



**Performance of Female Heads of Community Schools in
Kathmandu Valley of Nepal**

Yashodhara Joshi (Pant)

A Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Submitted to

Graduate School of Education, Office of the Dean

Faculty of Education

Tribhuvan University

Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal

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Prof. Basu Dev Kafle, PhD

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This study explores the leadership performance of female head teachers in community schools across Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur districts of Nepal. Focusing on instructional management, resource management, school culture, public relations, and interpersonal relations, the research examines how female head teachers navigate their leadership roles in urban school settings. The study highlights the challenges they face and their strategies to overcome them.

Using a case study approach, three female head teachers, each with over three years of experience and a master's degree from different community schools were purposefully selected as the participants. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, key informant interviews (KII), focus group discussions, and detailed case studies. The data collected and analysed provided comprehensive insights into the leadership practices and effectiveness of the female school leaders.

The findings revealed that female head teachers excel in instructional management by creating positive classroom environments and improving student learning outcomes. Their strong interpersonal skills contribute to harmonious relationships among staff, students, and the broader community, promoting inclusivity and a positive school culture. Additionally, the head teachers effectively managed resources to maintain optimal learning conditions and demonstrate adeptness in public relations, enhancing school's reputation and community engagement.

The study also underscored the variation in leadership philosophies and practices among female head teachers. Their approaches to managing curricula, building school culture, utilizing resources, fostering relationships, and engaging with the community are shaped by their daily challenges and unique educational contexts. Common obstacles to their leadership included unstable government policies, political

interference, limited resources, unprofessional teaching staff, disengaged parents, and resistant community attitudes. Despite these challenges, the female head teachers have developed adaptive strategies that aligned with their specific work environments, enabling them to successfully execute school activities.

The research highlighted the need for robust educational policies that support and increase the presence of female leaders in schools. Such policies are essential for improving school functioning and positively shaping public perceptions of female head teachers. The study further revealed that these leaders viewed challenges as inherent to their professional landscape and adopted leadership strategies that reflected their personal experiences and growth mindsets. Their resilience and adaptability, grounded in transformational leadership principles, drove them toward innovation, motivation, and meaningful changes within the schools.

It is implicative that the leadership performance of female head teachers in community schools should be accepted well and positively evaluated. Their ability to overcome obstacles and implement transformative strategies emphasizes the need and importance of policies that empower female leaders and enhance their effectiveness within the school management system. By increasing opportunities for female head teachers, educational institutions can foster a more dynamic approach to school leadership, ultimately leading to better students' outcomes and communities.

सामुदायिक विद्यालयका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको कार्यसम्पादन शीर्षकको प्रस्तुत शोध अध्ययनमा नेपालका काठमाडौं, ललितपुर र भक्तपुर जिल्लाका सामुदायिक विद्यालयहरूमा महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको नेतृत्व कार्यसम्पादनको खोज गरिएको छ। शैक्षणिक व्यवस्थापन, स्रोत व्यवस्थापन, विद्यालय संस्कृति, जनसम्पर्क र अन्तरवैयक्तिक सम्बन्धमा यो अध्ययन केन्द्रित छ। यस अनुसन्धानले तीन वर्षभन्दा बढी अनुभव र स्नातकोत्तर उपाधि हासिल गरेका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले सहरी क्षेत्रका सामुदायिक विद्यालयहरूमा कसरी नेतृत्वदायी भूमिका निर्वाह गर्छन् भनेर खोजी गरेको छ। प्रस्तुत अध्ययनमा उनीहरूले सामना गर्नुपरेका चुनौतीहरू र तिनलाई सम्बोधन गर्ने रणनीतिहरू प्रस्तुत गरिएकोछ।

तीनओटा सामुदायिक विद्यालयका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूलाई सहभागीको रूपमा सोद्देश्वपूर्ण छनोट गरी विस्तृत घटना अध्ययन विधि, सघन अन्तर्वार्ताहरू, मुख्य सूचनादाता अन्तर्वार्ताहरू, लक्षित समूह छलफललाई तथ्याङ्क संकलन विधिका रूपमा प्रयोग गरिएको थियो। यी विधिहरूको प्रयोगगरी संकलित तथ्याङ्कबाट विद्यालयका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको नेतृत्व अभ्यास र उनीहरूको प्रभावकारिताका बारेमा व्यापक अन्तर्दृष्टि प्राप्त भएको छ।

महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले सकारात्मक कक्षाकोठाको वातावरण सृजना गरेर र विद्यार्थीको सिकाइ उपलब्धीमा सुधार गरी शैक्षणिक व्यवस्थापनमा उत्कृष्टता देखिएको छ। तिनीहरूका सबल अन्तरवैयक्तिक सिपले कर्मचारी, विद्यार्थीहरू र बृहत्तर समुदाय बीच सुमधुर सम्बन्ध बनाउन योगदान पुऱ्याएको र समावेशि र सकारात्मक विद्यालय संस्कृतिलाई बढावा दिएको पाइएको छ। यी महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले सिकाइका अवस्थाहरूलाई प्रभावकारी बनाउन स्रोतहरूको उचित व्यवस्थापन गर्ने र सार्वजनिक सम्बन्ध विस्तार गर्न निपुणता प्रदर्शन गर्दै विद्यालयको प्रतिष्ठाका साथै र सामुदायिक संलग्नता बढाउने काम गरिरहेको पाइएको छ।

अध्ययनले महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूका बीचमा पनि नेतृत्व शैली र कार्य सम्पादन अभ्यासहरूमा भिन्नता देखाएको छ। पाठ्यक्रम व्यवस्थापन गर्ने, विद्यालय संस्कृति निर्माण गर्ने, स्रोतहरूको परिचालन गर्ने, पारस्परिक सम्बन्ध प्रवर्धन गर्ने र समुदायसँग सहकार्य गर्ने जस्ता कार्यलाई उनीहरूले भोग्ने दैनिक

चुनौतिहरू र विशिष्ट शैक्षिक परिवेशले प्रभावित पारेको देखिन्छ । महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको नेतृत्वलाई साभा अवरोधको रूपमा अस्थिर सरकारी नीतिहरू, राजनीतिक हस्तक्षेप, सीमित स्रोतहरू, गैरव्यवसायिक शिक्षक कर्मचारीहरू, पर्याप्त समय दिन नसक्ने अभिभावकहरू र प्रतिरोधी सामुदायिक मनोवृत्ति रहेको देखिन्छ । यी चुनौतिहरूबिच पनि महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले विद्यालयीय क्रियाकलापहरू सफलतापूर्वक सम्पन्न गर्न आफ्नो कार्य वातावरण अनुकूल रणनीतिहरू विकास गरेको देखिन्छ ।

अनुसन्धानले विद्यालयहरूमा महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको प्रभावकारी उपस्थितिलाई सघाउन र उनीहरूको अपेक्षित रूपमा संख्या बढाउन सशक्त शैक्षिक नीतिको आवश्यकतालाई औल्याएको छ । यस्ता नीतिहरूबाट विद्यालयको कार्यसम्पादनमा अपेक्षित सुधार गर्न र महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूप्रति वाञ्छनीय सार्वजनिक दृष्टिकोण निर्माण गर्न आवश्यक देखिन्छ । महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले चुनौतीहरूलाई आफ्नो पेशागत कार्यसम्पादनको अभिन्न अङ्गको रूपमा लिने र आफ्नो नेतृत्वदायी क्षमता प्रदर्शन गर्न आवश्यक रणनीतिहरू अपनाउने गर्दछन् । उनीहरूको व्यक्तिगत अनुभव र सकारात्मक मानसिकताको प्रतिबिम्बनका कारण महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले नेतृत्वदायी रणनीति अपनाएको देखिन्छ । लचिलोपन, अनुकूलनशीलता, रूपान्तरणकारी नेतृत्व क्षमताबाट निर्देशित हुँदै महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूले विद्यालयभित्र सकारात्मक र अर्थपूर्ण परिवर्तन ल्याउन सक्षम भएको अध्ययनले स्पष्ट पारेको छ ।

सामुदायिक विद्यालयहरूमा महिला प्रधानाध्यