued to dominate when the conflict ended. In many respects, findings indicated that Pokharel was interested in emulating one of the private schools’ main initiatives, believing that:

*The trend nowadays, because of the influence of private schools, is the medium of instruction being English. This has resulted in the increasing number of private students and the trust that parents have in this system. There is an increasing need for the English language skills. Therefore, the parents feel that the schools should teach in English. That’s the reason why many of community schools have started using English as the medium of instruction [MOI].*

One of the major differences between community schools and private schools in Nepal is using English as the MOI in teaching and learning processes. It is important to note that private schools had been using English textbooks and study materials since their establishment. Pokharel also named a few community schools which had already started English medium classes. As a future-focused plan, he believed that it would be an opportunity to attract middle class families to his school. He also shared two options, either forming separate programs for those students wanting English medium classes or running all the classes in English.

**5.2.9 Political Influences and Their Impacts on Principalship**

In Nepal, teachers and headteachers are considered, by the general public, as active members of a political party. Accordingly, it follows that political influences may affect the
ways in which a school is managed and operated. While Pokharel did not discuss political issues as often as other participants, in talking about headteacher recruitment processes, he acknowledged that there were political influences at play in many other community school appointments:

*In our country Nepal, there are legal processes in place. However, there is a trend that they (headteachers) get the position through political influence. They tend to please other people and bring them into their lobby groups. The one who has pleased more people and has received favours from more people, then he or she can become a headteacher.*

Pokharel admitted that there were many examples of headteachers who had lower qualifications than the teachers working in the same schools, believing that teachers with higher qualifications and greater experience could become headteachers if the recruitment was fair and just. He also conceded: “*We also hear of issues that the political parties have exerted pressure and made schools operate in line with their interests, and that schools are unable to work independently. However, we don’t have that problem.*” On the other hand, Pokharel considered that he would need support from political parties to get the illegally taken land restored to his school.

### 5.2.10 Leadership Strategies and Headteacher Beliefs

This section presents the findings about what Pokharel believed were his personal strategies, values, and beliefs for leading his school. According to him, he became the headteacher by making an agreement with staff that he was their equal and that he could not
force compliance with any school matters such as regular attendance for classroom
instruction and punctuality in arriving at and leaving school at the mandated times. Pokharel
that given his personal attributes, he was unable to exert any influence or power over them: “I
cannot put someone in trouble, make them sad, or make others feel hurt... otherwise, if I have
to work as a tough administrator, I cannot do it because I am liberal person in nature.”. He
occasionally made references to his innate traits throughout the interview, acknowledging
that:

People have their own personalities and obligations not to hurt others’ feelings or
behaviours due to weaknesses, they are not only educators or administrators, but they
are also social persons. If others take that stance as “softness”, it is very hard to
change the situation. In my experience, the administrator should be strong’. By being
strong, I mean, you should work hard to make others work for you, neglecting what
other people say. I should have done that, but I am learning.

Pokharel admitted that a leader must be authoritarian one in Nepali context, while at
the same time expressing his inability to be authoritative yet. He wanted to be seen as a “role
model” to others, rather than as someone who would constantly give orders and instructions
to those around him. In expanding on this role model view, he provided an anecdote.
Pokharel explained that if he flipped an object, he could not ask anyone to turn it upside
down to bring it back to its correct position, saying that he would perform this action so that
others could witness it and follow his example. Similarly, he arranged to teach two classes a
day, unlike the previous headteacher who never taught any classes. His main purpose in
doing this was to establish and maintain rapport with his school’s students. Pokharel
elaborated on how he carried out this the role modelling:
When the bell rings, I go to the classroom immediately. My “implied” meaning, rather than direct instruction, is that if the headteacher enters a classroom on time, other teachers might follow his example and understand that they need to arrive at their classroom on time.

Pokharel’s office was located next to the teachers’ staff room where there was an entrance without a door. There were a number of teachers in the room, perhaps because it was a break, or they were checking examination papers. I was sitting in the headteacher’s room and could hear the sounds emanating from the staff room. A popular Nepali song was being played through a mobile phone, hearing the lyrics “Neither I could forget you, nor could I achieve you; in vain, in my heart, I happened to frame you.” This was a discordant occurrence in a Nepali school. However, Pokharel was not paying attention to what was going on inside the staff room.

After talking about his personal leadership traits, Pokharel introduced another of his management strategies, that of work distribution. Pokharel had divided the school into two groups, from Grades 1 to 5 and Grades 6 to 11, assigning two teachers as coordinators for these groups. He also allocated two teachers and monitors who were responsible for coordinating extracurricular activities such as health and first aid. As Pokharel argued, he believed that while it was a shared responsibility, of all staff members, to promote change and improvement, teachers’ differing beliefs was one of the barriers.
When asked about the Government’s plans and policies in terms of investing in equitable practices and improving societal outcomes through education, he emphasised the implementation processes, arguing that:

_Whatever plans and programs are designed by the Government at the policy-making level, implementation resides within the schools. The school’s lead role model or player is the headteacher. Therefore, the headteacher is a person who is responsible for making the Government’s plans and programs either a success or a failure. To make this happen, if the headteacher wants successful outcomes, he or she must be able to do whatever is necessary._

After arguing that headteachers had the power to bring about positive change, Pokharel re-emphasised that the level of parental engagement, their contentiousness, was the main factor that hindered positive changes through education in their community. In answering a question regarding reaching out to the community as a school leader, he responded by saying, “Well, our role is merely academic, and we cannot improve their family backgrounds and economic situations.” The singular role of a headteacher, according to Pokharel, is to maintain the environments in which teachers teach and students learn, along with providing teaching staff with professional development sessions that are delivered by educational experts. To summarise, Pokharel was one of the most well-educated participants in this study with significant experience as a teacher and as a headteacher. However, there was a prevalence of pessimism as he discussed his perspectives about his headteacher roles and responsibilities and the way in which he undertook them. Given the research findings, there are four main discoveries. First, while the teaching profession was an unintended profession for him from the outset of his career, he was gradually immersing himself into this
leadership position. Second, while he did not want to become a headteacher, according to his retelling, he sounded like he was obligated to accept the position. During the interview, he talked more about school leader disappointments rather than his accomplishments or motivation to succeed. Third, while he was extremely disappointed with the functioning of the municipal government and the local school committee, Pokharel never mentioned any constructive, headteacher avenues that might improve or mitigate the current situations. Fourth, his perspectives demonstrated that while he had developed an understanding of the context of the disengaged parents and the community as a whole, he did not discuss any substantial initiatives designed to reach out to these important school community stakeholders.

5.3 The “Party-Political Leader”: Mr Niroula

5.3.1 School Background

Lakeside Secondary School was another community school in a rural area of Nepal that was established in the 1960s. Social leaders at that time gathered a few children under a Rosewood tree, and the school was born. It was a long journey from studying under a tree to a hay building, and in time, in blocks of concrete buildings. The school received permission from the Government to operate a secondary level nearly a decade ago. The student population was approximately 350 and there were 18 employees, two non-teaching staff. At this time, the school was running classes from early childhood level to Grade 10. Figure 12 below shows his school building and the staffroom:
5.3.2 Headteacher Profile

Mr Ghanashyam Niroula entered the teaching profession around 15 years ago as a temporary, lower secondary level teacher for Grades 1 to 8. Niroula had completed two degrees, a Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts. He passed the Teachers Service Commission examination after seven years of employment as a temporary teacher. Five years later, Niroula was appointed as the headteacher when the previous incumbent decided to retire.

5.3.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

The purpose of this section is to present the findings that demonstrate how Niroula described the historical development of the school and its current situation. According to Niroula, establishing the school was badly managed from its inception. Over time, local community members donated parcels of land to the school and buildings were constructed.
However, the Government compulsorily acquired most of the donated land when deciding to gazette a nearby area as a wildlife reserve in the 1970s. As compensation, the Government provided an equivalent area of land 40 kilometres away from the current school location. At present, the school had a total of 0.72 hectares of scattered patches of land property which is relatively lower when compared to many other community schools in Nepal.

Although I named this school as ‘Lakeside’ for anonymity, one distinct characteristic of this school was its name in the sense that it was originally named after an individual from a disadvantaged ethnic minority group. As Niroula related, it was among a few schools in Nepal that were named after a person from such a marginalised community. This same ethnic group comprised the majority of the population in the community, and in the student population as well. Consequently, Niroula advised that the local community comprises people from other ethnic groups such as Brahmins, Chhetri, Jhagad, and Kabirath, adding that: “However, in terms of diversity and assimilation, I did not experience any management problems.”

In keeping with the previous two case studies, Niroula characterised the school community as comprising a majority of students from low-income families. While acknowledging that there were a few relatively economically able families, there were no students from high-income families:

*Most of the parents are poor. They must work hard to pay for everyday living costs and after sending their children to the school, they are able to concentrate on their*
work. Most parents are involved in agricultural and livestock activities. Their priority is their work. Their children’s education is their second priority.

For Niroula, the most distressing problem was the economic problems of the school because the parents were unable to support the school. In addition, the school did not have any other resources except the dispersed land and government grants. Such was the condition and location of the land that they were not able to generate any income from it. While Niroula made it clear that the Government provided some support, it was not inadequate:

*The support that the Government provides us are the salaries for teachers and staff for their postings; the textbooks for students; and the afternoon meal for the early childhood students up to Grade 5. Apart from that, we occasionally receive conditional grants under specific initiatives. For example, under the ‘Per Child Funding’: NPR 150 [below two Australian Dollar equivalent] per student in basic education and NPR 200 [below three Australian Dollar equivalent] for secondary students. Other than these grants, the Government sometimes provides student scholarship, but we cannot use this money to manage the school.*

Niroula mentioned that the Government contributed only under specific grants with certain conditions. The school was unable to use these grants in the critical areas of educational quality improvement and infrastructure development. He admitted that while some Governmental and non-Governmental organisations provided school support from time-to-time, these measures were not “sustainable”. “*From whatever resources we have, we have somehow managed. The school has not been able to progress as hoped and expected.*” Niroula emphasised that if there were ways to increase sustainable incomes and gain extra
Government support the school could invest them in increasing the overall quality of education.

5.3.4 School Community and Parental Engagement

Niroula recognised that in his school community, most parents were relatively uneducated and managed on low incomes received from working in traditional small-scale agriculture and livestock production. Many families had a small area of land and a few livestock such as buffaloes, chickens, cows, and goats. Some families did not possess any land at all and worked in neighbours’ fields for daily wages. As the parents depended on subsistence work, there was underemployment, a typical characteristic of rural communities in Nepal. Niroula described:

_Because of poverty, lack of education, and lack of educational awareness, most parents are unconcerned about their children’s education. They feel that their overall responsibility is just to send their children to the school. There are only a few parents who regularly come to the school and talk with the teachers about the children’s progress._

Niroula lamented the conditions in which these families were living, but at the same time, he emphasised the parents’ role in their children’s academic achievement and in the school’s improvement. He viewed the parents’ economic and social conditions as enormous challenges because it was of its impacts in terms of there being little or no home study opportunities for the children. From Niroula’s perspective, the parents’ inability to influence their children’s education, in turn, affected the school’s overall success, considering that:
There is not a good environment for the children to study at home. As the parents are not able to manage their children’s study, this has a direct impact on our school. This is because the children remain in school just for six hours out of the day. That means they spend 18 hours in the home or in the local community. Therefore, these children reflect the community’s educational, economic and cultural conditions.

Niroula contended that if the school community was ‘richer’ in terms of teaching and learning material, the school would benefit from increased community engagement and contributions. He regretted that while the school had endeavoured to engage with parents about the shared educational responsibilities, he had not been successful. In an effort to collaborate with the parents and the community, the school had occasionally invited the parents to school meeting. However, the parents were unable to attend the meetings, as Niroula acknowledged that the parents did not have enough time to attend and discuss their children’s education.

5.3.5 Administration and Resource Management

One of the aims in this study was to understand how the participant headteachers in lower-resourced schools were coping with day-to-day administration given their historic and current educational contexts. Consequently, this section presents the findings of Niroula’s perspectives on his formal and informal roles, including the resource management strategies used in his school. In terms of his formal roles, Niroula explained that he was expected to carry out all the roles in keeping with the relevant acts and regulations. He described the major roles as being “to conduct the school; to take care of the school’s properties; to carry
out administrative work in cooperation with relevant departments; to plan for ways to
develop the school’s infrastructure; and to coordinate, assess, and support teachers’
teaching-learning activities and programs.” He emphasised that there were a number of
intermittent responsibilities in addition to these formal roles.

**Figure 13**

*The Typical Classroom and the Computer Room of Niroul’a School*

Niroula believed that a headteacher should be “dynamic” in order to ensure speedier
school progress, explaining how some informal roles were often allied to formal roles. He
provided an example of the examination registration form which was open at the time of a
festival holiday: “It is a surprising fact that a headteacher cannot say it is my leave or
holiday. We need to remain on standby for 24 hours. You never know when and where you
have to go. At any time, you may either have invitations or meetings.” While the school
remained closed during the holiday, Niroula had attended the school. Niroula believed that
his role was not just limited to the school alone, that it extended to the wider, local
community, providing the following views:

*The headteacher also has to take the initiative in plans related to the development and
projects of interest to the wider community in order to represent and involve everyone*
in our future plans. If a headteacher does not play an active role in those [programs], the school will never advance or make progress. The headteacher will fail if he just carries out the expected role, working from 10 to 4 [the standard working hours].

What Niroula was saying here was that, as a member of the community, a headteacher is expected to take part in the functions at both the individual and community level. It was important to him to know about and plan for attending various community programmes, as this involvement would ultimately benefit the school in terms of strengthening support from community members. This engagement was important in terms of fundraising activities that aligned with the school’s priorities. In Niroula’s point of view, many community schools experienced problems in relation to headteacher and teacher roles, along with dealing with conflicts and uncooperative teachers. However, while Niroula argued that his school did not have to manage problems such as these, he acknowledged that there were a few senior teachers and teachers with higher qualifications than him. While these teachers were generally cooperative, he explained:

I am the headteacher with a permanent posting at lower [basic] level. However, there are teachers and colleagues in the higher [secondary] level as well. There is only one teacher who is senior to me in terms of age and the years of service in this school.

When I asked them to assume the headteacher position, they refused.

With regard to resource management, Niroula readily admitted that his school was poorly resourced and that he received inadequate support from the Government. He showed me the land in front of the school which was occupied by a few small shops and an open area, a rural bazaar. He mentioned that the only properties the school had were “the market” and an
area of land that was located in another district, very far from the school. The land was unproductive because most of the land had been used by homeless people at the time of the conflict, and that occupation continues:

*We have four “bigah” [0.64 hectares] of land in another district, where homeless people are living. We have started to gain some income after a lot of hard work. In the last conflict period, we could not get anything. When I became the headteacher, I went there and tried to see if I could improve the situation, but we just received a nominal income. In the last year, the income did not even cover the land taxes.*

Although Niroula frequently mentioned that the school was not receiving adequate support from parents, he did acknowledge that some parents were helping to run computer classes, pointing out that, “*We needed a teacher for computer classes; we have appointed a computer teacher through the internal resources. The parents help us with some amount monthly. They pay around 50 to 100 NPR monthly. This is a voluntary contribution and some parents do not contribute.*” According to Niroula, community schools in Nepal do not have computer teacher postings, which means that schools must undertake this responsibility as best they can.

While Niroula discussed several ideas designed to improve the school’s current situation, he advised that there were no resources to fund them. For example, his plans included installing a smart television for early childhood classes to Grade 5 to access; having a “smart board” and “CC camera”; decorating the early childhood classrooms; and recruiting a security guard for the school. In elaborating on his school’s major infrastructure problems, he advised:
There are some buildings which were under construction but are still incomplete. I will show you later. The pillars of the building have been erected there with the amount of NPR 150,000 [approximately AU$ 1700] from the Ministry for Peace, but now that this ministry has “collapsed”, there is no budget. The next building has not been finished and works till to be done includes painting, plastering, and wiring. We have electricity, internet, and solar power but we do not have fans.

Niroula repeatedly emphasised the resource scarcity as being the common problem for all Nepali community schools. In addition, human resource management was another critical issue for Niroula as the school had no secondary postings other than a relief quota. In this situation, teachers from the lower levels had to volunteer to teach secondary level classes. Through its internal resource funding, the school was paying a nominal amount per class for those teachers. Figure 5.11 below shows a classroom in need of redevelopment.

5.3.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability

When the nation was transitioning into the federal structure, the school’s governance was also being decentralised. The municipal government was now accountable for operating most functions associated with the community schools. In investigating how these recent events impacted in Niroula’s school, his perspectives were generally balanced: “There are not any big problems in terms of decentralisation. Some matters have been easier, and others have been slightly more complex. By easier, I mean we can obtain services locally”. Contradictorily, Niroula had several complaints about the municipal government:
The complexity is that though the local governments have become more powerful, they [the representatives in the municipal government] have misunderstood the extent of that power. A new ruling class has come into existence, and they are making excessive demands on teachers and school administration. They do not treat us in the way the community school sector should be treated.

Niroula indicated, that in his view, the newly elected representatives and the bureaucrats in municipal offices were hounding teachers and headteachers. At the same time, he seemed slightly more careful with his choice of words when discussing his school’s situation: “In fact, I am talking about the situation of the community schools of the nation, not a particular one. In the case of our municipality, it is different. I am not talking about ours. We don’t have those types of issues”. For Niroula, the local government had been working efficiently because the bureaucrats in the education department within the municipality were experienced and well informed about schools’ contexts. Similarly, the elected representatives were also experienced, in that they were involved in local politics for a long time. Once again, Niroula returned to generalist statements, to the broader issue of other community schools:

There is a big problem in other schools because they [the municipality] treat teachers as people to do what they want them to do. Schools and other organisations are different. There is a difference in terms of the nature of the operation. They do not realise those differences. The more teachers become satisfied and confident, the greater their contribution in teaching-learning. In contrast, in the case of a labourer working in the field, the more you manage, the more he or she works.
Niroula emphasised that the teachers and support staff should be respected and motivated, rather than “tortured”. To him, the plight of some teachers often involved discrimination based on their political alliances. Niroula provided an example of a few local governments which were abusing their powers in relation to transferring teachers unfairly, labelling this as an “attack” on teachers. According to him, the courts had stopped these unjust transfer practices because the provincial legislation was not yet been enacted. Niroula advised that the local governments had to understand their “limitations and jurisdictions”, considering that it would be more efficient to work with the local government if there were a few corrections to their real or imagined legislative powers.

5.3.7 Headteachers’ Job Satisfaction and Activism

As one of the aims of this study is to discover how satisfied and how motivated the participants are in their leadership roles, it was important to become aware of any exemplary campaigns associated with reaching out key stakeholder groups. In understanding how Niroula became the headteacher of his school, he advised that the former headteacher had retired and others did not want to assume this leadership responsibility, “Where there are no permanent secondary teachers, or even if there are suitable candidates who do not want the position, they can agree to handover the position to someone who is willing to accept the role”. This explanation demonstrates that he had accepted the headteacher position because other teachers “did not want to take charge”. During Niroula’s interview, there were some instances that revealed the level of his satisfaction and motivation. For example, he expressed his sense of fulfillment in providing computer classes for Grades 4 to Grade 10, adding that he had been able to arrange an extra training period and a teacher to run the classes:
We have a separate computer lab. We conduct the classes according to the contemporary “ICT technology”, along with the “virtual classes” through a projector, searching from the sources such as YouTube. Next, other schools conduct seven periods; however, we conduct eight periods because we have a separate period for the computer unit.

In addition to the computer lab, although rudimentary by Western standards, Niroula was similarly pleased with other infrastructure projects such as establishing a library and science lab. The successful step for Niroula was being able to organise and celebrate “the golden jubilee” of the school, pointing out that celebrations such as this would be rare occurrences in other community schools in the region. He also mentioned that the school had also published its “Golden Souvenir” in the form of a book. Figure 14 shows the classroom with a projector and the science lab of the school.

Figure 14
The Technology Classroom in Which Students were Taught Using a Projector and a Corner of the Science Lab

Niroula often emphasised that his headteacher role as being made easier because he had a team of younger and more energetic teachers. This is a contrast to the situation
described by Parajuli and Das (2013) who found that “Most of the teachers who are teaching in community schools are old and have not upgraded their qualification and are not up-to-date with contemporary global and national issues”. Niroula argued that his school did not have problems such as dealing with “stubborn permanent teachers resistant to change” and “teachers who tended to dominate other teachers recruited from ‘internal resources’ and those working as temporary teachers”. He mentioned that there was only one teacher in the over-50s age group, arguing that that younger and more engaged teacher tended to be more co-operative and committed to more collaborative decision-making processes.

5.3.8 Community Versus Private Schools

In the Nepali context, the community schools are compared with, and often disadvantaged by, the private schools in terms of the quality of education being delivered and the students’ academic achievements. While not asking any direct questions regarding how participants viewed this inevitable comparison with private schools, almost all of the participants voluntarily raised this issue and expressed their views on this phenomenon. When Niroula was describing his school and its struggles with decreasing student enrolments, especially at the lower levels. He introduced the subject. To him, the reason behind the slump in enrolments was driven by parents’ positive interest in private schools and the widely accepted, negative views about community schools. Niroula argued while that community were making concerted effort to improve their educational standards, the community belief is that sending their children to private schools is highly regarded in terms of social prestige, adding that:
Even if we [the community schools] have good classes; and if we compare our students with the neighbouring private schools, we have more competent students; the parents say that when they want to send their children to our school, others tend to question their decisions and query “why are you educating them in the government school instead of the private school while you just have a son and a daughter?” Therefore, some families feel that they must enrol their children in a private school.

In order to attract more students, the school had initiated one of the private school’s most successful strategies, using English as the MOI in their classrooms. Niroula explained that his school now used English in classes from Kindergarten to Grade 5. In addition, the school now used the textbooks that are used in the private school in the region. According to Niroula, one of the main purposes of these initiatives, having English medium classes, computer units, and the use of technology in the classroom, was to influence parents in their decision-making about school enrolments. In summary, Niroula was working to establish community school enrolment as a viable enrolment option.

When asked if the overall community school education was successful in terms of generating student and community engagement, Niroula once again compared the achievement of graduating students from community and private schools. He argued that there was a ‘brain drain’ problem and lack of loyalty to the nation in that private school graduates who, in his view, were attracted to select professions such as banking, engineering, and medicine. However, to Niroula, community school graduates were represented in almost all the state sectors, claiming that these graduates were outstripping the private school graduates in the higher education sector as well. As he argued, “Is there any answer to that?”,
countering the stereotypical negative “rumour and impression” about community secondary schools.

5.3.9 Political Influences and Their Impacts on Principalship

As highlighted in previous case studies, party politics was either directly or indirectly affecting the Nepali community secondary schools. In the case of Niroula, he did not acknowledge any direct impacts of political influences in his school. Nor were direct questions associated with party politics explored. However, in responding to a general question related to dealing with any internal or external headteacher challenges, he occasionally talked about political influences, but always in reference to community schools in general, none specifically related to his school. As previously mentioned in this case study, Niroula believed that the Nepali community schools were facing problems of political influence at the municipal government level, with this influence being in the form of political bias, unwarranted dominance over school management, and disrespectful treatment towards headteachers. Nevertheless, he did not admit to any political impacts in relation to his school. In relating one reference, Niroula acknowledged the local political leaders as being experienced community workers. However, in a subsequent later reference, he referred to these leaders as being childish and uninformed, commenting that:

They are newly elected and therefore feel honoured, but unnecessarily so, because they think that they have won the election with the majority of votes. On the other hand, they do not know how to do it. After 20 years, they have just arrived, so they are new to the responsibilities. Some of them just show open hostility to teachers and headteachers.
In such a situation, Niroula maintained that his teaching team was working hard in the best interests of their school community and not for others’ interests. Consequently, he held the strong view that by working to sustain economic transparency and collective decision-making, their achievements would be their own and not aligned with any political “halo effects” along the way. In relation to other challenges, which also seemed relatively political in nature, Niroula maintained that several organisations viewed the school from a range of differing perspectives, including the view that the school was conducted in a “unilateral way”. He did not expand on this statement, nor did he specify whether he was referring to a political perspective. In turn, he provided a further example of an external challenge, one that involved a conflict with a cooperative organisation run by a group of local farmers. While Niroula pointed out that he had resolved this conflict since becoming the headteacher, as with other possibly politically influenced discussions, he declined to discuss the nature of the conflict.

5.3.10 Leadership Strategies and Headteacher Beliefs

In exploring Niroula’s personal leadership strategies, values, and beliefs concerning the management and administration of the school, he initially reflected on the various principles of administration. One of these principles he used was that “an administrator must be an autocrat”. At the same time, he raised the issue of his being conscientious in relation to what he considered the over-imposition of personal decision-making and collective decision-making, arguing that:
You must be autocratic if a teacher does not fulfil their assigned responsibilities. I am also autocratic. However, headteachers will fail if they always impose their personal viewpoints while making decisions. They have to work by cooperating with all, by discussing school matters with all parties and respecting the feelings and views of others.

Niroula argued that he had recognised the “roots” of probable internal conflicts by witnessing many other community schools’ situations. According to him, headteachers must not be “greedy” in terms of economic aspects and maintain transparency in all financial matters. Niroula added that conflicts may surface when a headteacher reacts according to political or ideological influences. To him, another strategy was to “facilitate the environment for the participation and acceptance of all [teachers and staff]” as a way of avoiding internal conflicts. He had assigned roles and responsibilities to the teachers and staff as per their qualifications and abilities as ways to enhance their job satisfaction. Niroula mentioned that the school had recognised teachers’ performance with occasional rewards. Similarly, the school also rewarded those teachers who would not use their annual sick leave. This ‘reward’ took the form of providing one day extra leave for 12 “proxy periods”, the periods that a teacher could cover classes as substitutes for absent teachers. Niroula insisted that in implementing these strategies he was able to avoid the internal school conflicts that other community schools in Nepal face.

Niroula emphasised his view that if school headteachers were to be regarded as “dynamic, self-confident, and self-assured”, they are better to work collaboratively towards improving the school. However, he believed that achieving positive school outcomes also depends on Government’s policies, commenting that:
If the government announced that the children of all government employees must be enrolled in the Government’s community schools; if the political leaders and all who receive salary and allowances from government enrol their children in community schools; then school improvements will automatically follow.

Given these reflections, Niroula lamented over the lack of policy direction that focused directly on Government employees, including the fact that many community schoolteachers did not send their children to the community schools. He suggested that if it was compulsory for the Government employees to send their children to their local community school, this would increase local community confidence in their community schools. In turn, this confidence would increase student enrolment, making the point that:

*If a doctor’s child studies there, the headteacher and teachers will be psychologically “influenced”, won’t they? Therefore, you need to do nothing for 50 percent of the required school improvement. Following that, there should be an increment in investment and monitoring systems that track community school improvements.*

Niroula believed that the Governments’ educational plans and policies would only be successful if there was a significant financial investment in the community school sector. In his view, the total budget allocated for the education sector was half of the required budget, arguing that the majority of the students from all over Nepal were studying in the community schools, allocating just 10 percent of the total budget was inadequate. In addition to increased budget allocation for the infrastructure development and better teaching materials, he
believed that the Government could improve community schools by increasing the number of teachers’ postings in schools and ensuring the on-time delivery of educational textbooks.

In summary, Niroula the headteacher in a rural community school that from its establishment in the 1960s has always been under-resourced. The majority of its local community are from marginalised and already disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Typically, the parents of the students attending this school are uneducated and lack of the awareness of the importance of education for their children. While Niroula did not hold the tertiary qualifications of many of his teachers, he was appointed as the headteacher due to his teaching experience, his age, and the fact that his colleagues were disinterested in accepting the headteacher role. From our research discussions, the conflict concerning his initial posting continued. Throughout these discussion, Niroula’s responses were carefully considered and handled diplomatically, particularly when addressing the socio-political influences that other participants had raised. However, Niroula was more open in discussing his major school improvement plans and in his views on the community school versus private school competition and related funding issues. Importantly, Niroula’s focus and interest on wider community concerns and organisations, demonstrated that his headteacher role was more on political matters than those expected by a school leader.

5.4 Conclusion

In identifying two distinct groups of headteachers in this study, this chapter presented the case study stories and research findings of the first group. This group, the demotivated
headteachers introduced Acharya, the Ineffectual Headteacher from the Forest Secondary School; Pokharel, the Reluctant Headteacher, from the Highway Secondary School; and Niroula, the Party-Political Headteacher, from the Lakeside Secondary School. In doing so, the ten research themes emerging from this study were comprehensively discussed. The next chapter focuses on the second group of headteachers, those considered dynamic, motivated, and optimistic and working in relatively ‘richer’ schools in terms of greater access to educational resources. In doing so, the case study stories, and research findings of Ms Samira Giri from the Motherland Secondary School, Mr Teknath Baral from the Greenfield Secondary School and Mr Kamal Tamang from the Hillview Secondary School are discussed.

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3 All headteacher and their school names have been assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and protect identities.
Chapter 6

Group Two Case Study Stories and Research Findings:

Effective, Hardworking, and Optimistic Headteachers

With six research participants representative of six case studies, across-case findings identified two distinct leadership groups. The previous chapter, using case study stories and research findings, discussed the first of these two groups, the three participants identified as being demotivated headteachers. In doing so, Acharya, the Ineffectual Headteacher, Pokharel, the Reluctant Headteacher, and Niroula, the Party-Political Leader, were introduced and discussed in terms of ten identified themes. Collectively, these headteachers were found to be less successful and less focused in carrying out their leadership roles, responsibilities, and priorities. At the same time, they were neither able to utilise available resources efficiently, nor sufficiently focused and determined to identify and develop additional resources for their respective schools.

This chapter presents the second leadership group, the three headteacher participants who were more dynamic, motivated, and optimistic. While their school contexts were slightly more advantaged in terms of the amount and use of resources available to the first group, findings indicated that they were better equipped to identify, manage, and develop these resources more effectively. This group comprises Ms Samira Giri from the Motherland Secondary School; Mr Kamal Tamang from the Hillview Secondary School; and Mr Teknath Baral from the Greenfield Secondary School. In keeping with the previous chapter, these case study will follow second level themes, that emerged from data analysis and research processes as outlined in Chapter 4. These are ten themes as shown in Chapter 5.
6.1 The ‘Hardworking’ Headteacher: Ms Giri

HT6.1.1 School Background

The Motherland Secondary School was among the most recent community schools and located in one of six metropolitan cities in Nepal. This school differed from the other participants’ community schools in that the school had a larger number of students with disabilities, making it the most inclusive of the six case study sites. While initially established as a public trust and a non-profit organisation, at the time of the research, this school had been accorded the status of a Nepali Government (the Government) school. The school provided classes from early childhood to Grade 10, with approximately 150 students in total. There were approximately 25 school employees, including non-teaching staff, with Ms. Samira Giri in the headteacher position. Figure 15 below shows the main school building and the headteacher’s office:

Figure 15
The Front View of the Giri’s School Building and the Headteacher’s Office
6.1.2 Headteacher Profile

Giri was a founding member of the school and had been teaching for the past 15 years. Initially, she became involved in school’s development with the intention of providing social services. In playing an active role in its establishment, she had been employed as a teacher for five years before she was appointed as to the headteacher role. At the time of this study, Giri held a postgraduate qualification from a local university in the area of educational planning and management.

6.1.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

The school was established as a collective initiative of like-minded people in the region who were either already involved in or were wanting to enter into social work sector. With approximately 20 founding school members, Giri was initially encouraged and supported by her family. Since there were no schools in the region providing inclusive education for students with disabilities, her support circle was keen to establish one.

With the help of her family, Giri first approached a government school’s supervisor, a resource person who was supporting community schools in educating children with disabilities. According to Giri, while a few schools were offering education inclusively at the basic level, there were no secondary schools, reflective of the Government’s absence of educational priorities in the disability area. Given this educational need, founding members began lobbying with local leaders and disability advocates and experts in the region.

In keeping with this approach, Giri and other members undertook a six-month long technical training course in order to be better plan and prepare for including students with
disabilities in their school. The next issue involved identifying sufficient space to establish the school. The first option was to request to existing community schools which might provide facilities to use their school buildings outside of their regular school hours. However, as community schools in the region showed no interest in cooperating with Giri and her team, with the help of a teachers’ association, one of the community schools, even farther away than planned, agreed to share their facilities.

By that time, the school had commenced its operations, educating three students on the premises of another school. According to Giri, her team used the school at alternative times, in the morning during winter and in the afternoon during summer: “We had no other choices other than accepting those schooling times.” Initially, the only assistance the school received was from a local government body that provided second-hand furniture and around NPR 10,000 (approximately AU$120), an amount that did not cover even one teacher’s salary. By that stage, they were in search of substantial assistance so that they could gradually develop the school. As Giri explained: “We thought we needed to seek support from the learned and socially well-known people and promote their association with the school.” The team also approached local organisations that might be willing to contribute to the school’s development.

An early contributor, an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) that supported all Nepali education sectors provided the equivalent of US$ 4000 as a scholarship fund which enabled the school’s founders to the next developmental stage. According to Giri, previously her team had been working as volunteers, without claiming any salary and or benefits for the initial six months. Subsequently, further community leaders, known locally as ‘socially-recognised people’, joined the team, and over time the school was able to increase
its student numbers. Meanwhile, the INGO provided two further grants totally around US$100,000 funds that were used for school land acquisition and buildings. A few years later, the school had its own school buildings, with the land approximately a half a hectare. Figure 16 below shows a drawing room and furniture donated by a local agency (on the left) and a part of the science lab (on the right).

Figure 16

*School's Drawing Room with Furniture Received as Donation and the Corner of Science Lab*

Following these developments, the school had a mix of students from the various ethnic and cultural backgrounds all living with disabilities, with many students who were from other educational districts. However, uniting all students were their low-income family backgrounds as Giri explained:

*Those families have problems that include the lack of adequate food, and being unable to receive medical attention when they are ill. We have also found that many children have disabilities in part because their mothers were not well-treated when they were pregnant. Even after birth, many disabilities became complicated as a result of conditions associated with jaundice and typhoid.*
Clearly, establishing Giri’s school represents a long story of struggle and working with vulnerable children from low-income families. However, she argued that her school was relatively “well-managed and progressive” during this time, making Giri’s educational contribution even more remarkable. In discussions that focused on establishing this school for children with disabilities, it was clear that Giri’s personal qualities and attributes, of being empathetic, dynamic, collaborative and committed to educational equity, were evident during the school’s establishment and subsequent growth.

6.1.4 School Community and Parents Engagements

The previous section provided an overview of the parents’ economic and social situations, both in the past and in the present. However, in obtaining a greater understanding of how she established parental engagement in guiding the school’s future, also involved discussions with the school’s connection to the broader school community. When asked how she would describe her relationships with parents, Giri explained that around 90 percent of families were poor, with a low socio-economic social status. As the school had its own dormitory that was available to the students, Giri provided an example of a student who was boarding in the school:

*Some parents drop their children across that canal* [a small canal beside the school] *and disappear. Some parents never return. You asked about the parents, so I recall past experiences. For example, there was a child, aged around seven or eight, who was enrolled in Grade 1. After he graduated from Grade 10, he was aged around 18*
or 19. I never met his parents meanwhile. When they returned, saying that that they were their parents, I said that I was not going to let that child be returned to them.

As Giri emphasised, some parents never contacted the school once they had enrolled their children. In the situation just mentioned, the student’s parents had little understanding of parental responsibilities, as a parent herself, she knew the real meaning of parental obligations. However, in contrast, a few parents were financially able and more conscientious, recalling that the school had received NPR 200 to 500 monthly (approximately below AU$ 6) from some parents. While this financial assistance was welcomed, in line with Government regulations, community schools were not permitted to accept additional fees from students’ parents. Giri discussed an obvious change in parental attitudes to school in comparison past experiences. For Giri, many parents considered that investing in their children’s education was pointless. With this changed attitude towards education for children with disabilities, parents had started to believe that education could contribute toward their children’s future livelihoods. Furthermore, Giri expressed her disappointment with several parents’ discrimination in favour of their children without a disability, accusing them enrolling their children with disabilities in her school, and then showing little or no concern with their progress, in contrast with their approaches to their other children, with no disabilities, whom they enrolled in other, so-called ‘better’ schools.

Regarding the school’s relationship with the broader community, it was evident that Giri had played a dynamic role from the outset of her career. As a founding member of the school, she had collaborated with extended community members throughout the school’s development. She made it clear that this shared community involvement, the transition from
an independent school to community school would have been impossible without continuing stakeholder support as the school further developed.

6.1.5 Administration and Resource Management

When asked Giri how she described her formal and informal headteacher roles, responsibilities, and priorities, she recounted that leadership meant managing the school “24 hours a day”, except the time for her family matters. She pointed that these school responsibilities also included being involved in a teachers’ association, specifically for staff educating students with disabilities. Despite her busy schedule, she considered that it was important to participate in these meetings, sharing experiences, and discussing programmes for those working in disability sector.

Giri mentioned that it was part of her school priority matters to collaborate with the schools’ founding members, management committee, and local government agencies in relation to the on-going school issues. For Giri, her formal roles involved supervising teachers and support staff, managing the day-to-day classes and resolving teachers’ issues, if and when they arose. She recognised that her informal roles were more significant and demanding in the sense that she had to be ready to face them regardless of the situation. As there were many students residing in the school’s “hostel”, she often had to spend her out-of-school time supervising and caring for these students.

In relation to the school’s daily administration and management, Giri shared the experiences she encountered such as uncomfortable situations with new teachers. In her experience, Giri found the new teachers often treated the teaching profession like other type
of employment, irrespective of contextual school matters. Giri believed that the school’s teaching should be orientated towards delivering service rather than focusing on earning a salary. Consequently, her discussions with newly arrived teachers focused their priorities in accepting teaching positions at her school, maintaining that:

*If you don’t have a service-oriented mindset, you will not be successful in disability sector. If you are more self-oriented, you will not succeed. When people talk about a job, they think about time because time is money. However, you may have to spend your extra time at any moment in this school for children with disabilities.***

When talking about the school’s resources, Giri first mentioned the “basket fund” which was started from the donation of NPR 100,000 (approximately AU$ 1,200) from each founder member. As a founder member, Giri had also donated a similar amount. Moreover, she appreciated that the Government had been supportive, now providing around NPR 4000 (approximately AU$ 50) per month per child as a form of scholarship. That amount would also go into the basket fund, the main source that funded the school’s operations. The school was also receiving significant support from various associations, organisations, and individuals, along with a few parents assisting in fundraising initiatives. As the school was located near an industrial area, according to Giri, the school had been identified as a recipient of their philanthropic activities. Individuals and local businesses were also providing resources in terms of building materials, stationery, and sports equipment.

**6.1.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability**
As discussed in previous cases, discovering how participant headteachers were coping with the new situational context of decentralised educational authority being delegated to the municipal government, in contrast with other research participants, Giri felt comfortable in working with the agency for three reasons. First, the school had recruited a former bureaucrat as a staff member who was now working in special education and had expertise in administrative and governance matters. Second, Giri and her team were resilient and resourceful, with these resources developed during their school establishment struggles. Accordingly, she worked well with people and organisations, arguing that: “Nowadays it is easier to work and deal with management issues, perhaps because of the critical tasks we accomplished in the past.” Third, Giri ensured that the school’s staff collaborated with ‘social leaders’ and well-known people in the local community and established a network with the municipal staff for their assistance.

In relation to educational governance, Giri expressed her utmost disappointment with the Government’s inability to conduct the Teachers Service Commission’s Examination\(^4\) (TSCE) for nearly two decades. This examination was the only gateway to obtain a permanent teaching position for newly employed teachers. She regretted the fact that competent, young teaching staff were supposed to be “better” teachers and as such could not sit the examination, with the result that the community school headteachers had to deal with the consequences: As Giri made clear:

\(^4\) The Teachers Service Commission’s Examination was the means of registering all teachers in Nepal. Having successfully completed the exam, new teachers entered a ‘pool’ to then be allocated to schools throughout the country. The system was designed to be equitable in terms of teachers qualifying and the distribution of teachers across the nation. By suspending the Examination, teachers – not fully registered – were allocated from local applicants often by criteria other than teaching ability or qualification, such as party membership.
The Teachers Service Commission did not administer its examination for 20 years. If the Commission’s examination was conducted in time, we wouldn’t have a problem. When we were young, when on earth did we have the chance to attend the examination? We didn’t. You can see the impacts now. They [people in the Government] are trying to manage it [teacher allocation] now. First, there should be better policy, law, and order. Then, educational sector improvement will follow as part of these gradual processes.

Although Giri accused the postponement of teachers’ recruitment process for an extended period and its overall impact for leading to the deterioration of community school’s education, she expressed her relief that she could cooperate with the metropolitan government for two teachers’ recruitment lately. Moreover, she expressed her satisfaction that the local government had also approved a quota of teacher for the early childhood class, which the school was conducting through its internal resource.

6.1.7 Headteacher’s Job Satisfaction and Activism

This section elaborates on the findings of how satisfied Giri was with her work roles. It also presents the findings of whether she was reaching out to the broader communities for a good cause or was involved in lobbying and campaigning for the school’s improvement. From Giri’s perspectives in the previous sections, she was straightforward about her philanthropic initiative and the dynamic roles she was playing. At the same time, she had recognised that she was doing something that was rewarding and meaningful. She reasoned:
The main purpose to work in this school is my self-satisfaction. If you earn money, you cannot get self-satisfaction. Who I was? I was nothing. As I said the highest of my achievement and happiness is self-satisfaction. People recognise me as a headteacher of this school in the region. I am proud of it, and therefore, I don’t get tired.

Giri acknowledged that working as the headteacher of the school had raised her profile in the community. She also pointed out that societal expectations for women in Nepal would be to become a housewife when they come to their husband’s family after marriage. However, Giri recognised her family’s support and motivation in her goal to establish an school for children with disabilities, mentioning she occasionally became frustrated in her endeavours, especially when people failed to recognise her efforts to establish the school, underestimating the hard work it required.

Giri shared a success story of a female student with a disability from a low-income family. When the parents had inquired about the enrolment, Giri had promised that if the student could do well, the school would not only take care of her studies, but also offer employment. The student did well in her studies and was eventually appointed as a teacher under a relief quota system in the school. Similarly, Giri was justifiably pleased to receive approval for conducting a technical course, civil engineering, explaining that: “They are also learning technical things such as wiring, plumbing, surveying, and architectural drawing. With a view of making them employable, we established this course.” Giri further explained how the school’s students were able to implement their training, knowledge, and skills in real-life situations, adding that:
The wall you can see in front of the school, the compound wall, the children built that themselves. They have done wiring inside [the building]. They can do it. The structure [of the shed] in front [of the building] was constructed by them. They can do many jobs related to construction.

Figures 17 below show the security shed, part of the main gate of the school, and the workspace of the Civil Engineering unit.

**Figure 17**
*The Shed Constructed by the Civil Engineering Students and the Students’ Workspace*

In the retelling of her school’s success stories, it was clear that Giri’s perspectives indicated a strong sense of belongingness. She emphasised that the school was established and developed to its present because of the team effort in which everyone worked extremely hard. She recalled how they had rigorously engaged and reached out to external non-Government agencies in successive fundraising drives. On the other hand, Giri was satisfied with her school’s situation when she compared her school with other community schools:
Many of them [community schools] have really tragic stories to tell here. Even if they provide me a position to another community school, I probably cannot not work there. They have neither of the boundary walls, drinking water facilities, and toilets. We hear that there is no progress in community schools. I wonder how the teachers can spend their days there.

Giri spoke positively about some of her lobbying activities with the local government and higher authorities. She discussed her effort to obtain approval to provide education at Grade 11 and 12 because she wanted her local students to be able to continue their studies in the same school. Giri strongly emphasised that she wanted to see her students become skilled, employable, and people with principles and good character.

6.1.8 Community Versus Private Schools

In any discussion about community schools in Nepal, the issues of their counterparts, the private schools, emerges. In the earlier section, Giri expressed her views and disappointment that some parents discriminated against their children with disability. She had accused some of the parents of enrolling their more able children in the so-called “better schools”, adding that:

Now I say to the parents that these are your children to take care of you in your old age. However, you are spending thousands [of NPR] for your other children in private schools, plus you don’t come to visit your children when your [disabled] children are ill.
According to Giri, there was educational discrimination because parents had enrolled their children without disability in the private schools that were very expensive. However, she emphasised that their more able children would leave ‘the nest’ for broader opportunities while their children with disability would stay with the parents. In discussing her views on private education, Giri argued, “Nowadays, from our monthly headteachers’ meetings, we know that there are some community schools which have improved greatly. This is because, if you really want to achieve something, you can make the school as good as private schools.” Giri also provided some examples of the better community schools and considered that if a headteacher could establish a “favourable teaching environment” and if there was a strong sense of belongingness in the staff and community, community schools would become more competitive.

6.1.9 Political Influences and their Impacts on Principalship

As discussed in the previous case studies, active party politics may be one of the main hindrances to community school improvement in Nepal. Consequently, political influences and their impacts were the major issues raised in participants’ interviews, even if not explicitly asked. While Giri did not acknowledge such influences in her school, she emphasised that the headteacher’s role is the most important factor in having effective administration and management of any given school. As she argued, “A headteacher is responsible for everything and he or she has to work hard if the school is to progress”, adding that other school matters follow from their roles.

Giri recognised that other school matters such as “policies, regulations, and politics” would come next., emphasising that she was not talking about her school but schooling “in
general”. She once again recounted that TSCE had not been conducted for around two decades. While partially blaming the nation’s decades-long conflict, she attributed blame to the deliberate interference from political parties because, according to her, “the teachers were recruited in the name of relief quota but based on nepotism, access to politics and power, and favouritism.” Giri strongly expressed her view that this interference was not the “right” thing to do for those who were managing public education, considering that this injustice led to the recruitment of underqualified teachers, teaching underperformance, and the further deterioration of community schools. Giri’s perspectives on this situation contrasted with her own leadership role in trying to recruit the best and the brightest young teachers in her school and being successful in appointing two teaching positions.

6.1.10 Value, Beliefs, and Strategies

As one of the aims of this study was to gain a better understanding of participants’ leadership approaches, research findings demonstrated that Giri had a strong work ethic and that principalship was one of struggle. She recognised that community schools, in general, faced a range of issues in the areas of resource availability, parents’ socio-economic situation, and teachers’ attitudes. However, she argued, “I am a bit of a different type of person because I am devoted to the spirit of service.” Giri emphasised that teachers’ jobs were not only about attending classes in the assigned periods but to reach out to the children in line with their learning need, irrespective of their standard class routines. In her view, students with disability would require relatively more attention and care compared to the more able students in secondary schools.
On the other hand, Giri emphasised that if the school was to improve, it was important to bring change in teachers’ perspectives about their profession. She was often critical of teachers who simply thought that the school was the responsibility of the headteacher alone, making it clear that: “I often hear from other teachers that the school belongs to the headteacher. The fact is that schools don’t belong only to headteachers. For example, does the municipality belong only to the mayor? No, it does not.” Additionally, she was critical of the less effective teachers because she believed that “only the qualified ones can perform a quality job” and that competence and determination should occur concurrently:

*The fact is that in our country’s schooling context is that if you are unable to find any other jobs, you become a teacher. If you do not have anything, you start teaching.

However, in my opinion, the most talented ones should be recruited as teachers.*

Giri highlighted two aspects of teachers’ recruitment process in the Nepali context. First, there was the unemployment problem, with teaching viewed as a profession that was easier to enter than other employment sectors. Second, while these unemployed people might not become particularly good teachers, they may have been recruited due to political influences based on nepotism and favouritism. According to Giri, this trend was not only downgrading the quality of education provided but resulted in less community respect for the teaching profession.

Giri’s was also concerned about the school curriculum for students with disability, empathetically arguing that there should not just be a single curriculum for all students, irrespective of their abilities. She considered that the same curriculum hindered the academic progress of the students with disability, adding that:
Education is fulfilled with listening, speaking, writing, and reading. An able child in his or her five years will have already heard and learnt thousands of words before coming to the school. However, when a child with a disability comes to school when aged around seven or eight, they may not know many things and they have never heard anything like that before. The most difficult and troublesome thing is curriculum.

Giri believed that there was a need for “a friendly curriculum” according to the types of ability rather than disability. According to her, the Education Department had just introduced a curriculum for students with intellectual disabilities. However, it was not applicable to students with other types of disability. For Giri, the notion of ‘quality of education’ was irrelevant in such a context when there was no dedicated curriculum for differently able students and no related teaching practices. While she believed that teaching and learning processes were the result of “interaction”, the school were being forced to depend on “one-way delivery” because teachers were not always able to receive responses from some students.

In discussing her perspectives on education for students with disability, Giri believed that a community school education should be able to bring positive changes in the lives of its students, outlining areas requiring urgent attention and improvement if the outcomes were to be “substantial”:

If there was no such school, and if they did not have this study option, they would have been confined within their homes playing with garbage, cleaning the garbage,
and looking after livestock. At least, they have been able to go outside, use a few words and become involved in organisations. They have been associated with different other institutions. They have been able to seek help and speak for their rights. I feel they have achieved a lot.

In summary, research findings demonstrated that Giri was very different from the previous participant headteachers in the sense that she was service-oriented, having philanthropic and empathetic values from the outset of her teaching and principalship career. By choice, she had pursued this career in improving the academic lives of students with disability, the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Giri’s school establishment had been a journey of struggle that required her continuing dedication, determination, hard work, and persistence as the headteacher. In this continuing journey, Giri demonstrated dynamic leadership, and that being an effective, hardworking, optimistic headteacher had paid dividends.

6.2 The ‘Resourceful’ Headteacher: Mr Tamang School

6.2.1 School Background

Hillview Secondary School was a community school situated in a relatively remote area in the hilly region of Nepal. The altitude of the school, of around 2000 metres above sea level, means that it was only accessible by a narrow gravel road, a few kilometres from the highway. It was established in the 1960s as a primary school with classes from Grades 1 to 4. After two decades, the school was upgraded to Grade 7. In the 1990s, the school obtained a further upgrade to teach Grades 9 and 10. After a period of 10 years, the school commenced...
teaching Grades 11 and 12, referred to as Higher Secondary Education that time. At the time of the research, the school had three separate, college-type faculties called Arts, Education, and Commerce. However, at the time of this study, the Government was in the process of integrating these faculties into the General Secondary Education program. The school had approximately 25 employees including non-teaching staff. The total number of students was around 450. Figure 18 below shows the school building the headteacher’s office.

Figure 18

Tamang’s School Building and the Combined Staffroom that Included his Workstation

6.2.2 Headteacher Profile

Tamang entered the teaching profession around 25 years ago. After two years, he was appointed as an Assistant Headteacher. After working in that position for around 10 years, he was appointed as the school’s headteacher. Tamang considered that he was appointed to this position because of his “administrative understandings and abilities”. He also emphasised that he had a Bachelor of Education qualification with a specialisation in educational administration. Prior to these studies he had completed a Bachelor of Arts specialising in
Economics and Political Science. At the time of the research, he had upgraded his qualifications to include a Master of Arts in Rural Development.

6.2.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

The history of the school was similar to those of other participant headteachers, in the sense that this school was also established by the local community. However, there were certain differences in certain aspects. First, the school was in the remote hilly area with a very small population where a few community members had received a formal education. At the time of establishment, there was no dedicated road access to the school except for a trail used by the local people, and the community did not have access to basic services such as drinking water and electricity. As this small community comprised predominantly of marginalised community members receiving low incomes, the school struggled, for a long time, to enrol the requisite number of students. In that situation, it was almost impossible to obtain adequate community support for developing the school. According to Tamang, the school had a very low profile from its establishment until recently.

As Tamang explained, there had been a significant growth in population density in the school’s community. With this growth, the access to road was widened and access to services such as drinking water and electricity became available. At the time of this research, there were many tall concrete buildings, many of which have display boards offering foods and homestay accommodation for tourists. The local population growth had been influenced by internal migration, with Tamang explaining that:
The economic situation of the community members has changed considerably in a very short period. Until the recent past, the situation was really dire and people were poor, but nowadays there are some families who have become very rich in a short period of time. I hope you saw very nice houses that have been built. Most of these families were only able to afford food for around three months in a year.

According to Tamang, the major change in the community school context was the increasing economic status of the residents. However, he believed that the changed situation was possible only because of his school’s contribution. He described how, at first, the school took the initiative in seeking funding from foreign tourists who used to visit the region from time-to-time. With this financial assistance and in collaborating with the tourists, the school was able to contribute to the community’s basic infrastructure needs. Tamang described how the development led to increases in land prices, the number of internal migrants, and the growth of small businesses such as local hotels and homestay opportunities. Importantly, the economic situation of the parents and community members had improved. However, Tamang pointed out that there was still relative poverty among 65 percent to 75 percent of the parents. In turn, he described three categories of students in his school: students from very rich parents, students from very poor parents, and students without parents.

This community school was dissimilar to other participant headteachers’ schools in terms of diversity of the students. Approximately 90 percent of the students were from a marginalised, indigenous ethnic group, and for Tamang, this was problematic. According to him, the problem with the ethnic group was that they did not value education and had a traditional belief that education would not contribute to their future. These community members associated education with earnings and believed that they could better go to “Arab”,
the Middle East, and find unskilled labour and earn more than an educated person in Nepal. Alternatively, they would sell their land if they required money. Tamang argued: “They tend to think if people found a job after studies, they would just earn around NPR 30,000 [approximately around AUS 350]: and if they went abroad seeking employment, they could earn a lot more.” In addition, there was a problem with absenteeism because the children from this ethnic group celebrated their festivals for extended periods of time that would go well beyond the allocated leave time.

Tamang believed that there was no educational discrimination in terms of gender, stating that around 53 percent of students were female while 47 percent were male. From Tamang’s perspective, there were mainly three reasons why there was a higher number of female students. First, if the parents had a son at first, they wouldn’t want another child. However, if the first child was a daughter, they would have more children until a son was born. Second, the male students in poorer families would drop out of school after they either got married or went abroad seeking employment. Third, sons in the poor families would go abroad to earn money that enabled them to fulfil their responsibilities toward their parents and family members. On the other hand, this situation was not as obvious in more economically fortunate families.

6.2.4 School Community and Parents Relations

As discussed in the previous section, the school community had been economically disadvantaged for a long period of time. However, Tamang maintained that under his leadership and his focus on engagement with the broader community, this region of Nepal is now more accessible to the local community as a popular internal and external tourism
destination. He gave an example of how the value of the land around the village had increased over the past 30 years, adding that:

\[
\text{In the 1990s, the value of the land here for ‘one ropanee’ (0.12 acres) was NPR 5,000 [approximately AU$60]. The same land now costs higher than 10,000,000 [approximately AU$ 1,010,000] This means if you have ‘three kattha’ (0.25 acres), you have property worth of 30,000,000. You don’t have to go anywhere to make money. In this way, over time, they had gone from being poor to being rich.}
\]

Although Tamang acknowledged that living standards had improved in line with economic improvements, he contended that changing situation had resulted in negative outcomes. He referred to the parents’ hostility and ignorance in expecting a rapid change in the quality of education as well. He argued that the parents lacked educational contentiousness, and therefore, wanted the same pace of improvement in children’s education as their economic status. Tamang argued, “They do not know how to make the educational environment better, however, they tend to emphasise that their children must be performing well. The improvement must be a slow process. It does not change just like their economic condition.” In this instance, he was referring to the rich families around the school area. However, he recognised that the community’s situation “a little down the road” was similar to the past.

Tamang considered that the educational plans of the school were constructive, and that he had managed the day-to-day administration and transactions well. However, in his view, inadequate home study environments and a lack of parental guidance for the students in their homes were the weaker aspects of the community school situation. Likewise, Tamang
argued that although there was a proportion of rich parents, those who were more dominating and influential in the school’s decision-making processes: “They tend to be involved the management committee, and they want to use their influence everywhere. So, it is sometimes a bit difficult to address the issue of the students from lower-level economic families.”

On another occasion, Tamang claimed, “The 30 percent [of the more well-off parents] have dominance over the 70 percent.” He also mentioned that the parents from the ethnic group who had resided in this region for a long time were “simple and honest” and perhaps more vulnerable to being easily misled by those people who had recently migrated. According to Tamang, many of the parents who had become rich over time, had changed their view about the school As Tamang explained:

Those parents who wanted to do something for the school; who contributed for integration of the community; and also, who had a long experience of working in the management committee; now tend to say, “Headteacher, I don’t have enough time, please decide it fast, tell me where I can sign, or else I can come later and sign.” This is the difference now.

Tamang’s concern was that the parents who were supposed to allocate more time to the school’s improvement had changed over the course of time. They did not give proper attention to formulating agendas, meaningful discussion and decision making. “However, the situation is that we are obliged to act according to them, not them acting according to us.”, Tamang contended.
6.2.5 Administration and Resource Management

When discussing how Tamang went about his roles and responsibilities, he mentioned that he had to carry out both formal and informal roles. First, the formal role was to ensure and manage salaries and allowances for the teachers and staff in a timely manner. For him, this role was important because otherwise the teachers would be dissatisfied immediately which could result in the school’s failure. In describing the situation, Tamang advised that “To provide salaries to them in a timely manner, we need to always bargain with the government. Sometimes, the government is not accountable within the policy framework.”

Second, Tamang was required to manage the school’s budget and prepare a yearly school management plan. This plan would provide details of the school’s activities, including developing an academic calendar and meeting schedules. Together with teachers, he was also responsible for ensuring yearly course unit plans. Importantly, he collaborated and cooperated with other community schools in its cluster in relation to formulating a unitary practice of the academic calendar and for developing integrated plans. Tamang also mentioned that it was the importance to work together with other schools so that it would be easier “to tackle the government”.

Third, as Tamang pointed out, as headteacher of a school, he would maintain connections and networks with the Government’s higher administrative authorities. Additionally, he had to review teachers’ performances and prepare reports. If any teachers needed professional development training, it was his responsibility to recommend courses and discuss these options with the administrative authorities. When talking about his informal
headteacher roles, Tamang mostly talked about how he had to counter party politics intrusions. These issues will be discussed later in this case study story.

Apart from the political influences that community schools, in general, were facing, another critical issue for Tamang was that of temporary teacher placements. While the headteachers in the previous cases had considered that their permanent teachers were more traditional in their teaching practices and inimical to temporary teachers, Tamang believed that temporary teachers were more willing to become involved in non-teaching activities:

*The problem with the temporary teachers is that they have started agitation about auto-permanence, with several other demands, leading to closure and strike. Some of them are also enrolled in other courses in universities, not necessarily the relevant teaching course. Because of these reasons, they are either absent, or they need to take leave.*

In Tamang’s perspective, absenteeism was an endemic problem among permanent teachers in the Nepali community schools at the national level, but that was not the case in his school. In the case of temporary teachers’ attendance, he upheld that there was some inconvenience for him, but he was managing the problem through different strategies. For example, he had arranged that teacher attendance was to be recorded during school’s assembly, and right after it, the school gate would be closed. If teachers arrived late, they would have to call the headteacher with their explanation. There was also a practice in place to invite volunteer teachers from the community for the replacement of absent teachers.
When discussing how Tamang managed the school’s resources, he appeared content and confident. He acknowledged that as a community school, his school would receive 90 percent of the funding from the government. In relation to the internal resources, he said, “I have undertaken many innovative programs in this district for which I received the Education Service Medal, typically referred to as the ‘gold medal.’” In taking the initiative in many exemplary projects designed to situate the school as centre of the community, one project was related to the physical infrastructure that benefitted the whole community. Tamang described in the following way:

As I already mentioned earlier about “pumping water”, lifting water from very low altitudes to the high hill, we accomplished it with the help of foreign tourists. We can now distribute water supplies to more than 250 families. It is the school’s responsibility to manage the water supply. If you buy land in this community, you need to request a water permit from the school. The school can impose certain conditions because this school and the community have worked very hard to bring the water to our community.

As a continuing project, the school was still managing the water project, and every household in the community were required to deposit around AU$ 2,000 in the school’s bank account. The school did not use these deposits, but it used the interest generated by this account to pay internally managed teachers’ salaries.

Tamang provided an overview of another project he developed as the headteacher of his school. The village where the school was located was a place of unique natural beauty. As a frequent tourist destination, in part due to the number of weather change in a single day,
generally referred to as the “12 types of weather”, Tamang and the school team recognised that implementing a tourism project could become an additional income resource. Accordingly, using approximately one hectare of school land, sufficiently far enough away from the school buildings they established a horticultural garden. Along with growing fruit and vegetables, this garden also captured the natural beauty of its surroundings. The garden had become an extra source of the school’s income charging visitors certain amount per entry. In addition to this garden, the school constructed an accommodation unit near the school that was being rented by a local hotel. The rental returns from this venture provide the school with approximately AU$ 150 on a monthly basis.

The extra income streams managed by the school had contributed greatly to the administration part of the school. As the school was now formally registered and fully funded from Grades 1 to 7, having obtained approval to conduct classes from Grades 8 to 12, the school was liable to manage teachers’ salaries and allowances for the educational upgrade. In addition, the school had a policy in place called “additional work, additional pay”. To make these additional payments, the school had to its own financial resources. Other school initiatives included offering computer classes for the secondary level from Grade 5 to 10. Tamang also discussed building a school library, a facility that most schools in the region currently did not have. In terms health and wellbeing initiative for its students, the school had invested in providing sporting activities during school holidays, along with a range of extracurricular activities. Figure 19 below shows a new block under construction which included the facilities such as library and science lab:
6.2.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability

With a new framework for decentralised governance of education in Nepal, and during the interim phases, the issue of accountability was becoming increasingly important. In exploring Tamang’s perspectives about those changes, Tamang raised several related issues. For Tamang, the new system was convenient because the school could approach their local government more easily and administrative services were available locally. However, Tamang was disappointed with the skills and abilities of those working in the municipal government, also referred to as local government. In his view, the people working in the government were inexperienced and undereducated, arguing that the newly elected, local political leaders did not have adequate qualifications and experience in educational decision-making. As Tamang explained:

There are elected people who have studied up to the 8th or 10th grades. While they have formed the Education Committee, they are all “laymen”. They do not even have
Tamang mentioned that, in the past, he could contact someone with the necessary expertise in the District Education Office. However, after the reconstruction of the government, if he visited that office, he would be advised that these matters had been assigned to the local government. Tamang pointed out, “If I go to the local government, I have to try to make them understand everything.” He further queried how he could obtain expert advice and address the situation, accusing the people in local government of lacking any appreciation of the real meaning of development. According to Tamang, in this agency, the concept of development was confined to building new roads and repairing them, making it clear that he had never heard them discussing allocating a budget for educational development and progress. As a headteacher, Tamang was also a representative on the Education Committee in the local government. However, he considered this position as a futile one, feeling isolated, lacking across-committee support and taking valuable time away from his school responsibilities.

Tamang lamented over the end of original system using a Resource Centre and support person to facilitate the community schools and maintain the chain-of-command with the higher administrative levels. According to him, these ‘Resource Persons’ were also confused about whether they would be dragged to the central government or given local responsibility. In the past, the District Education Office would give directions to the Resource Persons, and they would act accordingly with the schools. Tamang termed this situation as “a break in the string” and was unsure when that break would be restored.
6.2.7 Headteacher’s Job Satisfaction and Activism

One research aim was to find out how motivated and satisfied participant headteachers were and also if they were involved in any initiatives designed to reach out to the wider communities. In keeping with the research findings and discussions, Tamang was a determined, dynamic, and collaborative leader. In discussing these issues, Tamang responded:

*I am satisfied. It is the profession of my choice. I am a local resident here. Because of the role of the school, there has been a lot of improvements in the community. My contribution has also been recognised. To earn my daily livelihood, I am capable even without any job. I may enter active politics as well. However, I feel positive about remaining at this school and working here. I am satisfied. This is my birthplace, I have studied in this school, and it's my own community. I am satisfied working here.*

Tamang’s repeatedly expressed his satisfaction with his work, making it clear the reasons for his satisfaction included being respectful towards his profession; having a strong sense of belongingness; being proud of achievements; and having his hard work and achievement recognised by the local community and by the Government.

As a school leader, Tamang had undertaken many initiatives and collaborated with community members and foreign tourists not only for the improvement of the school but for the benefit of the community as a whole. The most important of these initiatives was the water project, a project originally started as a basic infrastructure development for the community. However, it now serves as a sustainable financial resource for the school. After
the water project’s successful implementation, the community had benefited in many ways, the main ones being the increase in land prices, population growth, and importantly, increasing the income of community members. Similarly, the tourism project introduced by Tamang increased the movement of the internal and external tourists, directly benefitting the community and the school. Additionally, Tamang shared that he had been lobbying the Indian Embassy for a grant of around AU$ 500,000 for his school improvement plans and had already received the “green signal” from the Embassy staff.

6.2.8 Community Versus Private Schools

In the discussion of community schools in Nepal, the issue of community schools versus private schools was largely challenged by all participant headteachers. Tamang also believed that the educational outcomes of community schools included graduates being more resilient, capable, independent, and competitive than private school graduates. Importantly, he argued that private schools tended to focus on memorising information, considering that as a consequence student from the private schools were less creative. As Tamang made it clear:

Do you know rhododendron flowers? They sprout in the hill and steep land. You do not need to water them. The products of the Government schools are the hill’s rhododendron whereas the products from the private schools are flowers in the flowerpots; if you don’t water them for two days, they will die.

Referring to other outcomes from the community schools, Tamang argued that the community school graduates were occupying most of the Government and administrative jobs because they were successful in competing in national-level exams. This outcome,
Tamang believed, contributed “To making the nation better, there is no better way other than improving Government schools.” However, he recognised that private school outcomes could be better for technical courses such as medical sciences and engineering because the students from private schools had greater English language proficiency.

Tamang suspected that private schools recruited underqualified and inexperienced teachers, and at the same time, claimed that there were highly qualified teachers in community schools. However, he recognised that there were certain flaws in the community schools, contending that “The situation is that those who have failed 10th Grade are private school teachers while there are teachers with a Master’s degree in three courses in the government schools. So, how come there is no quality in government schools?” In answering his own question, Tamang believed that the main reason for the deterioration of the educational quality in the community schools was the lack of efficient supervision mechanism and mediocrity of the government toward community school sector.

Tamang pointed out that the parents were not fully aware of the private schools’ situation, and therefore, they were enrolling their children in those schools. He believed that the popularity of private schools was just a trend, mainly brought about by the sudden change in the economic status of many families. According to Tamang, this situation was more prevalent among the families living near private schools. On the other hand, he argued that there was no gender discrimination in terms of schooling by parents. Rather, he viewed that the newer generation of students, male and female, were increasingly being enrolled in private schools.
To attract more students to his school, Tamang had initiated the contemporary trend of some community schools, that of conducting English medium classes for the lower levels, a practice that seemed to be the main attraction in private schools. Accordingly, he had budgeted for two teachers from the internal resources for those additional English medium classes. Although Tamang considered private schools as “the elephant tusks and not the chewing teeth”, he admitted that he had imitated some of the private schools’ trends, such as uniforms in different colours.

6.2.9 Political Influences and their Impacts on Principalship

This section highlights Tamang’s perspectives as to how party politics was influencing his school, an occurrence in most of the community schools in Nepal. Tamang recognised that the way the multi-party system was exercised in Nepal was a huge challenge for an headteacher “to sustain and save the schools”. As Tamang explained:

*External pressure may come for transferring a good teacher so that they can make a replacement for another teacher affiliated to certain groups and ideologies. If the former teacher is very important for the school, irrespective of their political ideology outside of the school, the headteacher should be very careful about not politicising school matters.*

Tamang believed that there was an inevitable informal role of an headteacher to be resilient over unnecessary political pressure. He explained, “*At times, even laws do not work. We may have to work on many things under curtains*”. Tamang emphasised that, as the headteacher, he had to play a balanced role and handle any political matters cautiously. For
him, there was no other way to escape from the pressure. He argued, “If we don’t listen to them, there is a problem. If we listen to them, then there is also a problem.” The main strategy for Tamang to solve a political issue was to remain indecisive for some time as he believed that not to decide was also a decision. He described:

*I listen to everyone. I don’t go over their thoughts and don’t even say ‘no’. I have assigned the leaders of each party in the management committee. I ask them to decide with the majority. However, I request them to take off their political cap and discuss solely the school’s interest. Then, they discuss it for a long time. If they do not reach a decision, I cancel the meeting. After many days, they ask me to solve the problem by myself, and then, I can apply my decision.*

Tamang often expressed his frustration over party politics and their political leaders, viewing the situation as a huge nation-wide problem, of interfering in community schools’ educational practices by using teachers for their political interests. Tamang contended the government of employing around 50 percent of teachers because they were members of the political leaders’ parties. By way of an example, he argued, “If you are the president of a political party, your secretary is a teacher, and the headteacher of a basic school is your assistant.” Tamang indicated community school teachers were heavily involved in party politics, in general, adding that the teachers were required to write the political leaders’ speeches or help in their projects which was why teachers were not performing their work properly.
6.2.10 Values, Beliefs, and Strategies

This section presents the findings of Tamang’s leadership strategies, values, and beliefs. Initially, Tamang claimed that the effectiveness of an headteacher depended on two qualities, determination and ability. He argued, “If a headteacher wants, and if he or she is capable, it is possible to bring about positive change.” Tamang further claimed that the headteacher had to be creative and visionary, not the one who just followed orders from higher administrative structures. For him, the headteachers were not just the government employees but social workers who could spend their time to the school and work as if the school was their own home and the students their families. He elaborated:

*I arrive at 7:00 as necessary. I plan for the whole day. I prepare how I must arrange others’ work the whole day, and then and only then, do go to lunch. I do the administrative works out of the school time. Only then can focus on my work.*

In addition to the above strategies, Tamang explained how managing teachers was difficult as they could remain absent for various reasons, and therefore, he had to plan alternative teachers in advance. Similarly, it was a great challenge for him to work with the local people inclined to favour various political parties. However, he believed that a headteacher should also build their “power” and maintain a balanced role. In order to do that, Tamang believed that he must first give respect to others if he is to gain their respect in return. If a new political leader was elected in the area, Tamang would assign some responsibilities immediately. He believed in building “a team”, not from a single political party perspective, but from the majority of views.
While Tamang considered that the contemporary school curriculum was contextually based and “very good”, community schools were failing to reach the curriculum goals. For him, the main reason for this failure was the lack of accountability on the part of both the teachers and the government, pointing out that: “The leaders of this nation should understand that the nation should allow its employees to work freely. But they have not realised it. The government has employed 50 percent of them for full-time political activities.” In considering that the Government’s plans were worthwhile, they failed at the implementation level. Tamang argued that the Government and the political leaders were bringing teachers into conflict by encouraging and using them for their own interests.

Tamang maintained that there was a major fault to be fixed in the evaluation and recognition of the hard work of headteachers and teachers. According to him, a cluster of the schools in the same region were evaluated and therefore, they had to share the outcomes even though his school was most successful. In the same way, he believed that teachers and their hard work should have been recognised at the individual level. Moreover, Tamang recommended two main policy changes. First, the government could implement a policy that all children of the government employees must be enrolled in community schools. Second, no government employees could be allowed to take part in any type of party politics. He argued that:

*If the government does not want to make government schools and government employees [teachers and bureaucrats] politics-free and still does not make it compulsory to admit their children in government schools, then there is a dark future of the government schools after 10 years. The factory which is supposed to produce able citizens of the nation is going to be closed.*
Tamang believed that there were long-term impacts, for the nation, if the community schools remained in a fragile academic condition. For him, the contemporary context characterised by the frequent agitations, strikes, lack of law and order, deterioration in morality in Nepali values and culture, along with weak governance demonstrated these impacts, making it clear that “If we shake up the schools, we will regain community respect. If we don’t do that the matter of forming better societies tomorrow through education today will not be achieved.”

In summary, Tamang is a leader who did not only worked for his school’s improvement, but one who considered the benefits that extend to the broader community. Due to Tamang’s leadership strategies and collaborative approaches, the poor village in the hilly region of Nepal had become a tourist attraction, resulting in considerable population growth and increasing economic status of many families. Tamang was a collaborative, dynamic, optimistic, and resourceful school leader with a strong sense of belongingness to the community.

6.3 The ‘Visionary’ Headteacher: Mr Baral

6.3.1 School Background

Established in the early 1960s, Greenfield Secondary School was one of the oldest schools in the region. Like many other community schools, this school was first established as a primary school. After a few years of operation, it was merged with another primary community school which was just a few kilometres away. After a decade, the school was
upgraded to the lower secondary school level that provides Grades 1 to 7. After a further decade, the school gained approval as a secondary school, and at the time the study was undertaken, was providing higher secondary level classes, Grades 11 and 12. While Grades 11 and 12 originally comprised three faculties, Education, Arts, and Management, the Plant Science was a recent addition. Compared to the schools of other participant headteachers, this school was relatively richer and well-attended as it was located in an accessible suburban region of Nepal. The school had approximately 1500 students and 35 employees including teachers and support staff.

6.3.2 Headteacher Profile

Baral entered the teaching profession three decades ago, spending 10 years working as a secondary school teacher. According to Baral, he commenced his secondary level teacher job as a third-class officer and was promoted as a second-class officer before getting transferred to Greenfield Secondary School. He claimed that he applied for the headteacher position, competing in line with Teachers Service Commission’s the merit-based point system. As he obtained higher points than his counterparts, he was appointed to the headteacher position. At the time of his interview, he held a Master of Arts in Economics and a Master of Education specialising in Educational Administration. Baral had been working as the headteacher in this school for around three years. Figure 20 below shows the main building of the school and the headteacher’s office:

Figure 20

*Baral's School's Main Building and the Headteacher's Office*
Note: Baral’s school was the most well-managed school in terms of its buildings, organised offices of the headteacher and other staff member, cleanliness and available facilities.

6.3.3 Historical Context and the Present Context of the School

As with the other participant headteachers’ schools, this school was established by the local community leaders. This school buildings remained rudimentary for around a decade since its establishment. The area was underdeveloped, and there were no dedicated roads or other basic services. However, the school had around three and a half hectares of land, considerably more than most of the community schools in this study. The school was named after a person, as under the existing regulations, anyone donating approximately AU$ 3,000 was able to assign their name to the community school. Therefore, in the 1960s a rich family in the community donated one more patch of land and funded the concrete building with 10 rooms. With that addition, the school had a total of more than three and a half hectares of the property and its own buildings.

By the time of this study, the suburb was gradually developing. Changes included: an increase in population; a four-lane concrete road that passed by the school was under
construction; the school had a modern two-storied building; there were relatively better managed drinking water facilities; there were separate concrete toilets for male and female students; a library had been built; and three science labs were under construction. In addition, there were more than 50 shutter shops attached to the compound wall facing outside, shops that the school had constructed for leasing purposes.

In terms of students’ cultural and linguistic diversity, most were from Chhetri and Brahmin communities, the communities typically associated with higher economic and social status. Additionally, there were students from various indigenous and marginalised communities such as Dashnami, Gurung, Jhagad, Majhi, Mushahar, Rai, and Tharu. According to Baral, the majority of the people in the community were Hindu. However, there were students from other religions such as Buddhists, Christians, and Kirats. In terms of linguistic diversity, most of students and families used the Nepali language at home. The Tharu language was the second most often spoken language. Baral named a few other languages such as Gurung, Magar, and Rai, although the people in those communities did not generally use their mother tongue.

Baral explained that most of the students enrolled in his school were from lower-class and middle-class families. He believed that the community schools in Nepal had lost the trust of people for a long time, which meant that community schools found it difficult to enrol from economically, well-established families. While these families could afford to pay the higher fees charged by private schools, Baral put forward the view that an informal competition between parents meant that if one neighbour enrolled their children in private schools, other neighbours would follow this lead. He maintained that there were around 25 percent to 30 percent of students from very low-income families who worked as labourers on
daily wages. However, the school was supporting the students from these family backgrounds with various scholarships.

In discussions with Baral, he made it known that the incumbent headteacher was sceptical and unsure as to whether Baral was sufficiently capable and competent to fill this position. Baral described the circumstances in this way, “I said that I have come here not because of my self-interest but to improve the quality of education, and therefore, you have to agree with my advice that is related to maintaining the quality of education.” Because Baral had completed his education in this school, he wanted it to be recognised as a successful one: “I was unhappy with the environment in the school because of the irregularities to the extent that the children and teachers used to come and go until 1:00 pm. In considering this Government school’s situation, I felt very sad.”

Baral had to fight for the position amidst the fear that not all teachers would cooperate with him because some of these teachers had also competed for the position. When he became the headteacher, he consulted senior teachers to determine the school’s main problems and to discuss his “intended approaches and his ways of managing the administration.” Baral’s point-of-departure for this headteachership journey was being able to organise a student-teacher interaction program for the first time in the school’s history, pointing out that he had “convinced teachers to sit with students, saying that we are not everything in teaching-learning, and that we should first listen to students’ voices.” As a result, all the teachers had actively listened to the students’ experiences and suggestions and had been frequently ‘scolded’ by them. In noting the students’ comments, action was taken to address these issues. These consultative processes, Baral claimed, helped to bring positive changes.
6.3.4 School Community and Parents Relations

Many participant headteachers were critical of parents’ responsibilities towards their children, accusing them of being irresponsible, unaccountable, and indifferent. Baral also claimed that there was a need for parental education as well, and it would need an investment on the part of the government. However, he considered that many community schools might want to avoid their responsibilities by accusing other stakeholders, maintaining that:

*We have two tendencies. We either blame the government or we blame the community. We say that the government did not invest enough resources, or the parents did not ensure their children’s study at home. This is a tendency to make excuses for educational shortfalls. The fact is that we have become job oriented. We just think about how to sustain our job. This is evident.*

Baral decided not to blame others and to start the transformation from the school. He considered that the situation would not change until there was a sense of belongingness in teachers as well, but this was not happening for a variety reason. He mentioned that more than half of the 35 teachers belonged to the same school community, making the argument that transforming the community must begin with self-transformation and personal investment, which in turn would lead to improved home environments and then extend to the community.

In addition to the collective efforts of the teachers towards school improvement, conducting mothers’ education or parents’ educational awareness programs were necessary. Baral believed that when someone talked about “quality of education”, there were many
contributing factors, one of them being “a healthy family environment”, with the school’s focus on educating parents about their role in providing a healthy family environment for their children. Furthermore, according to Baral, parents were cooperating with the school in terms of implementing the school’s administrative regulations related to the students. The school was also scheduling regular Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. However, Baral recognised that as nearly all of the Government’s financial investments were concentrated on teachers’ salaries and allowances, there was a need for substantial government contributions to educating parents.

### 6.3.5 Administration and Resource Management

One of the main purposes of this study was to find out what the participant headteachers’ priorities were in running the school administration, and what their understandings of their formal and informal roles were. On this issue, Baral provided an overview of his daily routine. Due to the higher number of students, the school operated in two shifts, morning and afternoon. He described how he woke up at 4:00 am in the morning to arrive and enter the school by 6:00 am for the morning shift. According to him, he always arrived early because he believed that “You need to guide livestock from the back and people from the front.” He maintained that he did not teach the first class because it was important for him to be present around the gate and closely monitor the students’ activities. He described why it was necessary to maintain student discipline:

> This is because our country is a developing country, and we have a typical society with a peculiar culture. To maintain discipline in the students, we must start from the gate. Otherwise, if they were “conscientious” just like the students in other contexts,
we should not have done that. Perhaps, as the culture of the people where money and power tend to dominate weaker, there is more resistance, and therefore, we must maintain discipline beginning from the gate.

Unlike many other headteachers in this study, he was teaching five classes a day, each class lasting around 45 minutes. In the remaining time, he undertook his administrative and supervisory tasks: “All teachers are not the same, they are different. So, I don’t often sit on the chair but go around the school and classrooms. At times, I watch inside classroom from near the window or side, without disturbing the classes.” Baral mentioned that he would provide feedback later if he saw any weaknesses in the teaching and learning activities.

Baral further explained how he had distributed a range of administrative roles to the teachers. For example, he nominated an Assistant Headteacher with a Master of Education qualification for “holding” or taking his classes in his absence, as well as providing assistance in other supervising roles. He had also assigned separate coordinators in the faculties of Education, Arts, and Humanities. Similarly, Baral had allocated coordinating responsibilities to other teachers for primary, lower secondary, and secondary classes. He also mentioned that the school had conducted a range of extracurricular activities such as Junior Red Cross Circle, sports, children clubs, and social group, and that these activities were also monitored by designated coordinators. Additionally, he had formed a Subject Committee to deal with the issues related to specific units and an Internal Auditing Committee to supervise financial activities. In discussions relating to possible role conflicts, Baral acknowledged, “I won’t say we have zero role conflict. However, we have allocated the jobs in that way. So far, in our context, I think, we don’t have many conflicts. At times, in being human beings, some may have been taken things personally.” He held the view that the situation was far better when
Concerning students’ activities and behaviour, Baral emphasised that he believed in “mind wash”, a phrase he used occasionally describing it in the following way: “What we have seen in three years is that the mental wall created by “mind wash” is stronger than the wall made of bricks, stones or iron.” He explained how students’ behaviour had changed with issues such as evading classes. Baral further mentioned that the students would stay and study in the classroom in teachers’ absences because of the provision of student-teachers’ roles. According to Baral, there were three to four student-teachers in a group of 70 students who would also help teachers. Importantly, to ensure that the teachers would attend classes on time and stay in the classroom for the assigned time, there was a teacher-attendance “log” that students would complete.

Although Baral had initiated cleanliness and hygiene programs for his students, while they held certain responsibilities to keep their classrooms clean, he had appointed cleaners as well. He also appointed a security guard who would look after the school after 4:00 pm and overnight. With additional staff, the school was running boys’ and girls’ hostels for those students who were not from the local communities. Baral would compile information provided by the hostel wardens every day. Figure 21 below show the school facilities such as safe drinking water and separate toilets for boys and girls:
Baral argued that many community schools were accused of being corrupt because of the administrative opaqueness and headteachers’ and accountants’ involvement in scams. However, he contended that the overall administration of his school had greatly improved due to his concerted and collective efforts to ensure accountability and transparency in school functions. Baral explained, “We have hardworking teachers; we are transparent; we do it cashless; salaries and allowances are paid through the bank; all other transactions are done through the bank; we share our ideas; and we have regular staff meetings.” He further described how his school was undergoing massive construction works, while emphasising that he was not directly involved. Rather, his role was merely supervisory, maintaining that “What we do here is to isolate ourselves; we just watch, assess, and monitor,” He claimed. As part of the monitoring processes, Baral formed a Construction Committee with people from the community as members and a local teacher selected by the headteacher acting as the Member Secretary.
Baral spoke about his major roles in terms of consolidating overall tasks such as school administration, educational, and economic activities. At the same time, he had to cooperate with the SMC and the PTA. At times, he would also attend the meetings of the headteachers of the community schools in the region and share each other’s innovative ideas for the school improvement. He also mentioned that he had to work as a non-teaching staff occasionally: “For example, if the colleagues are not here, who will ring the bell?” Baral also shared details of his family circumstances, pointing out that as his immediate family members were independent and well-established, he gave his “total time” to the school.

In relation to inadequate school resources, while not totally blaming the government, Baral expressed his disappointment that the government had been unable to identify the need for additional investment in other areas apart from teachers’ salaries and allowances. He considered that the government’s expenditure on human resources alone was not, in fact, an investment, saying that it also involved creating the “right environment” in which children could learn. According to Baral, in order to moderate the need for relying on future investments, he was doing what he was capable of doing with existing resources, citing the example of the 50 shutter shops on the front of the boundary walls of the school. Baral had also made use of the school’s property, patches of land, for productive purposes such as renting and using for practical training facilities for the school’s Plant Science faculty, fuming in saying that:

_The state is saying that we cannot construct them [the shutter shops]. If someone is misusing, this is fine. However, if you have 22 ‘bigah’ [three and a half hectares] of land, this is not the land for making the land just a playfield, or field for grazing_
livestock. I thought whether the school can earn from that. I already said that the state does in no way invest. It is just investing in salary and benefits.

Baral emphasised that the school’s property, the land, was not used efficiently before he came to the position of the headteacher. Rather, it was either a barren land or used as a playground or even the field for grazing livestock. He did not mention if the school could use its properties for commercial purposes as per the law. However, he mentioned that there were some regulations that would not allow him to build the shutter shops on the school premises. However, he maintained that the earnings from the school’s property should be used for the improvement to infrastructure. Baral described his plan:

At large, we are investing in scientific classrooms; there is a computer lab; we are making four science labs for physics, chemistry, biology and botany; we are making three more labs next year; and they are for practical education. You can look at them.

Baral also mentioned his plan for utilising the resource and make the school more profitable by using its land which was near to the school. According to him, there was a patch of land of around a half-acre, 200 metres away, where the school was going to build a modern playground or sports areas with seating for spectators and dressing rooms. This would not only be a playground for the students, but it could also add an income source the school. In an informal talk with Baral, he estimated that he would be able to collect approximately AU$ 6,000 per month as an extra income source of the school in near future, money that would be invested for future infrastructure projects.
6.3.6 Decentralisation of Educational Governance and Accountability

With each participant headteachers, I inquired about how they viewed the new decentralised Government, and how these were functioning in relation to their school’s management and administration. For Baral, the new changes delegating educational responsibility to the local government were troublesome because he felt as though as he was “sailing on two boats”. This was because, on the one hand, there was the Education Development and Coordination Unit (EDCU) under the government, and on the other hand, there was the Education Department under the municipal government. As a result, the school had to follow instructions from both central and local governments, emphasising his concerns about the lack of a clear framework for coordination.

Additionally, Baral expressed his disappointment about not receiving his teachers’ salaries on time. Although the Government had decided to provide the monthly salaries, at the time of the interview, he complained that they had not received their salaries for three months. Accordingly, it was a priority for Baral to ensure that teachers received their salaries on time. While he was in favour of the local government, Baral contended that “If the local government, rather than federal government, handles our schools, our problems and complaints; they would be better taken care locally.” He was optimistic about the effectiveness of the local government because he believed that when everything would be gradually settled into place, the local government could “catch the wave”.

There was still a dilemma whether the municipal government or federal government would be involved in teachers’ recruitment and transfer. Baral expressed his concern that if these authorities were assigned to the municipal government, it could be “widely misused”.
Therefore, he recommended that the “centre”, the federal government, handle the teachers’ recruitment and transfer processes. While believing that the municipal government would be effective in other areas, he advised:

*There are other aspects where the local government should work on such as taking care of the school; providing training; monitoring irregularities, corruption and carelessness of the employees or teachers; and providing training and seminar for professional development and empowerment.*

Once again, Baral emphasised that the community school was the property of the municipal government, and he had a constructive plan to redevelop his school within nine-years, bringing the school to a whole new level in terms of educational quality. However, he believed that it was possible only if he could increase the investment. According to Baral, the school was creating “wealth” in various ways by utilising internal resources, and at the same time, expecting relatively more support from the government side.

### 6.3.7 Headteacher’s Job Satisfaction and Activism

In understanding how satisfied Baral felt in his role as a headteacher, his engagement with the wider community for fair and just causes has been discussed previously. In Baral’s view, he had not initially considered entering the teaching profession, and therefore, had sought out other employment options for the first couple of years. When he became a permanent teacher around 15 years ago, according to him, he was not “stable” enough for the first five years for a variety of reasons. It had taken around ten years before he considered himself sufficiently stable and “fully satisfied” with his profession. The main reason for his
satisfaction was the respect he received from the students and the community, explaining that:

*I tell others that there is no other profession as respected as this profession. When I retire, the respect I gain is my property. We don’t have many other properties. Our homes are basic. We have not had our eyes on ‘black money’. We have earned white money. Our property is that we have earned thousands of students. Those students respect us. There is no better profession than this where you can get rid of the accusations of corruption.*

Baral further explained how he was enjoying his head teachership days, and that when he had any tensions outside the school, he would go to school, forget the problems, and start enjoying his teaching roles with the children. Showing respect towards his own profession, he said, “*We tell our children that we need good teachers for this country. Many people want to be teachers, but all don’t always have the quality of teachers that we need.*” He further claimed that he was spending 12 hours a day at school from 5:30 am to 5:30 pm in the school, and that if he was not enjoying it, he would not be there.

Baral expressed his satisfaction based on the achievement of the school during the relatively short period of his leadership. His first achievement was the pace of building infrastructure for the school which he called “massive”. In relation to educational outcomes for the school, he referred to the government’s Education Quality Assessment Centre and the fact that community schools were assessed against 64 indicators. As Baral’s school was declared the best community school in the district with a 90 percent score, the school was awarded with once off payment of approximately AU$ 6,000. Similarly, he expressed his
fulfilment in being able to develop a five-year work plan for the school and being able to implement the plan, which, according to him, many other community schools prepared only for formality.

In addition to the above achievements, Baral emphasised that the school’s educational quality had improved. According to him, the pass rate in Grade 12 was more than 80 percent and although there was no provision for the pass or fail for Grade 10, almost all the students progressed to Grade 11. This educational outcome he considered as another success. Additionally, understanding the attraction of the students and parents towards English medium classes, Baral ensured English medium classes up to Grade 5, which over time, he planned to extend to Grade 12. The faculty of Plant Science was already running in the English medium. Baral had also planned to start separate Nepali and English sections for all the grades.

Irrespective of the Government’s policy, Baral was determined to bring about positive change. For an example, he recognised that the Government’s grade progression provision from early childhood class to Grade 1 was impractical, and that he had decided to add one more grade, a lower kindergarten (LKG) between these grades. In doing so, there would be four grades, namely, Nursery, LKG, and Grades 1 and 2 running under the “Montessori System”. Figure 22 below shows a part of a well-equipped early childhood classroom in the school:
6.3.8 Community Versus Private Schools

This section discusses the rivalry and conflict between the community and private schools in general, and Baral’s school in relation to private schools. While not specifically asking Baral for his views, at different times, he introduced private schools into the discussions. First, he talked about a general trend in the community that parents were more attracted to private schools mainly because of family competition and the accompanying so-called social status. Second, Baral emphasised that private schools receiving more funding for their schools in comparison community schools, making it clear that:

*What happens in private schools is that they collect a lot of money from the public; they invest it well. They have delivered a better standard of education. This is because they are investing in physical infrastructure and educational activities. We just have*
salaries and allowances. There are no trainings or such things. There is no “input”, and when you ask for “output”, we feel there is something missing.

The conscientious and more economically able parents, according to Baral, understand this situation, and send their children to private schools. Further, he described how he was often questioned in relation to the quality of education, explained in the following way:

_A highly educated person once asked me why all of the students in a private school gain A+ scores, say 20 out of 20, but only one child gains A+ and all other 19 students gain lower grades in community schools. I proposed him to move all the students from private schools to community schools and vice versa and see the results._

_I said that there is no magic formula, the only reason is the financial investment._

However, Baral accused private schools of being involved in what he considers to be unethical practices. He explained that the people running private schools go door-to-door in the community, trying to convince the parents to remove their children from community schools. Similarly, he accused the private schools of enrolling the community school’s students without any prior certificates and transcripts, adding that his school would require this documentation when enrolling students. Additionally, he maintained that if the people from the private schools are aware of bright students in the community schools, they would “tempt” the parents and encourage school transfers. However, in reflecting on these enrolment practices, Baral declared, “We don’t have to carry them here on our back. We are working to win our local community trust first.”
Behind the educational dominance of the private school sector, Baral’s argument attributed fault to the government as well, accusing them of allowing private schools to operate near community schools. Baral shared a practical example of conflicts with a private school that shared the boundary with his school, describing it in the following way:

[Pointing out to the playground] *They had captured that field. This is the government’s property. We had to take it back. In that course, a distance was created between our school and that private school. At first, this land was donated by someone to our school. However, the last management committees and headteachers did not care about that. We now have a compound wall in the half section of this field. We have a gate on the western side. They [the private school] had established an entry in the middle of our school’s playground. In the past, the teachers just carried out the employment alone. They didn’t need this field. Now, we are trying to do something, and therefore, we needed the field.*

As Baral explained, the private school had encroached on his school’s field for over two decades and still insisted on using the land after his tenure began. As the shareholders of that school were involved in local party politics, they tried to use political influence to reverse the community school’s decision. Baral provided me a tour of the buildings around the compound wall that was completed within three years of his tenure. He explained that he needed to use the land for those construction purposes and that his school was also intruded upon by the children from private schools who used the playground area. Baral explained, in detail, how he went about instigating court proceedings and restoring the land to the community school’s control.
Overall, Baral expressed his gratification that his school had improved and that it had a considerably higher number of students than those of other nearby schools. He mentioned that there were six other schools within a radius of two kilometres, three community and three private ones. Importantly, Baral claimed that the number of students in his school was higher than the total sum of the six neighbouring schools.

6.3.9 Political Influences and their Impacts on Principalship

In discussing the influences Baral encountered from the community members who were often actively involved in party politics, he began by explaining the headteacher recruitment processes and the general characteristic of the Nepali context in relation to these processes:

*In our situation, there is a tendency to keep aside senior teachers; to influence the recruitment politically; to create pressure from local people; to ignore able people; and to enter the position as an ‘acting’ and run the headteacher position. In whole Nepal, there are rare ‘confirmed’ [people from the right process] headteachers.*

Baral contended that there were only four other teachers in the region, including himself, who were recruited as the headteachers following the correct procedure. According to him, most of the other headteachers had used political or local influences:

In addition, as previously discussed, land encroachment in his community school demonstrated how local political parties could influence a community school’s decisions. As some private school investors were political party members, they went so far as to erect their
flag on the community school’s ground and then suing the community school for encroaching on their land. According to Baral, the contemporary political parties used many of the community schools as meeting places for political assemblies. However, Baral’s school had dissuaded eight major political parties from using the school property for political purposes. In the changing scenario in which many political party members ran municipal government, and amidst confusions around teachers’ appointment and transfer policies, Baral responded by providing his views that such actions would increase political influences to an ever greater extent when compared to past events:

*I am very concerned about teachers’ recruitment and transfer processes. This is because we Nepali have a similar mental state for nepotism and favouritism. In case, if around 750 local governments receive this authority, this may create a difficult situation. There are not necessarily enough good people in each place.*

Baral feared that if the local governments obtained the authority of teachers’ recruitment and transfers, the consequences would lead “to make a headteacher on the basis of their affiliations to a particular political party; to recruit teachers who are closer to political parties; and to teach politics to the children from early age.”

6.3.10 Values, Beliefs, and Strategies

Baral first mentioned that when he started his school, teachers were not held accountable for their actions; that students were not adequately disciplined; that there was little adequate infrastructure; and that resources were poorly managed. As Baral explained, “He [the former headteacher] said to me that he was not able to work as a leader and that he
had surrendered for a long time ago.” As discussed earlier, Baral adopting his “mind wash” program with students, with their parents, and with teachers, frequently emphasised that changing people’s attitudes was necessary to bring about positive organisational change.

When discussing how much ‘power’ a community school’s headteacher held in order to bring change and lead community school improvement, he claimed that a headteacher could have “unlimited power” and the most important aspect was “determination”. He argued that “It is not about how headteachers can impose their leadership on others. If they don’t have determination but only status-quo, they can do nothing. I already said that it is possible to change the attitude of the people.” Baral then explained how he was able to change SMC members’ and the community members’ attitudes towards the school.

I said to the then headteacher that if you don’t do “mental wash” of the children, you cannot run the school. So, I proposed to start the students’ assembly. I entered their classroom during my leisure period. I persuaded the children about what their purpose was to be in the school; what their aim was; and what they were doing; why they were supposed to ask teachers to come into the classroom if they didn’t attend; and how they could bear the loss, not the teachers.

After emphasising his “determination” for school change, Baral expressed his belief that “planning” and “proper vision” was another crucial aspect of his leadership. He claimed that most of the other community schools had designed their five-year plan only because it was expected, while he had carried out his plan and had reached all the documented milestones. He argued that, only after his arrival, had the school started to develop and progress as an educational institution in the real sense, contending that:
It may not be good to speak right now, but people will see what they want to see inside this school. They will not only see the things; they will also find whether the implication of these things is reflected in children. Education means we must change the behaviour of the children. We are trying to give a message from the children’s behaviour so that people will understand this is an educational institution.

Baral believed that education only be counted if it was “practical”. For that reason, his priority was to lobby to obtain permission for practical courses in his school and to develop the right infrastructure for those courses. As he outlined:

Education means we must change the behaviour of the children. We are trying to give positive messages about the children’s behaviour so that people will understand this is an educational institution. We have started Plant Science this year. Next year, we are planning for Animal Science and Computer Engineering. We are also planning for Civil Engineering and Pharmacy. We will be bringing all the practical and technical courses.

When visiting his school for observational purpose, I found that there was a vision statement that set out the school’s goals. Baral claimed that the vision was formed not only by himself but also in consultation and discussion with students, parents, SMC members, and other school stakeholders. To achieve the goal, his first priority was to develop the physical infrastructure. He claimed, “You need to establish a scientific classroom. In this era of science and technology, the world has reached too far. We have classrooms like the ones of 18th century. If a classroom is suffocating, our goals will not be achieved.” Baral, therefore, believed that his priority was to build physical infrastructure at a faster pace. Figure 23 below
shows the written vision statement of the school which was displayed at the main gate of the school:

**Figure 23**

*Vision Statement of the School Displayed at the Wall of the Main Entrance*

Note: The vision statement entails that it will be a model community school in the district providing quality education to school aged children. It also mentions that the school will remain fair, and child- and disability- friendly equipped with excellent facilities such as fully equipped library, modern and scientific teaching materials and laboratories and excellent playground.

In summary, Baral expressed his determination that he will be able to lead the change and take the school to the next level. Rather than explaining his worldview, Baral’s words convey his future school goals:

*After nine years, I want to make this school a full-fledged polytechnic. I want to see projectors, smart boards and laptops with each student, and also digitally downloadable books through the internet in place of paper-based books. I want to see the school as an advanced modern school that can produce children that can compete*
in the international standard. This is the most important thing for me. After nine years, when we will be using all the resources, we will be able to meet many of our goals. Until that time, I have the dream that the school will be the model government school within the whole country where people have to make an appointment just to look around this school. I feel that we will achieve this.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter concluded the two-part approach to discussion on the two distinct leaderships groups identified by case studies and research findings that were organised by the ten emergent themes. Chapter 5 discussion focused on the first group, the demotivated headteachers, that comprised Acharya, the Ineffectual Headteacher; Pokharel, the Reluctant Headteacher; and Niroula, the Party-Political Leader. In turn, this chapter’s discussion focused on the second group of dynamic headteachers, that comprised Giri, the Hardworking Headteacher; Kamal, the Resourceful Headteacher; and Baral, the Visionary Headteacher. Collectively, these case studies, research findings, and an initial across-case analysis that provided in-depth insights and understandings that addressed the central research question: How do community secondary school headteachers in Nepal manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in the post-conflict, post-disaster context? Importantly, these accounts provide the foundations for the next chapter which discusses theoretical development in terms of school leadership.
Chapter 7
Cross-case Analysis and Discussion

The two previous chapters presented the findings on the six cases of participant headteachers. Findings for each case were presented under common headings: school background; personal profile; historical context and the present context of the school; school community and parent relations; headteacher’s job satisfaction and activism; administration and resource management; decentralisation of educational governance and accountability; community versus private schools; political influences and their impacts on principalship; and leadership strategies and headteachers’ beliefs. The two groups were determined in terms of their apparent effectiveness as school leaders, as they managed their schools and the contexts in which their school operated. In one way, this division of the six participants into two groups represents a first attempt at a cross case analysis as the division involved placing the participants into one of two groups based on a broad criterion of effectiveness.

In this chapter, the emphasis is on deepening those analyses; it explains in greater detail the two groupings, drawing conclusions and developing theory around leadership in a Nepali context that was evident across all six participants. In doing so, this chapter seeks to address the three research questions, which were:

1. How do the Nepali community school headteachers understand the historic contexts of the school in which they operate?
2. How do the Nepali community school headteachers respond to the historic contexts of their schools?
3. What leadership traits, values and perspectives influence the outcomes of the Nepali community school headteachers?

To address these questions involves working through the following structure. First, the chapter discusses the historic context of the schools as seen by the participant headteachers, and the meanings these headteachers attached to that context. The historic context embraces social, economic, and political dimensions. The second section will then establish how the headteachers acted in response to the meanings they have of the contexts. Thus, the second broad thematic area will constitute how the school leaders administer, manage, and govern their schools in the light of the perspectives they have of the contexts. In developing the structure this way, it also foregrounds the symbolic interactionist underpinnings of the study. The first part is about the meanings that the principals give to their contexts; the second part links these perspectives to the action they undertook. The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism assumes importance as the underpinning, underlying perspective throughout the sections of this chapter. The views and actions of leadership that the participants describe or whose outcomes have been observed, reflect the meanings that they have given to the phenomena they confront, and how they act towards those things of people as a result of those meanings. This is particularly powerful when we see different leaders respond to similar phenomena in very different ways.

It will be remembered that the first group of participants comprised three headteachers: Ganesh Acharya (Forest Secondary School), Ghanashyam Niroula (Lakeside Secondary School) and Yogendra Pokharel (Highway Secondary School). The second group of participants comprised Samira Giri (Motherland Secondary School), Kamal Tamang (Hillview Secondary School) and Teknath Baral (Greenfield Secondary School). As
explained in Chapters 5 and 6, forming these two distinctive groups was based on three criteria: (i) school circumstances common to them; (ii) the perspectives they shared; and (iii) judgments made from observations of how each of them went about their roles. While Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 presented the findings from these two cohorts separately at the individual level of the participant headteachers. The purpose of the upcoming sections is to analyse cross-case commonalities and major differences of the two groups and to discuss what they may mean, to arrive at generalised statements relating to the headteachers’ perspectives and actions in three broad thematic areas.

**Figure 24**

Outline of Thematic Analysis and Discussion

Note: The chart illustrates two main parts of the chapter in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism where the first part (7.1) will reveal how the participant headteachers gave meaning to their contexts, and the second part (7.2) will constitute how did they act in response to the meaning they have of the contexts.
7.1 Perspectives of Historic Contexts

This section focuses on the headteachers’ perspectives of the contextual elements that emerged from the findings across the six case studies. The emphasis the meanings that the headteachers gave to those issues and how they responded, or acted, towards those meanings. The term ‘historic’ is used to describe the contexts because they have an historic dimension to them in that they exist in the present but are informed by the past. In analysing their perspectives of the context, the findings revealed three major dimensions: social, economic, and political. The social dimensions include entrenched extent of inequalities within school communities; the post-conflict and post-disaster context; issues of parental and community engagement; and issues of diversity in the student population and headteachers’ response towards it. The major economic aspect of the schools’ contexts was the issue of community schools versus private schools; economic in that it related to resource allocation and resource scarcity, and issues of choices and opportunity costs made by parents who could afford to send children to those schools. The political dimension constituted of two sets of issues: (i) party politics; (ii) schools and their management transitioning into a decentralised system of governance.

7.1.1. Social Dimensions

The findings revealed that a significant proportion of the participant headteachers’ perspectives revolved around the social dimensions of their school’s context. The headteachers emphasised certain historical and sociocultural aspects of community schools’ contexts, which seemed to influence leadership practices of the headteachers and their overall school operations. Thus, discussing the social dimensions will incorporate the headteachers’
understandings of, and engagement with, three areas: entrenched extent of inequalities within school communities; the post-conflict and post-disaster contexts; and issues of parental and community engagement.

7.1.1.1 Inequalities Within Schools Communities

All the headteachers’ schools had a long history operating within similar patterns of historical development. Common to all the schools, they were first established as primary schools with lower-level classes before developing into lower secondary schools, and finally into secondary schools. All their schools had been established by community leaders, most of whom had donated areas of land which the schools began using as a resource, especially in generating income. How much land each school had inherited from the local donors in their developmental phases determined how much property or resources these schools had. Because schools and their leaders could exploit it economically, this created an income stream for the schools, something important in these lower socio-economic status schools. Giri’s school was the exception because it had started as a charity and therefore had received donations – but not in the form of land – from individuals and other social organisations. Otherwise, local community leaders had helped the other five schools to register scattered patches of vacant land in the school’s name. Not all schools, however, had equal allocations of land, so there were inequalities in the distribution and ownership of school properties. To illustrate, in the first cohort Acharya’s school had 0.64 hectares of land, Niroula’s had 0.72 and Pokharel’s had 1.6 hectares. On the other hand, in the second cohort, Giri’s school had no land beyond its school premises of around 0.5 hectares; Tamang’s school had approximately one hectare of land; and Baral’s school had around 3.5 hectares. What can be learnt from this evidence is that the schools where the headteachers were less effective were poorer in terms
of income generation, so lower income from land was a contributory factor in the way they managed their schools.

Another aspect to consider in the historical development of these schools was the broad community context in which they were established. Not one of these school communities could identify any economically advantaged groups of people. Acharya’s school community where was made up of people who had arrived after being displaced by a devastating flood elsewhere in Nepal; consequently, the community’s population had always been in relative poverty. Niroula’s school was established in a community where the majority of people comprised an indigenous, marginalised ethnic group. Pokharel’s school was built around a recently settled rural community, again existing in poverty but also with no traditional connections to the area. Tamang’s school was established in a place where there was a majority of marginalised population living in poverty; and Baral’s school was established in a poor rural location. Two important conclusions can be drawn from these. The first is that all six participants’ school communities shared more similarities than differences in terms of their socio-economic status and socio-cultural features – ethnicity, diversity, and a culture of poverty. However, three schools seemed unable to emerge from their extensively dire circumstances, while the other three schools had worked around these matters and were making positive strides to improve their circumstances. This reflected the second conclusion to be drawn from this: that the principals gave different meanings to these contextual factors and hence acted in different ways as they responded to the situation in front of them.

The three headteachers in the first cohort shared common perspectives about the overall context of their schools. Acharya lamented the lack of resources available to him and believed that the shortfall of resources was the main reason behind his school’s poor
infrastructure, inefficient instructional activities, and the inability to establish improvement projects. He could point, of course, to his school having one of the lowest land allocations Similarly, Niroula believed that the economic problems of his school were due to the parents’ inability to support the school financially, a problem furthered by inadequate government support. Acharya and Niroula described their school communities and parents as a mix of very poor and middle-class families; however, Pokharel described his school community as extremely poor although his school was actually located in a more developed, and slightly more prosperous, community than the other two headteachers’ schools. In contrast, and importantly, the three headteachers in the second cohort did not take a negative view of their schools’ context and available resources. These three were satisfied with physical infrastructures and available resources, and they said more about how they mobilised their potential resources, which will be discussed in later sections.

In the literature of community school education in Nepal, there is a growing number of studies on educational inequality in relation to students’ achievement or policy implementation (Devkota & Upadhyay 2016; Neupane, 2017; Pherali, 2014). Intriguingly, although there was a strong historical connection to levels of inequality between community schools, there was no measures connecting resource shortfalls to education achievement levels of the school’s students. Some large-scale studies such as a series of them (Chiu 2005, Chiu, 2010 & Chiu 2017) in other Asian countries’ contexts, aligns with the findings of this study in that schools with low levels of resourcing, combined with low levels of family income, were correlated to lower educational achievements of their students. The inference was that achievement was low because community resources, or rather their lack of them, would impact on the availability and quality of educational materials, teacher quality, and students’ levels of educational disadvantage.
The study reported here found that most of the participants did seem concerned about the levels of disadvantage in their schools and their communities. However, it was surprising to discover that these headteachers, who were working in very poor school conditions, did not say much about this; neither did they suggest any strategies to minimise the impact of this deprivation. If education is regarded as one important means of reducing inequality rather than reproducing it (Novali, 2016; Pherali, 2014), headteachers should be capable of taking several initiatives (Chiu & Walker, 2007), but the headteachers from the first cohort of the study reported in this thesis rarely tried to effect change in school communities. The headteachers from the second cohort however had taken several initiatives. The one exception was all was Tamang, who had tapped and piped a clean water supply from his school’s grounds into the local community and had also marshalled school resources to develop a tourist attraction, which in turn had raised the average incomes of many families in the school’s district.

7.1.1.2 Post-conflict and Post-disaster Contexts

When offered opportunities in interviews to talk about the impacts of conflict in Nepal (post-2006) and the earthquakes (following 2015), I expected that all the headteachers would say something about these and their impacts on their schools’ contexts. Surprisingly, only two of the headteachers made mention of issues relevant to the post-conflict situation, while none referred to the earthquakes. Perhaps, the earthquakes did not have such an impact on each school, in that these schools were some distance from the epicentre. However, the ten-year long Maoist insurgency did have enormous impacts not only on children and school education but also on the wider community. In fact, several authors have argued that
inequalities in education and communities were as much a cause of the conflict as an outcome (Rappleye & Shields, 2008; Standing & Parker, 2011; Pherali, 2011).

In the first cohort, Pokharel alone argued that community schools in Nepal had started to deteriorate in the period of liberalisation, following the restoration of democracy in 1990. He argued that the Maoist insurgency after 1996 had been responsible for worsening these schools’ situations, because of the lack of proper attention from the government during the conflict period. He resented those people or groups who had encroached onto his school’s patches of land, which, he argued, was the result of their being encouraged and protected by the Maoist party. He claimed his school had only just begun to recover from that situation at the time of this study. Apart from a few other comments, from Niroula and Baral who said that their school had not been able to exploit its land value during the conflict, no other headteachers in either cohort expressed any issues arising from the civil war.

The body of literature on educational leadership in post-conflict, developing countries shows that research conducted, and the attention of international scholars has been growing in recent times (Clarke & O’Donoghue, 2013; Hallingar & Walker, 2017). Published research on post-conflict developing countries such as Rwanda (Karareba et. al, 2018), Cambodia (Kheang et al., 2018), Kenya (Lauritzen, 2016; Wanjiru 2018), and Uganda (Crary & Miller, 2017) has provided glimpses of the theoretical and practical implications of context-based research in post-conflict societies. Broadly, the research showed how post-conflict situations in countries has differed, informing the influence of conflict in education and context-responsive leadership practices. Clarke and O’Donoghue (2013), for example, had shown the impact of conflict under three main themes: “organisational learning, teacher learning and student learning” (2013, p. 192). These relate to affected schools’ organisational capacity and
situation; the professional development of teachers; and students’ learning and development, respectively.

In Nepal, research into educational leadership had emerged after 1990 when democracy was restored. However, there have been an increasing number of studies in the post-conflict era, after 2006, which have critically examined the Nepali context in relation to inclusion and equity issues and found that structural inequality was prevalent in education and in the school system (Pherali, 2011; Pherali, 2016; Pherali & Garratt, 2014; Shields & Rappleye, 2008). While nothing of substance was said about the conflict on any of these matters by the participant headteachers in this research, the participant headteachers discussed several challenges they were coping with.

In exploring educational leadership in post-conflict settings, O’Donoghue and Clarke (2019) argued for the significance of understanding the issues and problems of unique school contexts so that school leaders could reflect on them for the better decision-making process. They summarised the major issues in post-conflict circumstances which included: staff shortages; corruption; issues of accountability and transparency in educational governance; and disorganised coordination mechanisms. Singh and Allison’s (2016) earlier research had shown that many of these issues existed in the broader context of Nepal, and these three are certainly amplified in the research reported in this thesis, despite the headteachers not mentioning each of them.
7.1.1.3 Issues of Parental and Community Engagement

In terms of their relations with their school communities and parents, the three headteachers in the first cohort provided different interpretations and perspectives among each other, but there were also some common features within their perspectives, most of which were accusatory of parents. They described and explained their school community’s and parents’ disengagement as being due to them being naive, indifferent, or ignorant. All three headteachers of the first group stated that most of the parents were naive, because parents were unaware of how they could engage in their children’s education, due to their own lack of education. They argued that parents’ naivety was concomitant with their socioeconomic situation where poorer parents were not able to engage in any activities beyond them satisfying their basic livelihoods. A second explanation given by the headteachers for the parents’ disengagement was that of indifference, in the sense that the parents were not supporting the school by choice. For example, Acharya was unequivocal in blaming parents for wasting time in unproductive and casual gatherings rather than allocating some time for the school and their children. The third perspective from the headteachers was that the government was failing in not encouraging parents to be more effective in their roles hence their use of the word ignorant. More importantly, none of the headteachers in the first cohort had taken any personal initiatives for increasing parents’ engagement in school matters, except for a few formal meetings with parents; however, some of these had to be called off, as Pokharel said, for insufficient number of attendees.

The three headteachers in the second cohort showed more distinctive understandings about their relationship with parents and broader community. These headteachers did express some disappointment with parents, and with the government’s indifference towards parental
Baral, for example, believed that there was a need for parents to be educated about their relationship with the school, but he did not blame the parents and the government at all. On the contrary, he argued that the first requirement for improved engagement was the self-transformation of himself and the teachers. Furthermore, he was also conducting awareness programs such as mothers’ education and parents’ education. Consequently, and in return, Baral found parents to be more supportive when carrying out disciplinary actions with the students and in exercising administrative regulations. Unlike the headteachers in the first cohort, he also held regular PTA (Parents Teachers Association) meetings which were obviously well attended.

Tamang and Giri, also from the second cohort, were critical of the disengagement of the parents to some extent, but at the same time, they believed that they were working collaboratively with the parents and broader community. From Tamang’s perspective, some parents’ economic situations had improved dramatically in a short time – partly because of the school’s role in the community, which will be discussed in the following section in detail. Therefore, their aspirations and expectations for their children’s performance had increased proportionally to their economic growth. However, the nature of the children’s home study environments and the parents’ accountability for the children’s home study habits had shown no improvement. In addition, recent migrants, including the wealthier people in the community, although proportionally small, could simply dominate and mislead the majority in the school’s decision-making processes. It is likely that this could be replicated elsewhere in Nepal and prove to be a challenge for many other community schools in growing suburban and urban regions. Giri, on the other hand, was a hardworking and dynamic leader from the outset, who collaborated with the broader community and organisations for the establishment and growth of her school. For her, the parents’ attitudes, especially those of the students with
disabilities, toward the value of education was relatively more positive compared to what they had been in the past. At the same time, it will be remembered that Giri was disappointed with, and had reprehended, some parents who discriminated between their own children with and without a disability, sending their typically developing children to private schools and sending their children with disabilities to her community school.

Research has shown that successful school leadership includes maintaining a productive relationship between the school, parents and the wider community (Leithwood et al., 2008). The Nepali government’s policies for decentralisation of educational governance assumed that parents would engage more often and more positively. However, the policy did not reflect views on participation shared by parents in the case-study school communities; in general, the parents had not sought to engage more with their children’s schools. At the same time, there were problems in the schools’ management which failed to address the disparities and diversities of their communities, as described by Khanal (2013). The top-down policy making process for parental participation in Nepal was ineffective because it did not involve the stakeholders in the community, and the members of the SMCs were generally politically driven and could not engage the parents as the policies had expected (Edwards, 2011).

Despite the inadequacies of policy frameworks in relation to school governance and participation, individually headteachers could create and develop ways of enhancing parental engagement, and relationships could “be mediated by school practices and school climate” (Keetanjaly et al., 2019, p 1). For example, Singh and Allison (2016) found that some successful headteachers in Nepal had directly involved the parents in schools’ strategic planning and decision-making. The evidence reported in this thesis found that, although most of the participant headteachers revealed different degrees of satisfaction in relation to parents’
engagement, the less effective headteachers from the first cohort had an impression that the parents and the school community were unenthusiastic, a sort of ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’. These headteachers did not express an understanding of the parents and the school community in their unique context. Neither did they disclose any creative steps to foster parents’ engagement and/or community participation in the schools’ undertakings. It may well relate to a ‘blame culture’ because the leaders “blame and complain about their clients can result from feelings of powerlessness and helplessness—often referred to as low senses of self-efficacy” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 10). The more motivated and more committed headteachers in the second cohort, however, had made efforts to engage parents and the broader community in improving parents’ awareness; in increasing school resources; and even further than that, in creating and developing a role for their schools in community affairs.

7.1.1.4 Ignorance of and Reluctance in Responding to Diversity

There have been long-standing critiques in Nepal that reasons for inequalities in schools and communities were because linguistic and cultural diversities were not responded to (Pherali, 2016; Phyak & Ojha, 2019; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Yadav & Turin, 2007). In this study, all six cases revealed that diversity was an important matter; however, each headteacher described the diversity of their school’s population in different ways. Acharya described the student population as a mix of a variety of students’ sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. Niroula characterised students in his school as being largely composed of a marginalised aboriginal community, with a mix of others. However, Pokharel emphasised that while there was diversity, the majority of his students came from families of the lowest-paid professionals. Those professions were traditionally categorised according to the long-
standing caste system. Although nowadays caste is a social taboo, for long it had
discriminated against people in terms of ethnicity and family names; hence people in those
professions were still recognised as people having lower social status. Although Acharya and
Niroula expressed a general view about the caste system, Pokharel believed that, although the
system had been legally abolished, it could still be influencing people’s attitudes. Pokharel
also believed that there was a relationship between the students from so-called lower caste
families and their parents’ awareness about education and health.

The headteachers from the second cohort also described how their student populations
were distinctive. For Giri, her student population came from a variety of ethnic and cultural
backgrounds, as well as from different districts, because the school provided an inclusive
education both for students with disabilities and for those without; therefore, there were
students from other communities where there was no special education available. Tamang
described his student population as problematic because more than 90% of his students came
from a marginalised, indigenous ethnic group, who believed that education would not
contribute to their future. For Baral, most of his school’s students came from a community
having so called higher social status, including a mix of many other ethno-cultural groups.

All headteachers recognised the diversity of their student bodies in terms of social
cultures, ethnic groups, castes and language in their respective schools. Although the extent
of diversity in, and the composition of, the student population differed across each school, all
three articulated similar meanings of diversity. Each believed that cultural assimilation and
mutual respect existed among students and that the sociocultural diversity did not affect the
way they worked. They had a similar idea about the linguistic diversity in the student
population as well. They believed that the Nepali language was not only the medium of
instruction but also a lingua franca, and students were at ease in using the Nepali language. This will be further discussed in the following paragraphs.

Diversity and culture have been important research areas in the field of educational leadership, and researchers have explored this issue in a variety of ways (Lumby, 2019; Lumby & Morrison, 2010; Wang, 2016). In western theories of educational leadership less attention has been paid to fundamental differences in cultures, until recently. Recently, the focus has been shifting toward understanding non-western cultures (Walker & Haiyan, 2019). To understand the participant headteachers’ perspectives about diversity is to find out their ‘cultural competence’, which reflect their ability to understand and respond to diversity (Hernandez and Kose, 2012)

Findings across the six participant headteachers in this study aligned with the idea of Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity of Hernandez and Kose (2012). The model is reproduced below again in Figure 25.

**Figure 25**

*Scale of Approaches to Diversity: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnocentric Orientation</th>
<th>Ethnorelative Orientation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense</td>
<td>Adaption</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>Integration</td>
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255
All headteachers’ perspectives were largely at the level of denial and defense because they neither seemed concerned about issues of diversity, nor did they act accordingly to address them. They expressed their understandings of the existent cultural and socio-linguistic diversity in a homogenised way, by defining their contexts as being culturally assimilative and mutually respectful. Regarding linguistic diversity, however, the headteachers went well beyond this state of denial and defence, in that they were very much at odds with the constitutional rights owed to young people. Nepal’s Constitution 2015 is emphatic on every student’s right to school education in their mother tongue. However, none of the headteachers seemed concerned about implementing this fundamental constitutional right; indeed, this goes beyond the level of denial in that it appears as outright rejection of a fundamental State policy. However, the State itself contributed to this situation by not providing teachers with the necessary language competence and other resources. As a result, the headteachers’ responses to that stated human right was made all the more difficult. Therefore, it may be fair to say that the headteachers were on Hernandez and Kose’s defensive scale, believing that if all students used Nepali language, it would replace the need for education in their mother tongue.

7.1.2 Economic Dimensions

The second dimension of the historic context that surfaced in the findings was economic. There is no argument about the lack of monetary and material resources in schools in the difficult circumstances of low-income, countries like Nepal. This was evident in all participant headteacher’s schools, but to varying degrees. For example, levels of inequality discussed above under the social dimension overlaps into the area of economic dimension as
well. Similarly, in subsection 7.1.1.3 descriptions of parents’ socioeconomic situations context revealed that most were unable to engage with their children’s education because of their poverty and its ramifications. The second part of this chapter includes a subsection discussing how the more effective headteachers tried to mitigate economic challenges. The economic dimension of the context seems to play a role in intensifying the gap between two contesting schooling systems.

7.1.2.1 Private Schools as a source of inequality

An increasing body of research on community schools’ education in Nepal indicates that one of the sources of growing inequality in Nepali communities was the rapid growth of private schools. Studies (Koirala, 2015; Mathema, 2007; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Subedi et al., 2012; Thapa, 2015) reinforce that perception that children from wealthier families would attend more resourced and so-called ‘better quality’ schools, confident that they would have better outcomes and greater opportunities in the future compared to the products of community schools. Consequently, community schools were the destination for students from disadvantaged and poor families, and increasingly, disproportionally comprised such young people.

Most of the participant headteachers articulated their views on the issue of private schools, even when not asked directly about them. The headteachers either compared their community schools’ issues with those of the private schools or made reference to the private schools when discussed the quality of education in community schools. There was some degree of agreement among the headteachers for the reasons behind the rapid growth of the private schools. One of the main reasons they gave was the prolonged civil war, when
community schools were mostly affected and unsafe; yet those schools were not protected by the government, whereas private schools were considered relatively safer and less affected. Their other reasons were: (i) stereotypical views of the parents that educating their children in private schools was prestigious; (ii) the attraction of middle-class families towards English as a medium of instruction, which privates schools provided; (iii) relatively more resources and thus more favourable images of educational success; and (iv) fewer government control mechanisms which they found stifling.

Participants agreed that the growth in the number of private schools had led to a series of problems for the community schools. The most notable was the numerical decline in the student population, especially in lower grades, because of their schools’ apparently declining reputation and the increasing attraction of the private schools. Baral argued that the private schools even deployed corrupt practices such as recruiting community schools’ students into certain grades without the necessary completion certificate from their schools and snatching bright students from the community schools by offering them incentives. Participants also told of private schools encroaching onto public property, even onto community schools’ own property; in this the private schools were backed by the power of social elites and political parties. The results of increased enrolments in private schools were highlighted in a series of television reports by Tripathi (2018). These showed that some community schools in a metropolitan area, let alone rural and remote areas, had less than five students, and they had a larger number of staff members than students.

Despite many negative impacts from the increasing number of private schools, the participants believed that not all private schools were better than the community schools. They argued that most of the private schools had underqualified and inexperienced teachers,
and they merely focused on learning based on repetition. They also claimed that students in their community schools were more creative and productive, and therefore, they believed that many of graduating community schools’ students would ultimately be competitive and successful in their careers. Finally, the headteachers had also made efforts to attract students by imitating private schools’ strategies such as introducing English medium classes; introducing attractive uniform codes; and initiating computer classes and providing access to ICT equipment.

Despite the perspectives of the headteachers regarding their private school competitors, the evidence suggested that private schools did better in terms of academic outcomes, measured by state examination results, where community schools had only around 30% pass rate compared to 90% pass rate of the private schools (Dixit, 2019). Although there was a vast depth of disparity between community school students and private school students, anecdotal evidence suggested that employment outcomes for community school students remained higher, especially in a board range of public service opportunities such as teaching, bureaucracy, and security sectors.

### 7.1.3. Political Dimensions

Historically, education in modern Nepal has undergone various changes and national and local politics have always played a central role in bringing those changes. After the civil war, Nepal transitioned into a federal democratic republic, and the authority for the governance of community schools was transferred from central government to the municipal governments, also called ‘local’ governments. Consequently, politics has surfaced as the third dimension of the historical context. It will include the issues of reconstruction and the
decentralisation of educational governance; ignorance of, and reluctance towards, responding to diversity; and headteachers addressing party-political challenges.

7.1.3.1 Reconstruction Dilemma and Decentralisation of Educational Governance

Before 2015, school governance occurred at three levels: the national level had ultimate authority and control over mid-level development regions, and districts, the lower-level authorities in a top-down scenario. The lower levels simply implemented policies and regulations from above. After the promulgation of the new constitution in 2015, Nepal moved quickly towards decentralising education systems. There were three hierarchical authorities: federal, provincial, and municipal, and, in principle, most of the authority for community schools’ management was handed over to the municipal, or local, government. In the research reported in this thesis, the headteachers were asked about what they think about this new restructuring and decentralisation practices.

The headteachers stated two types of understandings about working in the changed scenario. First, most said that they found it inconvenient to work with the local government for several reasons. These included: uncooperative local authorities; increased responsibilities ascribed to the headteachers; the hostile behaviour of many staff in the local government; and inexperienced and underqualified peoples’ representatives at the local level. On the other hand, some did have positive remarks to make about how they were managing their schools in the new political context. This subsection below begins by emphasising the commonalities and differences in the headteachers’ perspectives about how decentralised school governance affected the ways they worked. After that, the discussion relates the findings to a broader framework of relevant research on educational decentralisation in Nepal.
From the first cohort, two of the headteachers, Acharya and Pokharel, criticised the new system most, saying that it was challenging to work with the municipal government compared to the previous centralised system of governance. This was because only minor changes had been made in the administrative procedures, and the ‘status quo’ was still present. However, the minimal changes had brought problems in obtaining funds and managing budget and salaries. Acharya emphasised that a timetabled transfer of permanent teachers, a proper school monitoring system, and a mechanism for successful implementation of relevant policies were ignored in the new system. For Pokharel, the transition made it more difficult for the headteachers to work, for four reasons: (i) they newly imposed responsibilities on the headteachers without providing required professional training; (ii) the lack of coordination across the governance hierarchical levels; (iii) the corruption loopholes that existed in the system; and (iv) hostile and abusive treatment from the officials in the municipal government. In addition, Niroula mentioned that the representatives and officials in the municipal government misapprehended the real powers they had and resorted to what he called imaginary powers.

Baral and Tamang from the second cohort did mention most of the issues identified by those in the first cohort. However, both believed that the municipal government officials did not understand the real meaning of development. This was because the municipal government had not prioritised educational development in their development plans. Baral was further concerned with the confusion around teacher recruitment and transfer policies, and as to which of the levels of government – local or federal – was responsible. In contrast to the other headteachers, Giri was satisfied with the level of the help and cooperation she achieved from the municipal government.
In the literature, a select body of research, including Caddell (2005), Parajuli (2008), Shields and Rappleye (2008) and Edwards (2011), showed that the planning and implementation of decentralisation of education in Nepal, and empirical inquiry on them, had started after the restoration of democracy in 1990. These studies critiqued some of the developments in decentralising planning in school education and highlighted the vested interests of both state and international actors in the development of the planning. At the same time, they did argue for the value of education decentralisation as a means for a more inclusive and participatory ‘bottom-up’ approach in the Nepali community school context.

Parajuli provided a critical analysis:

The policy of continuing centralised practices and excluding the people from participation in the governance of local school has made the school an external agency, a state representative which delivers the knowledge often away from the local aspirations and with little compatibility with their everyday life. (Parajuli, 2008, p.8)

The findings of Caddell (2005), Shields and Rappleye (2008) and Edwards (2011) aligned with Parajuli’s (2008) argument. Another recent study in the newer context of community-based schooling found that mandated bodies such as SMCs and TPAs were not the only space where community members could participate in school management; other stakeholders such as local individuals and graduates were also acting with a sense of belonging for more participatory roles in school governance (Pradhan et al., 2019). These arguments could certainly be related to the perspectives of the participant headteachers reported here, in the sense that the recent transitional phase showed more of a centralised imposition in policy and practice than a meaningful participation of the local level and school...
communities. This may also be reflected in the assertion of some of the participant headteachers that the SMCs were not truly active in their schools.

In the post-conflict context of education and school leadership in Nepal, the difficulties faced by the participant headteachers in this study, particularly in relation to the decentralisation issues, aligned with findings articulated by O’Donoghue and Clarke (2019). These difficulties included: “a chronic shortage of qualified teachers; poor record keeping, corruption and lack of transparency in educational governance; and a plethora of coordination mechanisms which, in turn, lead to coordination challenges” (p.365). In addition to these challenges, three major issues the participant headteachers revealed may be important. First, there was no reciprocity between community schools and municipal government, the immediate authority for community schools’ governance; rather, the headteachers experienced hostility from the bureaucrats and political leaders in power. Secondly, the headteachers’ beliefs that there was a lack of expertise in the governing body raised serious questions as to whether the municipal government could give effective direction to community schools’ education. Thirdly, the headteachers were not, if at all, prepared in advance for the forthcoming changes imposed by the restructuring and decentralised educational governance. These findings align with those of Bush and Glover (2016) on South African school leadership in decentralised contexts; there, they had found a lack of coordination between schools and governing bodies; principals being more focused towards administration than teaching and learning; and underprepared school principals.
7.1.3.3 Addressing Local Party-Political Challenges

This subsection within the broader political dimension of schools’ historic contexts explores the political influences on headteachers as they went about managing their schools. In a society where members were divided both at an individual and organisational level on their loyalties in party politics, it was evident that the government’s responsibilities and services, including in public education, had to come to terms with the extent of irregular and unethical administration that existed across the country. The findings from all six participants revealed their mostly unpleasant experiences with those external influences, although four of the headteachers were more articulate than the more discreet two (Giri and Niroula). The findings suggested that external political influences could be found in three main areas: among staff members; between schools and governing authorities; and in the processes of teachers’ recruitment and transfer.

While most of the headteachers maintained that there was no internal conflict due to the different political affiliations of their staff members, they agreed that there was animosity between staff members in many other community schools in Nepal, other than theirs. This animosity was corroborated by Acharya’s remark that staff members motivated by a different political belief other than the headteacher’s tended to politicise the smallest of issues to thwart the school’s decision-making processes. In cases of other community schools, for example, Tripahti (2019) broadcast a media report which exposed the partition of staff members in one community school in Nepal; these were across the lines of their political affiliation, issues of accountability, arguments of former and latter headteachers from different political parties (almost to the extent of physical violence), corruption, and a range of irregularities.
The second area where local party politics impacted was in the nature of the relationships between the community schools and school governing bodies such as the SMC and municipal governments. From the perspectives of the participants, it was evident that they could cooperate better with both the SMC and municipal government if those bodies comprised people from the same political parties that the headteachers belonged to. As per the current Education Act, each school’s SMC would be formed from the elected members of the community, which would in turn inevitably involve party politics in elections. Thus, if the headteachers shared similar political beliefs with the Chairperson and members of the SMC, it would make it easier for them to cooperate, make decisions, and implement them in their favour of the headteachers. The same scenario would also work in the case of headteachers and the municipal government. Evidence for this was corroborated by the responses of the participant headteachers who publicly identified as active members of political parties. Hence, Niroula, Acharya and Giri were less critical of the municipal government than Pokharel, Tamang and Baral.

Teacher recruitment and transfer process was the third area where political intervention had a serious impact, and even the more successful headteachers recognised this as formidable. The main accusation of all of them was that nepotism and favouritism were given priority over qualification and competence, and to some extent, over-rode the processes set out in the acts and regulations. They opined that the past practices of political parties recruiting individuals from their cadres, while at the same time deliberately delaying the national Teacher Service Commission (TSC) examinations so that they could get their loyalists into teaching positions, had proved to be extremely counterproductive. It had led to the degeneration of educational quality in terms of teacher standards and the proliferation of
politicisation in public schools. Both of these, they said, were contributing to declining
standards in community schools. The headteachers also were concerned about the future of
the recruitment and transfer practices at the municipal level since they believed that the
current municipal structures were not yet fully competent to manage teacher recruitment and
transfer appropriately.

7.2 Responding to the Historic Context

The previous section of this discussion outlined the meanings that the six participants
held towards common aspects of the historic contexts in which they led their schools. In
keeping with the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, this section elucidates
how the headteachers acted in response to the meanings they had of those contexts. In order
to understand the headteachers’ responses, this section first discusses how those school
leaders administered, managed and governed their schools. Then, it will evaluate their
enactment of leadership in terms of their traits, values, and perspectives.

7.2.1. Administration and Management

This subsection compares and analyses how the participant headteachers explained
and carried out their roles, responsibilities, and priorities, and how they went about improving
their schools. Then, there is an analysis of how, and how far, the case-study headteachers in
both cohorts went about alleviating the issues of managing the resources of their schools.
There were defined roles and responsibilities of the headteachers promulgated by the Education Act 1971, 8th Amendment (2016). At the same time, most of the responsibilities listed in the Act amplified the managerial aspects of school leadership, rather than emphasising innovative leadership roles (Singh & Allison, 2016). Therefore, given the Nepali context, how the participant headteachers from both cohorts envisaged their roles and responsibilities was a major area for exploration. The headteachers of both cohorts were somewhat similar in defining their formal and informal responsibilities; however, the tone in – and the emphasis on – describing these roles provided a distinctive understanding of the meanings they associated with their perceived roles.

To build upon the work of Singh & Allison (2016), it is worth emphasising that the first cohort of headteachers not only prioritised managerial roles, almost exclusively, but also reflected array of the nuances of the managerial model of leadership (Bush, 2019). Some of the participants displayed the characteristics of the “South Asia Leadership Profile” posited by Northouse (2019, p. 450-451), as amplified by the findings of the research reported here. These included: giving importance to self-protection; emphasising charismatic leadership; and believing that others involved in leadership may be ineffective. These shared characteristics can be related to the managerial model because it focuses on implementing requirements and policies imposed by an external body or higher bureaucratic structure and thus believed to be convenient in a centralised education system (Bush, 2007). The findings here showed that the legacy of the previous centralised system still permeated the Nepali community school system, and therefore, the managerial model of leadership was practised by the ineffectual headteachers. I argue for, and elaborate on, this claim below.
In the first cohort, Acharya reflected this managerial model as he repeatedly emphasised that his priority was to run the administration smoothly and to balance all staffs’ viewpoints (ideological conflicts). In describing how he conducted his community connections in an informal way, Acharya’s main concern was to execute a balancing, middle-of-the-road approach to embrace peoples’ views emanating from different political parties. Hence, there was a party-political undercurrent to his approach as well. Niroula, also in the first group, emphasised the formal roles of school administration, executing transactional and instructional aspects of his role as per the regulations. His next priority was participation in different functions both at individual and community levels in order to acquire moral and material support from the community. He was more reserved and diplomatic than Acharya in expressing views about community connections; however, perhaps, he was again referring partly to party politics since he was also a publicly identified, active member of a political party. In the case of Pokharel, as well as carrying out the daily administrative tasks, he emphasised his role in calling meetings of the SMC but having to make decisions because the SMC of his school was not effective.

From the above comparisons of headteachers’ perspectives about their roles, there was strong evidence that these headteachers had to carry out political parties’ instructions, while taking account of the variety of political views held by employees in their schools. The perspectives of these headteachers did reveal two realities of Nepali community schools in difficult circumstances. First, as claimed by Singh and Allison (2016), there had been an amplification of managerial roles by the Education Act, and in addition to that, from the findings of the research reported in this thesis, the headteachers understood those limited managerial roles as their main duty. Secondly, these headteachers operated their informal
roles based on their understandings of local party politics, supplemented by their own political beliefs. While party politics and their interference in education were not necessarily new phenomena for community schools (Gautam et al., 2015), in the case of my study, the headteachers of the struggling community schools had to do more political work at the expense of their ‘leadership’ roles. A previous study demonstrated that effective headteachers were “politically savvy leaders” (p. 5), which meant that: they had good understanding of the context they were working in; that they were successful in influencing people in their organisation and beyond; and that they built partnership with community members. This aligned with the findings of the research being reported, especially in the case of the participant headteachers in the second cohort. However, it was evident that even if the headteachers in the first cohort were involved in local party politics they did not share any of the above strategies which were tailored to lead organisational improvement.

All three headteachers in the first cohort denied any role conflicts in their respective schools. They emphasised a commitment to collective decision making, distribution of responsibilities, transparency, and the SMC’s parting minimising role conflicts in their schools. However, one of Pokharel’s administrative problems was that he had no knowledge of accounting practices, yet he was responsible for intact, accurate records of financial transactions. He explained that an administrative staff member was responsible for all the accounting work, but ultimately, he would be accountable if something went wrong with the calculations. Here, Pokharel’s revealed sitting on the fence between his reluctance to be accountable and his reluctance to taking part in necessary training and professional learning in book-keeping. This also indicates, as identified in section 7.1.1. above, that there was no provision for proper leadership training and preparation both in policy and practice. In relation to this, in a different country’s context, Caldwell et al. (2003) claimed that new
principals often felt that they were underprepared and not ready for the principal roles as per the demand of their tasks. In the changing context of Nepal, the situation described relates to the claims of Bush and Montecinos (2019) that careful preparation would be necessary wherever there would be increased “accountability requirements” and “site-based responsibilities” (p. 166).

In the second cohort, all three participant headteachers emphasised the amount of time they gave to their respective schools in relation to instructional, transactional, and collaborative activities. For example, Baral spent more than 10 hours a day in school on weekdays and taught five periods of 45 minutes each, every day, as well as fulfilling his other headteacher roles. Giri believed that she gave most of her time to the school for her formal and informal roles including teaching, particularly because her school’s focus was on students with disabilities, and her school was a residential school. Similarly, Tamang insisted on taking many classes by himself and conducting his administrative duties out of office hours. This contrasts with many headteachers in community schools, such as Acharya and Niroula in the first group, who did not teach a single period.

This second cohort’s headteachers’ commitment may imply that the effective and motivated headteachers were better in time management and were certainly more directly involved in teaching. In fact, the teaching responsibilities of the headteachers are found in government policy that states that they were supposed to teach at least 12 periods, 45 minutes each, per week (Shah, 2016). This may question whether headteachers could sacrifice the time they spent teaching for other leadership roles in school improvement, such as sourcing funds (Khanal et al., 2019). However, the findings from the research reported in this thesis revealed that those headteachers who were actively participating in teaching were more
effective than those who avoided teaching responsibilities. The headteachers who allocated sufficient time for teaching actual classes, rather than being involved in only administrative roles, were more effective.

When outlining their priorities, Baral and Tamang reflected more about planning, budgeting, reporting, professional development, management of teachers’ remuneration and economic activities. Baral emphasised his key priorities; these were instructional activities, such as a close supervision of teachers and providing immediate feedback; a focus on students’ discipline and enhancement of school culture; strong cooperation with the SMC and the PTA; an economic transparency; and providing extracurricular activities. Similarly, Tamang emphasised the importance of teachers being satisfied in their work; developing yearly unit plans; cooperating with other community schools in the region; resisting pressure from local political parties; and connecting with higher administrative structures. Giri, on the other hand, prioritised collaboration with stakeholders, because of the nature of her school where the focus was more on students with disabilities, and she would need more support systems than other normal schools. For Giri, her priorities were supervising teachers and staff members; contingency planning; service-oriented teachers’ accountability; and participation in organisations related to special education.

How the headteachers in the second cohort prioritised that their roles can be related to the principles of contingent leadership practices; this approach recognises “the diverse nature of school contexts, and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to the particular situation” (Bush, 2019, p. 13). In his study of school leadership in Nepal, Khanal (2017) recognised that local and contingent factors were equally as important as the focus on the adaptation of the best practices from other contexts to meet local needs and priorities. The
findings of the research reported here showed that the priorities of the three headteachers in the second cohort differed because of their contexts varied so much.

7.2.1.2 Perceived Improvement Efforts for School Administration

Two of the headteachers in the first group largely associated the concept of school administration with a simple, common understanding of ensuring that their schools were functioning well in their day-to-day operation. In fact, headteachers in both cohorts revealed how they had gone about trying to standardise and improve their school’s administration at the outset of their roles as headteachers. For example, Acharya had introduced some functional measures which would apply to both students’ and teachers’ accountability and discipline. These measures included: the provision of class-diaries to record teachers’ attendance and class timings; the rule of gate closure after school time started to make teachers and staff members punctual; a card system to control students’ habit of taking unnecessary breaks; and the display of academic calendar and teachers’ attendance record to control teachers’ absenteeism.

In keeping with the spirit of symbolic interactionism, whereby participants’ actions may be explained by the meanings they give to things, it is important to link headteachers’ understandings with their actions. The aim here is to find out ‘what is’ rather than ‘what should be’; as O’Donoghue and Clarke (2019) argue, “If things are described accurately ‘as they are’, there is more likely to be agreement on changes that will create things ‘as they ought to be’” (p. 369). From Acharya’s perspective, his regulatory procedures for the school administration could be seen as being effective in controlling students’ and teachers’ behaviour to some extent. However, from the evidence of the poor state of the school’s
buildings and the overall school appearance at that time, one may have reasonable reservations about Acharya initiated improvements and implemented them effectively. It was for this reason that Acharya fell into the first cohort of the less effective headteachers. As seen in photographic evidence in Chapter 5 (Figure 9), he had ignored clearly visible areas needing repair work; that the basic cleanliness of the staff room, toilets and drinking water was not maintained despite the availability of a cleaning staff; and that the computer lab had evidently not been in use for a long time. Similarly, in observing the staff office, there were teachers without uniforms, wearing flip-flops instead of shoes, despite the government’s uniform code for community schools’ staff members. These small but potent symbols may not only illustrate Acharya’s ineffectiveness but also reflect similar tendency in Niroula’s and Pokharel’s schools.

Coincidentally, Acharya from the first cohort and Baral from the second cohort shared almost identical strategies for regulatory procedures aimed at changing the behaviours of the students and teachers in their respective schools. However, Baral could explain the meaning of those modifications more precisely, emphasising that they would shape the thinking processes of the students, leading to real changes in their behaviour, in what he repeatedly termed as “mind wash”. He also found them to be effectual in practice, when combined with other strategies such as the provision of student-teachers (monitors); this meant having an average of four students for a class of 70 students, who would teach the class in a teachers’ absence and help teachers actively in effective teaching-learning, as well as involving students in the cleanliness of their classrooms and the school premises.

One can identify similar strategies but different implementational procedures between two headteachers’ perspectives and actions, and in turn, these revealed distinctions in the
relative effectiveness of the leadership in respective schools. From my observations, compared to Acharya’s school, Baral’s school was better maintained physically; it had around five times more students, but the environment was relatively quiet, meaning the students were better behaved. All the students, teachers and staff members were in school uniforms; facilities such as the library and science laboratories were well managed; and the areas around drinking water outlets and toilets were cleaner. Thus, keeping contextual factors aside, it can be argued that headteachers’ might have had their own perspectives on what constituted change, but at the same time, to what extent they were motivated and committed to make efforts for that change could determine overall school effect.

As mentioned in the earlier section, the Education Act and other relevant regulations did not provide a precise and comprehensive explanation of what constituted the formal and informal roles of a headteacher in community schools. Rather, the regulations focused mainly on headteachers’ day-to-day administrative responsibilities. However, most of the participant headteachers had formed an administrative structure so as to distribute work among teachers, largely based on their abilities and expertise. But the range of that work distribution was dissimilar between the two cohorts of headteachers. Moreover, as some of the schools had been running a higher secondary level, Year 11 and 12, they had separate faculties such as a faculty of education or a faculty of science, which in turn had separate coordinators for those faculties.

Nonetheless, if those practices were not identical in each school, there was a trend of either of appointing a coordinator from teachers or forming a committee of teachers and/or stakeholders for specific purposes. Among two headteachers in the first cohort who emphasised work distribution, Acharya specifically highlighted only the internal auditing
committee, comprised of teachers who were responsible for transparency in the economic management of the school. Pokharel, on the other hand, had assigned coordinators when dividing the classes from the primary level to the secondary level and he had also assigned roles to teachers an Assistant Headteacher, Extracurricular Coordinator and First-aid Coordinator. On the other hand, from the second cohort, Tamang had allocated some of his roles to an Assistant Headteacher and a Higher Secondary Education Coordinator. Among all the participant headteachers, Baral, from the second cohort, showed the highest priority in distributing a range of roles not only to the teachers but also to the community members. He had devised a range of designated coordinator roles, who were the leaders of the subject-based faculties in the higher secondary levels. There were also leaders of particular groups in the area of extracurricular activities, such as Red-Cross, sports, children club and social groups. Distributed leadership was also exercised through participation and, and leadership of committees such as subject committees to oversee issues related to specific areas of studies and an internal auditing committee comprising teachers and the SMC members. Baral had also formed a Construction Committee involving community members and teachers which would supervise construction works of the school, and their economic transactions.

From the spectrum of improvement efforts made by the headteachers from both cohorts mentioned above, one way their perspectives on the distribution of responsibilities and shaping school culture can be explained was on the basis of what they emphasised. The headteachers’ priorities and practices unveiled three core aspects that could influence school improvement. First, several administrative and management practices of the headteachers resembled each other, some of which were also identical. Second, despite variations between individual cases, the participant headteachers had promoted teachers into leadership roles by directing them to interact with clearly designated functions. Third, the headteachers had
enjoyed administrative autonomy that could be a motivational factor for some, but equally
demotivating for others. However, this autonomy could be better employed if the relevant
legislations prescribed their roles in greater detail. To have no guidelines at all for
headteacher actions was a flaw in the educational processes of managing schools in Nepal.

7.2.1.3 Resource Creation, Mobilisation and Management

In almost all jurisdictions around the world, most of the schools and education
systems have limited financial resources, and their funding models differ variably according
to the larger economic situation of a particular country (Mestry, 2019). In general, one of the
constraints of lower SES countries in trying to develop education and improve schools lies in
available financial resources. As already recognised, one of the noticeable distinctions
between the two groups of headteachers was how they went about managing schools’
financial resources. This section attempts to explain how the headteachers went about the
management of financial resources. In this regard, Maringe and Sing (2019) asserted that the
current literature in school leadership in developing countries found that successful
headteachers used meaningful strategies to improve schools’ standards. Furthermore, they
emphasised that specific leadership theory and practice would not work in those contexts
where there was multiple deprivation – “a lack of capital, skills and assets” (p. 340). Yet, in
the research reported here, some school leaders were exemplary in improving school
conditions despite the financial setbacks. Compared to the first cohort of the headteachers,
the motivated and hardworking headteachers in the second cohort displayed exemplary
strategies in resource creation, mobilisation and management.
The headteachers from the first cohort revealed three common features in relation to financial resources. First, they directly associated their inability to provide for school improvement with the limited resources they had available and the budget restraints; they also noted their poor communities that were unable to make monetary contributions. Second, they linked inadequate instructional activities with poor physical infrastructure. For example, two of the schools had a few computers in their computer classrooms for their students to provide demonstrations, but they were not available for practice. The third school was not even conducting computer classes. Third, the headteachers made a common pretext that they were looking for monetary help for their respective schools from individuals such as school alumni and/or organisations such as foreign diplomatic missions and NGOs; however, at the time of their interviews, they had not been able to secure any funding from external sources.

The Government’s funding for Nepali community schools was unquestionably inadequate; most of the funds provided barely cover teachers’ salaries, and regulations mandate that community schools are not permitted to collect fees from students’ parents or carers. For extra human and material resources, such as teachers, teaching materials, provision of a library, a laboratory and even classrooms, which the schools desperately needed, there were just no funds available from government sources. This is reflected in the studies by Amatya et al., 2004; Gautam et al., 2015; Singh & Allison, 2016; Thapa, 2015. Thus, the earlier research at different times shows a continuous pattern of inadequate funding for what were invariably similar needs of the community schools in Nepal. The headteachers in the first cohort were particularly struggling to meet the rudimentary needs of their schools and students.
Despite facing the same situation, the participant headteachers from the second cohort were entirely different in their perspectives and actions towards resource creation, mobilisation and management. All three headteachers in the second cohort revealed unique strategies. First, Giri demonstrated that additional school resources could be generated by utilising government grants and actively exploiting stakeholders and external organisations for monetary, and material helps. As Giri’s school prominently catered for students with disabilities, there was some leverage in this case. From Tamang’s perspectives and actions, by providing the community with clean tap water and developing a tourist attraction, he demonstrated schools could lift themselves up and also enrich their community by initiating meaningful and productive projects which address the needs of both. Thirdly, Baral established that the vision and determination for school improvement stayed ahead of financial constraints because he was able to exploit pre-existing resources for marked improvement in multiple areas of the school’s operation by developing school infrastructure, generating extra income streams, reclaiming school properties, and shaping a supportive school culture.

Existing literature found that Nepali community schools have undergone years of chronic underfunding, and that these financial constraints have consistently hindered school improvement efforts (Carney et al., 2007; Carney & Bista, 2007; Parajuli & Das, 2013; Nepal & Maharjan, 2015). A narrower body of literature has explored how community school leaders in Nepal responded to this deprivation. Recent studies on leadership of high-need community schools (Gautam et al., 2015) and of one high-performing community school (Khanal et al., 2019) did not delve much into the substantial resourcing of those schools, except to mention fundraising through donations from NGOs/INGOs or foreign embassies. As a strategy for resource creation, seeking such a grant from external organisations,
especially from the Indian Embassy, was a solution mentioned by participants in both cohorts of my study – not necessarily as a leadership strategy, but rather, as a trend. However, the motivated and exemplary school leaders in the second cohort showed that school leaders can attract and exploit resources in various forms as per the context and need of the schools. This does not necessarily mean that those strategies apply to every school’s situation; however, the findings from my study are similar with the assertion of Mestry (2019) from South Africa, that educational institutions can flourish and close achievement gaps by maximising the outcomes from their limited resources, however scant they may seem.

7.2.2 All Leadership are Unique: The Force of their Personalities

The sections above discussed the participants’ perspectives on the contextual and administrative factors. This subsection elaborates on how the participant headteachers described themselves in terms of their traits, values, and perspectives. It may be helpful here to note that despite the subsections in this chapter being distinctive, they are not mutually exclusive, and therefore, glimpses of participants’ leadership traits, values and perspectives have already appeared at times. It begins with a general comparison of the demographic information of the participant headteachers, which helps to understand them more in the light of their background. This subsection will then bring in the traits, values and perspectives of the participant headteachers together and will present an analysis by comparing them between the two cohorts.
7.2.2.1 Asymmetric Qualifications and Experience of the Headteachers

All three brought a long teaching experience to their current role, although Acharya’s teaching experience was the equivalent of the other two combined. In their current roles as headteachers, Niroula and Pokharel had a similar experience of around five years, while the most experienced teacher, Acharya, was the most recent headteacher with just two years of principalship experience. One interesting discrepancy in the demographic data was in the formal qualifications of the headteachers. Pokharel was most highly qualified with two master’s degrees, and Niroula had two undergraduate degrees. Both of them had a relevant teaching qualification from their respective university’s Faculty of Education. However, Acharya had no tertiary qualifications, only possessing a high school exit certificate, and he had no teaching qualification. Table 26 below reminds the reader of the demographic information of the headteachers in both cohorts:

Table 2
Demographic Information of the Participant Headteachers in Both Cohorts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Headteachers</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Schools’ Name</th>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Experience (teaching)</th>
<th>Experience (headteacher)</th>
<th>Student Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samira Giri (Ms)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Motherland Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>10 years +</td>
<td>150 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamal Tamang (Mr)</td>
<td>Remote</td>
<td>Hillview Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>25 years +</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>450 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teknath Baral (Mr)</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>Greenfield Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>30 years +</td>
<td>3 years +</td>
<td>1400 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganesh Acharya (Mr)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Forest Secondary</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>35 years +</td>
<td>2 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanashyam Niroula (Mr)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Lakeside Secondary</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>15 years +</td>
<td>5 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogendra Pokharel (Mr)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Highway Secondary</td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>20 years +</td>
<td>4 years +</td>
<td>350 +</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the second cohort of the participant headteachers, there were also disparities in the teaching experience and leadership experience similar to the first cohort. Baral had the longest teaching experience of more than 30 years, which was twice as much as that of Giri, but had the shortest leadership experience, of nearly 3 years. In contrast, Giri and Tamang had relatively shorter teaching experience but had longer leadership experience. In terms of school leadership, Baral was five times less experienced than Tamang and around three times less than Giri. Another major difference between the three headteachers was the number of students in their respective schools: Baral was leading a school with 1400 students compared to Giri’s student population of 150 and Tamang’s 450.

Comparing the demographic information in the tables revealed differences in the qualifications of the headteachers. The less motivated headteachers in the first cohort, except Pokharel, had relatively lower qualifications than the more effective headteachers in the second cohort. Moreover, the headteachers in the latter group had focused on upgrading their qualification during their teaching and leadership career. This reflects a commitment to professional learning which may have some influence of the quality of their leadership outcomes. Second, the headteachers in the second cohort were more experienced than the first, except for Baral. Perhaps, the headteachers’ superior qualifications, combined in part with their experience, could explain why the three headteachers in the second group were more motivated and effective.

Notwithstanding external factors involved in the headteacher recruitment process in Nepal, which will be discussed in a different section later, there were discrepancies in the qualifications and experience of the headteachers, likely due to imprecise selection criteria and variations in the traditional headteacher recruitment processes based on seniority and
teaching experience. In a similar South Asian context, Pakistan, there is a clearly defined qualification requirement for the recruitment of headteachers which includes a post-graduate qualification combined with a relevant degree (Nasreen & Odiambo, 2018). Similarly, Beri and Tenzin (2019) described a rigorous process of headteacher recruitment in Bhutan where the qualification requirement was at least a master’s degree in a relevant area, or a bachelor’s degree with additional requirements. In addition to the inconsistent qualification requirements for headteacher recruitment in Nepal, headteacher preparation and pre-service training were almost non-existent, except for a few in-service training programs. This, according to Moorosi and Bush (2011), was a common characteristic of school leadership practices in developing countries, including Africa. Furthermore, all three headteachers believed that they were selected as headteachers on the basis of presumed skills and abilities for the leadership.

Another major difference between all six headteachers was the number of students in their respective schools. Most of the participant headteachers viewed that small numbers of students in a school was a challenge. The number of students in the schools of the first group was similar at around 350 but was unevenly different in the second group. There were approximately 150, 450 and 1400 students in the schools of Giri, Tamang and Baral, respectively. The reason Giri’s school had the lowest number was likely due to its more focus on special education, and Tamang’s school was in a remote hill area where there was lower population, and therefore, it had lower number of students. However, Baral’s school which was in a similar geographical and social context to those of the schools in the first cohort had a greater number of students than the combined number of those three schools. This gap in the number of students may well portray that the much larger number of students in Baral’s school was because of the parents’ trust resulting from the school’s improvement.
7.2.2.2 The Reasons Behind Headteachers’ Appointments

Traits and behaviours have been recognised in various ways. Traditionally, leadership traits referred to a set of characteristics possessed by a leader such as intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity and sociability (Northouse, 2018). In recent times, the leadership traits have also been seen in novel ways such as mindfulness in the workplace which included the leadership attributes such as non-judgemental attitude, kindness, curiosity, compassion, self-awareness and gratitude (Lemon & McDonough, 2018). Similarly, Clarke (2015) argued for the need for “contextual intelligence” in defining effective leadership rather than the conventional prescription of traits and behaviours (p.356). Therefore, it may not be wise to look for a corresponding list of leadership qualities assumed by the trait approach, but rather it may be helpful to compare the traits, values and attitudes that appeared in the participant headteachers’ perspectives.

One of the main attributes the participant headteachers revealed in their perspective was the motivation to become an headteacher. Out of the six headteachers, five of them revealed that they had chosen to lead their respective schools by themselves. However, one of the headteachers, Pokharel, was so reluctant that he did not even want to become a teacher; neither did he want to become the school’s headteacher. With regard to motivation, Barton (2011) found that school leaders were motivated either by internal factors such as higher salary, or by a desire to initiate change or gain power; or by factors such as a profound desire to make a difference in others’ lives. The study reported here revealed that the first cohort headteachers were largely guided by the factors of internal motivation; these included their longing to change their own roles power desires. However, the headteachers in the second
cohort were motivated by both internal and external factors; of the latter, most evident was their desire to make a difference in people’s lives.

Closely related to motivation, having a clear vision for setting the direction of an organisation is one of the major attributes of a leader (Leithwood, 1994; Hallinger & Heck, 2002). The concept of a shared vision is emphasised by many models and theories of educational leadership, including transformational leadership and transformative leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Shields, 2010). One major difference between the two cohorts of the headteachers was in setting a vision, planning according to the vision and executing the plans properly. Notwithstanding the visionary characteristics of the headteachers, one of their formal roles set by regulation was to prepare a five-year plan for school improvement. Yet, there was not one on display in the headteacher’s office of two of the first cohort. However, the second cohort headteachers had their plans displayed spoke to them and claimed that they were working according to the plan. They were visionary in the sense that they had articulated a vision, built trust among staff and other stakeholders for the plan and fostered the acceptance of the vision. As a result, their schools’ improvement was noticeable in terms of infrastructure, resourcing, and teaching and learning. From the limited body of research available on successful school leadership in Nepal, one of the attributes for successful community school leadership was forming a vision to meet the student needs, to enhance school culture and community collaboration and to improve instructional practices (Gautam et al., 2015 & Khanal et al., 2019). The headteachers of the second cohort reflected these qualities immensely.

Education is one of the most stress-prone industries; Phillip and Sen (2011) claimed that the rate of stress in education was nearly double compared to other organisations. On the
other hand, job satisfaction can be positively related to job performance (Wright et al., 2007). In the Nepali community schools’ context, although little literature was available on headteachers’ satisfaction, one study by Mondal et al. (2011), in the case of schoolteachers, found that they were moderately satisfied but also mildly or moderately stressed. The study reported in this thesis found that the second cohort of the headteachers appeared far more satisfied than the first cohort. The first cohort of the headteachers came across as relatively dissatisfied and they often appeared accusatory of and resentful towards, the context of their school, their parents and the governance processes.

Another variation in the headteachers’ perspectives was their levels of self-confidence and self-efficacy. Trait-based leadership theories included self-confidence as an imperative attribute of leaders that allow them to believe that they can make a difference and can influence their followers (Northouse, 2019). Similarly, headteachers’ self-efficacy comprises skills and confidence in organisational and instructional areas, as well as external or community relations (Fisher & Kostelitz, 2013). In my study, the participant headteachers in the first cohort showed very low self-confidence and self-efficacy in the sense that they largely believed in the ‘status quo’ and repeatedly blamed the overall context as a hindrance to improvement. Pokharel was the most pessimistic, but all three headteachers expressed some degree of pessimism about the future of community schools in Nepal. However, the perspectives and actions of the second cohort headteachers revealed that they led their schools with self-confidence and self-efficacy. They did recognise contextual challenges, but at the same time, they were less condemning of these. They believed in and were optimistic about the execution of their plans and worked accordingly. Thus, they were also more optimistic about the future of community schools in Nepal.
7.2.2.3 Comparing Headteachers’ Appointment Patterns

The historical overview of education in Nepal in Chapter 2 emphasised that Nepal had experienced different dynasties and systems of government from the early 19th century to the present, and those different governments used the education system for their own political benefits and interests. Moreover, from the outset of formal education in Nepal, factors like foreign influence, universalisation, and neoliberal concepts of development were predominant, and these have continued up until the time of the research reported here (Bhatta, 2011; Caddell, 2007; Carney, 2010; Carney & Bista, 2009; Regmi, 2017). After the restoration of democracy in 1990, party politics started to gain momentum in every sphere of society and brought about ideological divisions in every sector including school education (Pherali, 2013). The study reported here has certainly emphasised the influence of political fragmentation in the areas of headteachers’ recruitment, teachers’ recruitment and transfer, and overall school management in the community schools of Nepal.

The findings revealed that the ideological fragmentation caused by the local party politics was one of the overwhelming challenges for the participant headteachers. All of them articulated that, in one way or another, the prevalent party politics did have a direct impact on community schools’ operation and leadership. Notwithstanding all the political influences on how the case-study headteachers worked, there is evidence that many headteachers in community schools across Nepal have been, knowingly, recruited through their political orientation and relation to the people in power. Evidence for this came from some of the headteachers in this study. Five of the six headteachers had been appointed as school leaders through an alternative process to the statutory procedures, based on seniority and experience, which likely meant that they had been appointed with some level political influence. Only
one headteacher, Baral, was recruited through the government’s formal ‘point-based system’, and he claimed that only four out of 50 community schools’ headteachers in his district were recruited through the government’s formal procedures. This is evidence that the headteacher recruitment system did have loopholes that could be exploited politically.

While most of the participant headteachers defended themselves, in their own terms, of being legitimately recruited, the accounts they gave about some other community schools revealed exactly how headteachers were recruited, even if they were less qualified than other qualified teachers in the same schools. Recently, news media in Nepal has taken an increasing interest in stories of irregularities in educational policy and practice (Dhakal, 2019), which has highlighted an escalating number of cases of frustrating disorders in Nepali community schools. One such account of a community school was broadcast by a television channel where the headteacher did not meet a minimum qualification criterion; misinterpreted the experience criteria; and overlooked a qualified candidate in the same school (Tripathi, 2019).

In response to questions about the problems he faced in his school, Acharya said that he felt insecure and threatened in his job; his anxiety was because he had lower qualifications than other teachers in relief quotas, or temporary teachers, who had lobbied higher educational authorities for the headteacher position in the past. Acharya’s anxiety may be explained in two ways. First, the headteacher recruitment process that put him into the position of headteacher was unlikely to have been fair; and second, he found it difficult to work productively with temporary teachers and to maintain cordial relationships between the permanent teachers and the temporary teachers who, he believed, were after his position.
In the wider Nepali context, one of the outcomes, and resultant limitations, of what was intended to be the improved service delivery of community organisations in Nepal was power politics, where the leaders of such organisations would be committed more to political and individual interests than social change (Acharya & Zafarullah, 2017). To be specific to school education, this limitation could be linked with the gap between stakeholders’ concerns and policymaking in the process of decentralising school education in Nepal (Dhakal, 2019). Thus, the outcomes of decentralising school education appeared to be challenging because of the politically or elite-dominated policies, under-cooperation of teachers, and mishandling of authorities at the local level (Khanal, 2011). The common outcome of these is that schools, their students and their communities, continue to lose out.

7.3 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to conduct a cross-case analysis; to draw conclusions and develop a theory around school leadership in Nepali context; and to answer the research guiding questions. The first part of the chapter (7.1) focused on the historic contexts of the schools of the participant headteachers and their perspectives of those contexts. It described the historic contexts in terms of their social, economic, and political dimensions. The second part (7.2) involved a discussion of the responses of the headteachers toward the historical contexts of their schools. The second part (7.2) involved a discussion of the responses of the headteachers toward the historical contexts of their schools which answered the second research guiding question: How do the Nepali community school headteachers respond to the historic contexts of their schools? It also answered the third research question: What leadership traits, values and perspectives influence the outcomes of Nepali community school headteachers? This involved a discussion of their demographic profile, the process of their
appointment as the headteachers of their schools and their reasons to choose to become an
headteacher. Addressing these three research questions can be displayed in the diagram,
Figure 27 below:

**Figure 26**

*Microsociology of Community School Leadership in Nepal*

Note: The chart demonstrates the interrelation between the participant headteachers’ understanding
about the contexts they were operating in, their responses to the historical contexts and their unique
personalities.

It is evident from the analysis of the findings that the headteachers showed varying
degrees of understandings about the historic context they were operating in. Also, the
participants did not emphasise all the dimensions of the historic context, to the extent that
some of them did not even mention critical issues of Nepali community schools such as post-
conflict situation and diversity. However, it is important to note that those headteachers who
showed better understanding of the historic context were the more effective school leaders.
Their effectiveness was reflected in the way they responded to the historic context as per the
meanings they gave to it. In other words, the headteachers who recognised and emphasised the weight of historic context seemed to better respond to them, and thus, were more successful.

It is also important to look at the contrasted realities of the same school system between two cohorts of the participant headteachers. The less effective headteachers in the first cohort were less resourceful, less motivated and more denouncing, and at the same time, their schools were weaker in terms of physical, material and human resources. Therefore, the fate of those community schools appeared to become increasingly vulnerable as time went on. On the other hand, the more effective headteachers of the second cohort were more resourceful, motivated and less denouncing, and at the same time, their schools were in a much stronger position in most of areas, including physical, material, and human resources.
Chapter 8

Conclusion

This final chapter provides a summary and critical review of this thesis by evaluating it in terms of the intentions of, and outcomes from, carrying out this study. To do this will involve four parts to the chapter. First, there is a section providing a critical review of the research, which connects the problem, aims and significance to the findings and discussion themes. Second, there is a section on the implications of the study which connect the major propositions and recommendations from the findings to policy development and practice. Third, there is a section on the limitations of the research, in terms of generalisability and transferability. The final section provides suggestions for future research relevant to school leadership in Nepal and in similar contexts elsewhere.

8.1 Critical Review of the Research

The overarching research question of this study was How do community school headteachers in Nepal envisage their roles, responsibilities and priorities in the recent context of post-conflict and post-disaster Nepal? In the light of the research problem outlined in Chapter 1, this study was important in order to understand the situation regarding community school leadership in post-conflict Nepal after the end of the Maoist insurgency and the promulgation of a new constitution in 2015. The new constitution changed the system of government from a centrally governed democratic system to a federal democratic republic. As part of those changes, community school education in Nepal has undergone several modifications in terms of educational policy and practice in line with the changes in the nation’s politics and government systems. In post-conflict Nepal, the governance of
Community schools have been decentralised and handed over to the 753 municipal governments that now exist in the country. Moving from one single centralised system to the decentralised situation that exists currently in a unique post-conflict and post-disaster context was always likely to have considerable impact on the leadership of the community schools, and this study has aimed to explore this issue systematically.

After decentralisation, the Ministry of Education ([MOE], 2016b) delegated a service contract to headteachers of community schools in Nepal in relation to implementing one major ongoing policy, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP), 2016-2023. The contract assumed five core dimensions of the plan, which were equality, quality, efficiency, governance and management, and resilience. Furthermore, the current Education Act (1970) (8th Amendment, 2016) stated that headteachers retain the main jurisdiction to run community schools smoothly and effectively. Headteachers were mandated to be the central figures for community schools’ leadership and development; hence the nature of the research here was to explore the perspectives and actions of the participant headteachers. The six participants were considered to be six individual cases in a multiple-case study research.

The key issues this research explored were the context, worldviews, and experiences of the participant headteachers in relation to their understandings of, and coping mechanisms to deal with, the unique circumstances they worked in. Therefore, an interpretivist theoretical perspective, which aligns with the epistemology of constructionism (Crotty, 1998), was the most appropriate approach to the phenomena investigated here. Symbolic interactionism, which is embedded within the interpretivist approach, was the underlying theoretical perspective to reveal the diverse leadership practices by each of the participant headteachers for this qualitative inquiry. Insights from the underpinning theory of symbolic interactionism...
proved to be particularly valuable because the headteachers in this study assigned their own meanings to the broader context, their individual school contexts, their roles and responsibilities; they showed unique patterns of their interaction with their individual contexts; and they also revealed those interactive processes which were involved in modifying meaning for them, and turn, their actions.

The reason for adopting maximum variation sampling, a type of purposive sampling procedure, was to select the participant headteachers for representing the variations and uniqueness in perspectives and actions which is reflected in the spectrum of the cases under this study. These variations included school contexts, schools’ location, gender, ethnic backgrounds of the headteachers, and their work experiences. Embracing these variations, individual cases were selected. Thus, six headteachers from six different secondary community schools of Nepal made up the six individual cases of this study, hence the multiple-case study. This has, in one way, helped to maximise generalisability of the study, although there are still other limitations which are considered in more detail later in the chapter.

As suggested by Yin (2014), one of the most significant sources of case study evidence is guided conversation, often called semi-structured interviews or qualitative interviews. These in-depth interviews included open-ended questions, which in turn provided opportunities for the participant headteachers to express their perspectives freely. This also allowed them to reflect on the emergent issues during the interviews. Some of the participant headteachers gave lengthier details than others on particular issues raised, which helped to explore those issues in-depth, which was not expected prior to the interviews. Some of the responses from the headteachers also provided insights that deepened the inquiry with regard
to specific issues and explored these issues across other cases as well. In addition to the interviews, non-participant and unstructured observation of the participants’ schools, their material resources, physical infrastructure, and tangible efforts provided opportunities to deepen understandings and develop richer, descriptive accounts of the cases. For example, one of the headteachers had run a water project for the community, which was visibly evident within the premises of the school. Similarly, documents and physical artefacts added to the information from the interview data and also helped to understand and analyse the headteachers’ perspectives.

To find out how the participant headteachers assigned meanings to their roles, responsibilities and priorities in post-conflict and post-disaster Nepal, there were three research guiding questions. These were:

- How do the Nepali community school headteachers understand the historic contexts of the school in which they operate?
- How do Nepali community school headteachers respond to the historic context of their schools?
- What leadership traits, values and perspectives influence the outcomes of Nepali community school headteachers?

In the paragraphs that follow, addressing each of these research guiding questions are critically reviewed.

The first question was: How do the Nepali community school headteachers understand the historic contexts of the school in which they operate? The responses from the headteachers reflected three dimensions of the historic contexts of the individual cases:
social, economic and political. These dimensions were critically analysed, and conclusions have been provided, and critical reflections of these are considered below.

There were deep-seated inequalities between the schools in terms of available resources, in particular land. However, no measurement was available to document this inequality; neither did the poorer schools receive any extra support. In the two groups of headteachers, the schools of the less effective headteachers were poorly resourced and had less amenities and facilities. However, the headteachers of the second group were found to have made efforts to increase alternative income streams for their schools. Thus, the economic context of these schools was not only determined by inter-school inequality but also by school leadership.

Most of the community schools’ student populations came from lower-income, lower-social status, and less well-educated parents and communities, who could hardly contribute, financially or in terms of time given, to supporting and/or taking an interest in their children’s education. However, the participant headteachers’ perspective toward the parents’ roles seemed contradictory. The three headteachers in the less effective group, as well as Tamang from the second cohort, attributed parental disengagement to either naivety, indifference, or ignorance. In contrast, the other two headteachers made meaningful efforts to engage parents and communities.

In spite of this research carried out in a post-conflict and post-disaster context, the participants did not state any deeply felt or explicit meanings of those events in their perspectives, except for a few instances. Specifically, the post-conflict situation was one of the main foci for researchers of education in Nepal. There are many who would argue that
education was also one of the major reasons for inequalities in society, and in turn, the conflict, and therefore, a revisitation of the whole educational system was necessary. Although all the headteachers experienced the 10 years long conflict, it was surprising to find hardly any references, in their perspectives, to the impacts of the conflict, or the disaster, on students, schools and communities.

The declining reputation of community schools in the social sphere, and in turn, the attraction of lower-middle, middle- and upper-class families to private schools, seemed to have notable impacts on community schools and their leadership. The headteachers faced issues of numerical decline in student numbers, the snatching of bright students, and the domination of social and political elites (often the owners of private schools). Some headteachers deployed some imitative strategies such as English-medium and ICT classes and attractive uniforms for their students, as evidence of being competitive with private schools. However, the headteachers had not realised any improvement in student numbers and/or academic achievement.

The political dimensions of the historic context were reflected in the participant headteachers’ perspectives in terms of how they coped with the issues of reconstruction and decentralisation; how they understood the diversity of the student population; and how they faced local party-politics. With regards to decentralised governance of the schools, the headteachers revealed numerous issues such as problems in coordination; hostility between the schools and governing municipal governments; and the lack of preparedness or preparation of the headteachers for the change. In acknowledging the diversity of their student bodies, all the headteachers placed themselves in either a denial or defensive position by generalising the current socio-cultural and linguistic diversity in a homogenised way with
a common assumption that the students were mutually respectful and culturally assimilative. Finally, the headteachers recognised that addressing and dealing with local party-politics was one of the external challenges, which appeared to result in creating animosity among staff members, influencing teacher recruitment and transfer, and instigating conflict between schools and governing bodies such as municipal government and SMC.

The second research guiding question was: How do Nepali community headteachers respond to the historic context of their schools? The findings from each case revealed that all of the headteachers employed various degrees of managerial, contingent, distributive, transactional, instructional and authoritative leadership. It became apparent that the ineffective headteachers in the first cohort were mainly concerned in the managerial, day-to-day operation of their schools in activities such as: managing teachers and students’ attendance; student discipline; school finances; balancing teachers’ political views; and maintaining transactional duties as per the regulations. While most of these were essential tasks for all headteachers, the members of the first, less effective cohort, seemed to pay most of their attention, if not all, to those tasks alone, at the cost of providing genuine ‘leadership’ in other areas. Two of them revealed their inability to handle increased responsibilities in the new context of decentralisation; the findings also revealed that there was no preparation or professional development available to these headteachers to help them to adapt to the new system. While not ignoring their managerial demands, the second cohort headteachers emphasised more contingent, collaborative, instructional and authoritative leadership. They prioritised strategies such as setting and planning a vision; relatively more involvement in instructional activities; collaboration with stakeholders and the school community; promoting teachers’ satisfaction; and improved school culture.
The findings of this study helped to delve into the participant headteachers’ perspectives and actions on financial constraints that community schools faced. The first cohort headteachers solely relied on government grants and expected donations from external organisations; while they were more successful with the former, they received no grant donations at all. However, the government grants were inadequate compared to the needs of the school and students. The second cohort headteachers found various ways of utilising more locally available resources and creating income streams by establishing community projects; exploiting school properties for generating income; and collaborating with stakeholders and community members for effective fund-raising and material help.

With regards to decentralised governance of community schools, all the participant headteachers said that their main concern was the lack of reciprocity with governing municipal governments. It was clear from the headteachers that there were certain degrees of animosity between the headteachers and local political representatives, including the district-level bureaucrats. There was a lack of coordination even with the organisational hierarchy of the municipal governments. The findings also showed that there were numerous loopholes for corruption due to imprecise regulations and coordination problems with the local authorities.

The third guiding question was: *What leadership traits, values and perspectives influenced the outcomes of Nepali community school headteachers?* In order to fully understand the uniqueness of leadership of the individual cases, demographic information of the headteachers themselves was analysed first. The demographic information showed that there were major discrepancies in terms of the headteachers’ qualifications and experiences, number of students in their schools and accessibility in terms of the schools’ locations. By way of conclusion, the headteachers with higher qualifications and longer experience,
together with their individual commitment to professional learning, were more likely to be effective leaders.

Clearly, findings showed that there was a spectrum of distinct qualities of the headteachers from the first cohort to the second. The headteachers from first cohort proved to be: less motivated; reluctant to recognise and address their school’s context; indifferent, accusatory, and pessimistic; and more likely to be involved in party-politics themselves. The impact of these traits and values were reflected in their perspectives, and in turn, in their actions in managing their schools. As the evidence of the findings revealed, their management was achieving little in the way of improved outcomes for students. In contrast, despite having started their leadership roles in schools of similar, difficult contexts, the headteachers in the second cohort assumed the roles of, and proved themselves as, agents for improvement. They had made their schools increasingly resourceful in terms of monetary and material aspects; they had acted rigorously in the area of community engagement; and they had shown improvement in teaching-learning activities and overall school operation. In short, they were visionary, determined, hardworking, collaborative, and self-confident.

8.2 Implications

The findings showed that despite there being remarkable differences in the leadership styles of the participant headteachers, individual and cross-case analyses suggested that there were a number of similar issues across the leaders of the six community schools’ leadership. It also provides an insight into the constituents of ‘effective’ school leadership in particular contexts, and in Nepal more broadly, by comparing two cohorts of the headteachers. The knowledge gained from this study does not necessarily represent each community school in
Nepal. However, the study’s findings and conclusions are likely to be useful for informing policy and practice of school management in Nepal itself, but also may have relevance for similar contexts in developing countries, especially in post-disaster and post conflict situations. More importantly, this study contributes to the literature about community school leadership in Nepal by building theory based on rich description, concepts of effective and ineffective headteachers, and building a category of headteachers based on their similarities and differences. While some results may align with previous research works on Nepali community school leadership, there are a number of findings that are unique to the varying contexts of the school headteachers, and they have been already discussed in Chapter 7. Based on the results, the following subsections suggest numerous implications for school leaders, municipal departments of education, School Management Committees (SMCs) and the Federal Government.

8.2.1 Implications for School Leaders/ Head Teachers

The service contract of headteachers delegated by MoE in relation to implementing SSDP, 2016-2023 lists equality, quality, efficiency, governance and management, and resilience as the five core dimensions of their work, with the main jurisdiction on the headteachers to operate schools smoothly and effectively. This means that headteachers are accountable to maintain these five core dimensions. Moreover, it was also evident from the findings, especially from the second cohort, that headteachers can play significant roles in leading school effectively even in difficult contexts. While this whole study is relevant to school leaders, the following points summarise the implications:
Evidently, all the headteachers did not have a well-informed grasp of the historic contexts they were operating in. By developing a thorough understanding and developing genuine concerns for their immediate situations, school leaders can recognise diverse issues they may have about their schools and make appropriate decisions. For example, they could look for ways to minimise the impacts of inequalities in the school communities by leveraging available resources, as some participant headteachers did.

Community engagement was one of the main planks in the spirit of decentralization of education. While the role of municipal governments in participatory school communities cannot be forsaken, school leaders can initiate effective programs for parental engagement through regular meetings, encouragement, activities, and rapport building. They can develop meaningful projects, such as those by Tamang, which directly interact with school communities, or by Giri, which involve stakeholders in resourcing. These will, in turn, enhance parents’ and communities’ responsibilities toward community schools and children’s education.

The main purpose of school leaders should be ensuring effective teaching and learning, which, in turn, assures improved learning outcomes for students. The premise here is that improved academic outcomes for school leavers would enhance their opportunities for greater economic security in the future, in terms of further and higher education, which would impact on future employment and income. In their own words, most of the headteachers were found to have only a marginal interest in instructional leadership. From the evidence, the headteachers were more likely to engage in administrative tasks alone at the cost of genuine leadership, and especially
instructional leadership. Furthermore, some of the headteachers had engaged too deeply in party politics and been badly indulged by local political bodies. Effective leaders, for example Baral and Tamang, had shown equal interest in going to classrooms every day and involving themselves in pedagogical activities. The reputation perceptions by communities that private schools were more effective and achieved better results can possibly be explained by the emphasis in those schools on instructional leadership. In the first place, an emphasis on instructional leadership in four of the six case-study schools would likely address some of the academic outcomes but this could likely be replicated across many community schools in Nepal, which in turn could somehow address their plight.

- Acknowledging and addressing diversity is a major policy issue in Nepal at the time of this study. Individual schools and their leaders have to acknowledge the issues of diversity within their school communities in terms of inclusivity, equity and equality and mother tongue as a medium of instruction. First, a better understanding of the nature and extent of diversity peculiar to their schools may be the first step towards dealing with it at the level of individual schools. But community schools – often a destination for the children from poor, undereducated and marginalised families – seem to offer little support to the students from the most vulnerable communities. Whichever way it is possible, school leaders can work towards minimising the impacts of diversity and poverty on students’ education in some forms such as counselling, advocacy, scholarships, and material helps in order to improve their educational experience and academic outcomes.
Further down the track, the headteachers might initiate activities of peace education tailored to young population that will prepare them for non-violent solutions to conflict, which is more important in a post-conflict situation. In a post-disaster context, the leaders can prepare early by ensuring institutional capacity for sustainable infrastructure and resilience.

The impacts of professional learning communities were evident in the headteachers’ efforts for change and improvement. However, to compare Acharya and Baral, Acharya’s strategies were more likely mere imitation of those of Baral. Here, the emphasis is laid on the reasons of school leaders’ meaningful sharing of the ideas and experiences and their effective implementation. If community schools are underperforming compared to other schools in similar contexts, school leaders should learn from, and collaborate with, effective leaders within and beyond the designated areas of school clusters at the personal level and organisational level or through the support from higher bureaucratic structure.

School leaders in difficult circumstances in Nepal generally exist with a dire lack of resources. Beyond blaming the contextual factors, school leaders can look for the opportunity to create, manage and mobilise resources as per the context of schools and school communities. They can learn from Giri, Baral and Tamang who represented three unique contexts and went through the hurdle of inadequacy of resources, yet they made exemplary efforts to avail their schools’ minimum requirements and lead to the next level. Therefore, headteachers should look to utilising available resources – mainly land and other physical properties that most of the community schools have – for maximum output.
Participant headteachers’ relevant qualifications and experience largely correlated with their effectiveness. Those who gave more importance to their professional learning were the second cohort headteachers. Therefore, obtaining relevant qualifications in educational management, along with the emphasis on continuous professional learning could make the headteachers more effective. Clearly, there is also a lack of the recognition of the importance of professional learning for teachers; therefore, school leaders should focus on managing and leading professional learning as well. Apart from the government’s prescribed trainings and urging to governing bodies for further help in the needed areas, headteachers can take help from private providers.

8.2.2 Implications for Municipal Governments

Throughout this study, it has been emphasised that the importance of understanding the historic contexts of community schools would not only help the headteachers but also other stakeholders so that they could make better informed decisions when responding to those contexts. People’s representatives and bureaucrats in municipal governments may need to first take into account historic issues for the planning and implementation of effective educational governance at the municipal level. The responsiveness of the governing bodies towards issues such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and other unique cultural aspects including historical circumstances, depends on the level of their understanding, priorities and, in turn, action. Based on the predominance of the headteachers’ negative remarks about their municipal governments, the following implications may be practical:
It was evident from most of the headteachers’ statements that there was a lack of cooperation, indeed augmented animosity, between community schools and municipal governments. This may be a result of politicising schools because of the involvement of headteachers/teachers and members of municipal governments in local party politics. Strong commitment from the municipal governments not to favour one particular political party and its supporters, and a mechanism to oversee politicisation, may help to increase coordination between schools and municipal governments.

Almost all the headteachers stated an exasperation with the political leaders in the new municipal governments that now had oversight of community schools. Many were inexperienced, underqualified and even, in the words of some headteachers, ‘uneducated’; yet they now had the power to oversee schools’ operation and staff members and provide grants to needy schools. To address this issue, first, the Federal Government would need to initiate and fund a range of professional development programs and activities to provide the representatives in municipal governments clearer insights into schools and their operations. Furthermore, the same government would need to establish well-defined set of working guidelines to regulate the municipal government’s limits of operations.

Functional SMCs, according to the regulations, play an important role in schools’ decision making, supervision and improvement by increasing participation and ownership of local communities. If the professional development of municipal government leaders and tighter regulations create a more responsible approach to school oversight, municipal governments should then assume responsibility to supervise, and make SMCs increasingly accountable for, schools’ improvement.
Underperforming schools’ leaders did not appear to prioritise SMCs’ activities. The municipal governments should create and make explicit new regulations that mandate SMCs to take a more responsible approach to school reform and progress, then it may be more likely that headteachers will have to develop and maintain more positive and worthwhile relations with their SMCs.

8.2.3 Implications for School Management Committees

Most of the participant headteachers attributed little priority or importance for the SMCs’ roles, meaning that the SMCs were either dysfunctional or relatively inactive. In turn, the SMCs’ members have to recognise that the rationale behind their formation by law was to actively involve community members in the decision-making processes of the community schools. There are numerous responsibilities assigned to the SMCs which, in principle, mandate these committees to have oversight all areas of operation, management and supervision of the schools. Being dysfunctional or inactive contravenes the national law and essence of the current structure of community school management and governance.

Findings also suggested that party-politics may have been primary drivers in the formation of the SMCs since most of the members in the SMCs were elected or nominated members, which, in turn, could lead to a conflicting relationship with the municipal governments as well. The implications for SMCs that emanate from this thesis are three-fold.

- First, the municipal government and the headteachers should call for members of the SMC to be committed to the improvement of their school, whatever their party affiliation. Both the municipal government and the headteacher can call for
membership being based on an emphasis on school improvement rather than an avenue for party political machinations.

- Second, there should be regulations covering minutes of meetings and reports of activities at the SMC Meetings. This may turn the minds of the SMC to address school and community issues and increase accountability.

- Currently, the role of the headteacher in the SMC is reduced to being the Member Secretary, which devalues the significant role a school leader can play in the group’s decision-making. The headteacher needs to be an active, engaged, voting member of the SMC, although s/he will always be in a minority. The secretarial role can be allocated to a non-voting member such as a teacher at the school.

8.2.4 Implications for the Federal Government

Although the governance of community schools’ management was handed over to municipal governments, the findings showed that the ineffectiveness of the municipal governments and SMCs has not necessarily justified the original purpose. In that transition time, the participant headteachers had found themselves in a dilemma with regards to implementing new changes. This was more likely caused by the lack of well-defined policy framework and direction for the headteachers. This might have created further problems to the headteachers who were already struggling to cope with their historic contexts. Implications for the federal government extend to the following points.
• Findings showed that there was no uniformity in the educational qualifications and experience of the headteachers, which may suggest that there are alternative ways to bypassing the statutory system of headteachers’ appointment by exploiting political influence. In order to ensure quality in community schools’ leadership, the government may have to revisit its policy of the appointment system so that headteachers cannot use the loophole of ‘seniority and experience’. Until, and unless, the school leaders themselves maintain strict integrity with regard to following the spirit of existing acts and regulations, their leadership effectiveness and impact on school improvement always remain in question. Therefore, there is an urgent need for stricter and precise headteacher appointment criteria.

• There was little attention from the government in professional development programs and activities. The participant headteachers mentioned few opportunities for training for headteachers and staff, and those that did exist were often formalities. The government may have to recognise the areas of professional development for the headteachers and ensure adequate resources to carry out such programs. For example, it is important to recognise that contingent leadership practices, as reflected in the participant headteachers’ perspectives and actions, may be beneficial where contexts are diverse so that school leaders can act according to the situations, which can further help them to address their local needs and priorities. However, the leaders of struggling schools in difficult situations cannot afford effective and continuous learning by themselves.

• In the nation’s transition period, the MOE and education departments have failed to recognise the need for the preparation of headteachers and municipal governments for
upcoming changes. Therefore, community schools need mechanisms tailored to address the issues of change management so that headteachers would not feel overburdened; there would be better coordination between schools and municipal government; and it would minimise policy execution dilemma.

8.3 Limitations

This qualitative inquiry was aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of community schools’ leadership practices by investigating multiple cases in the eastern part of Nepal. To focus the study beyond the selected community schools’ headteachers in Nepal, it would require extended time and resources. A survey involving a large sample of the headteachers from all over Nepal would have represented wider scope of the study; however, it would not have been possible to understand how the participant headteachers dealt with their immediate circumstances by providing them the opportunity to put forward their perspectives in greater depth. The similarity and differences in the spectrum of leaderships as reflected by the findings are so subtle that a survey would not be able to apprehend.

Generalisability is often an issue for the limitation of a case study research because “The epistemological assumptions that lead to the study of cases (or population) also have implications for how findings of particular research study are generalised” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 25). According to Yin (2009), generalisability in case study research is often compared with generalisability in scientific research; however, the nature of these two are different, and therefore, case studies are generalisable to the “theoretical propositions” (p. 15). Yin (2009) further emphasise “analytical generalisation” (p. 15) where multiple cases can symbolise, demonstrate and generalise a theory. In this regard, Cohen et al. (2011) argue, “Case studies
allow generalisations either about an instance or from an instance to a class. Their peculiar strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right” (p. 292). The findings of this study reported in this thesis may not be generalisable across all schools; however, the knowledge gained from the study may be applicable to the schools of similar contexts in Nepal or elsewhere.

8.4 Future Research

O’Donoghue and Clarke (2019) have shown the importance of producing accurate accounts of the unique settings of schools, especially those in a post-conflict situation and in difficult circumstances, because those accounts may be the only documented ones able to reflect the real issues and problems. They recognised that once the context-specific circumstances and issues are documented and are then taken into consideration, it allows stakeholders including school leaders and practitioners, to better understand what approaches may be appropriate for school reform. Thus, this research was intended to be a descriptive study rather than explanatory one and was focused on theory building around how Nepali community school headteachers manage their roles, responsibilities, and priorities in post-conflict, post-disaster Nepal; it was among the first attempts to do that. More in-depth case studies such as this one focused on headteachers in different contexts would further capture more generalisable account for cross-examining the findings of this research.

Future studies could invite more stakeholders in in-depth multiple case studies taking lower than six cases which would allow representation from other members from schools, communities, SMCs, municipal government, experts and higher bureaucratic structures. Examining other stakeholders at the same time would provide better insight on the complex
phenomena that constitutes a particular context for a school. Comparing across cases in the way Chapter 7 did would provide wider understanding of the issues and concern of headteachers and implications for leadership improvement.

This study has generated theory around important aspects of school leadership of community schools in Nepal, but as stated above, these have emerged from the limitations of the multiple-case study. Future research will involve extending inquiry into the applicability and replication of the findings of this study at larger scale. Further research can use a large-scale survey for the representation of the sample population of the headteachers from different contexts all over Nepal. The survey could incorporate the issues, concern, and strategies of the community schools’ headteachers identified in this research which would give the breadth to the current findings and increase generalisability of the research.

Both underperforming and effective headteachers revealed a need for effective preservice trainings and professional development programs which are the areas the MoE and DoE should re-examine. This would help to identify the areas that needs urgent attention in policy and practice. Moreover, the MoE and the DoE should plan a large-scale study to measure interschool inequalities in order to address multiple areas of the differences in the same school system; otherwise, overall community schools’ improvement cannot be achieved with the lonely efforts of headteachers ignoring fundamental facts.

8.5 Coda

One question that arose during the course of this study – and raised by participants themselves – was why government schools’ headteachers and teachers, the country’s social
elites, political leaders and bureaucrats do not send their children to community schools, but rather to private schools. The question is significant, as it raises deeper questions about the efficacy of the country’s community schools and their educational outcomes. Those parents who send their children to private schools clearly reveal a lack of confidence in the community schools and question their accountability. Most significant is that these parents choosing private education over community schooling include school headteachers, teachers, and educational bureaucrats; this represents a vote of no confidence in the very system and schools that they are pledged to administer. While it may require enormous efforts and resources to address the gap between expectations of people and the realities of schooling, there is no way other than increasing, step-by-step, the quality standards of community schools in Nepal to attract young people and their families to the schools and contribute towards ensuring their successful future. One such step is to be able to warrant effective community school leadership, and this was stated most forcefully by one of the most effective school leaders in this study. A statement by Tamang that encapsulated many of the issues raised here provides a suitable way of bringing this thesis to a conclusion.

My opinion is that the nation has to pay proper attention to government schools. If [owners of private schools] want to run private schools, they should appoint qualified teachers. The situation is that those who have failed 10th Grade are private school teachers while there are teachers with Master’s degree in 3 subjects in government schools. How come there is no quality in government school? Isn’t it because of lack of proper attention? Then, there must be full time teaching as indicated by the curriculum. At present, there is dire lack of attention by the government. Political leaders used teachers for different jobs because there are neither leaders’ children here nor teachers’ children. This has merely been a form of employment. To get rid of all these, children of all should compulsorily be admitted to
government schools. Then, teachers should not be allowed to pronounce even the “P” of politics. There must be law and order. If these can be done, there will be a drastic change. Then, the change will be automatic. For example, who is the policy for? It is for those who adhere to law and order. The improvements will come gradually. The major thing is that when we want to plug out a plant from soil, we search the main root. What I am talking right now about is the main root. All children from higher status people, such as leaders, bureaucrats, teachers and headteachers have to be admitted in government schools. This is the final remedy. (Tamang, Hill View School)
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Appendices

Appendix A

Confirmation of Candidature and HREC Ethics Approval

Edith Cowan University

Confirmation of Candidature for Rupak Dahal PhD (SED)
Message By Email (Shelley Huts) (11/05/2018 02:14 PM)
11 May 2018

Mr Rupak DAHAL

Dear Mr Dahal,

I am pleased to write on behalf of the Associate Dean Research who has approved your PhD research proposal: Head-teachers in troubled schools: A case of community school leaders in Nepal.

I also wish to confirm that your research project complies with the provisions contained in the University’s policies for the conduct of ethical research, and you have met your ethics requirements by submitting either an ethics application or declaration. Your ethics approval number is 19619 and the period of approval is 11 May 2018 to 15 March 2021.

Approval is given for your supervisory team to consist of:

Principal Supervisor: Dr William Allen – ECU
Associate Supervisor: Dr Christine Cunningham – ECU

The examination requirements on completion are laid down in Section 6 of The University (Admissions, Enrolment and Academic progress) Rules for Courses Requiring the Submission of Theses.

Additional information and documentation relating to the examination process can be found at the Graduate Research School website: http://research.ecu.edu.au/grs/

Please note: As a guide, the maximum number of words in the text, excluding references and appendices, for a doctoral thesis is 100,000 words.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer you our best wishes for your research and the development of your thesis.

Yours sincerely

Shelley Huts
Senior Student Progress Officer
Research Assessments
Student Services Centre
Phone: 08 6304 8770
Email: researchassessments@ecu.edu.au

Principal Supervisor: Dr William Allen
Associate Supervisor: Dr Christine Cunningham
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Phone 134 328
International: +61 8 6304 0000
CRICOS Institution Provider Code 00279B
Mr Rupak Dahal M.Ed., M.Phil.
Research Student
School of Education

HREC Approval No: 19619

Dear __________________,

Headteachers in Difficult Circumstances: A Study of School Leaders in Post-Conflict, Post Disaster Nepal

My name is Rupak Dahal, and I am conducting a research project as part of my Doctor of Philosophy degree at Edith Cowan University, Australia. The research project aims to understand how Nepali community school head-teachers are managing their schools. I am using a multiple-case study methodology and the case study schools are six secondary community schools in Province No 1 in Nepal. I am writing to ask you if you would be willing to take part in this research project. This letter sets out information regarding the project and what involvement in it might mean.

If you were willing to participate, I would like to invite you for two interviews: the first interview will be followed by an informal observation and after
the observation I would like to conduct second interview. I would also appreciate it if you could allow me to shadow you at your work. By ‘shadowing’, I would like to observe your work informally so that I can have further questions with regards to your aims and intentions.

**What does participation in the research project involve?**

Each participant will be involved in two interviews at some time during the months of 2018. The interviews will be approximately 30 minutes to 60 minutes in length to take place at a location and time of the participant’s choice. If you were willing, I would also very much like to make some observations within the school.

As a student of education, I understand the commitments of a school head-teacher and I will keep your involvement in the administration of the research procedures to a minimum.

**To what extent is participation voluntary, and what are the implications of withdrawing that participation?**

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. First, you may choose not to participate. If you do participate at first, you may withdraw later at any time. In the interviews you may decline to answer any of the questions, and you may wish to close me off from some aspects of your work when I am observing; from work that has a confidential nature, for example. If you decide to withdraw from this study at any time, you may do so without any negative consequences simply by advising the researcher. Your data can be withdrawn from the study at any time up until the findings have been processed and published. If you wish to withdraw, the collected data will be permanently destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copies of interviews and notes and deleting computer files, using a university appointed data disposal agency.
There will be no consequences relating to any decision by you other than those already described in this letter. Any withdrawal will not affect the relationship with members of the school, the research team, or Edith Cowan University.

**What will happen to the information collected, and is privacy and confidentiality assured?**

Information that identifies the school, yourself or any other member of the school will be removed from the data collected. You will be sent transcripts of the interview for their perusal, and you may withdraw information in part or in whole. The data is then stored securely in the locked storage facility in the Institute of Education at Mt Lawley and can only be accessed by my two Supervisors and myself. The data will be stored for a minimum period of 7 years, after which it will be permanently destroyed. This will be achieved by shredding hard copies of interviews and notes and deleting computer files, using a university appointed data disposal agency.

You, and your school’s identity will not be disclosed at any time. The only exception to this, as you will understand, is in a circumstance where the research team is legally required to disclose that information.

Participant privacy, and the confidentiality of information disclosed by the participant, is assured at all other times.

The data will be used only for this project and will not be used in any extended or future research without first obtaining explicit written consent from the participant. I would like to make available a summary of the research findings to you and your school. You can expect this to be available in 2021.

**Is this research approved?**

The research has been reviewed and approved by the ECU Human Research Ethics Committee and has met the policy requirements of the Department of Education as indicated in the attached letter (Ref No. ___)
Who do I contact if I wish to discuss the project further?

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this study with an independent person about the conduct of the project, in the first place please contact my supervisors:

Dr Bill Allen  
Email: w.allen@ecu.edu.au  
Tel: +61 8 6304 6729

Dr Christine Cunningham  
Email: c.cunningham@ecu.edu.au  
Tel: +61 8 6304 6807

If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Research Ethics Team  
Edith Cowan University  
270 Joondalup Drive  
JOONDALUP WA 6027  
Phone: +61 8 6304 2170  
Email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

How do I indicate my willingness for you to be involved?

If you have had all questions about the project answered to your satisfaction and are willing for you and the school to participate, please complete the Consent Form on the following page.

This information letter is for you to keep.

Yours sincerely,

Rupak Dahal (M.Ed., M.Phil.)  
Student Investigator  
Edith Cowan University  
Tel: +61  
Email:
Consent Form

- I have read and understood the information letter about the project.

- I have had any questions I may have had addressed, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.

- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.

- I am willing to become involved in the project, as described.

- I understand I am free to withdraw that participation at any time.

- I understand I can withdraw my data up to January 2019 from this study.

- I give permission for my contribution to this research to be presented at conferences, published in journal articles and online, provided that I or the school is not identified in any way.

- I understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research has been completed.

Name of Participant

______________________________

Signature of Participant: ________________________________ Date: / /
Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. Would you tell me how you become the Head-teacher?
2. Are there any other roundabouts or influences that lead to the position?
3. Please tell me about your formal education and experience.
4. Would you tell me about your school?
5. Would you also let me know about the school community and parents? How are their background, strength and weaknesses? Is there any impact of this background on the way you and your school functions?
6. Would you tell me how you go about your work? What are your priorities?
7. How satisfied you are with your work?
8. How much autonomy you have? Are there any role conflicts? How are your teachers?
9. Are there any measures for work recognition of teachers and yours?
10. How are your internal and external challenges for your school?
11. Would you tell me any success story of the school?
12. The nation has been reconstructed as a federal republic. How are you working in these changed circumstances? Are there any challenges?
13. As a school leader, how much power and control do you have for a change? How about the role of School Management Committee?
14. Do you have anything you would like to change or improve in your school in future?
15. Is the school education able to contribute to the better future of the student studying in community schools? whether a Head-teacher can go out of the boundary of formal roles and responsibilities, reaching out to the community?
16. The main goal of the government’s past and continuing school improvement plans, such as SSRP and SSDP, is to increase equity and equality existent in broader communities. In your opinion, will the community school education can play the roles according to the goal?

17. Finally, how do you evaluate your work?
Appendix D

NVivo 12 Coding

The following sections present some captures from NVivo 12 that help to understand how coding and analysis took place. These captures demonstrate coding from both descriptive and analytical stages, where different topics were assigned to related codes at the initial stage and through analytical process those topics were further condensed for the purpose of theory building.

Text Search and Word Frequency Queries

Queries such as text search helped to make sense of data at the initial stage for developing topic codes. It also helped to understand what types of words or phrases have been used in what context. At times, searching for a text by checking in ‘including stemmed words’ to bring together two related information under a single topic.
The above two examples demonstrate that before developing a node, specific terms such as ‘education quality’ and ‘political influence’ informed by the literature showed their strong presence in the data, and thus identified as potential codes. Similarly, word frequency queries gave an insight on what are the most frequently used words, or what the participants talked more about. This also helped to identify codes at the initial stage.

Comparison Diagrams

The following comparison diagrams show how cross-case comparison was conducted and visualised at the analysis stage.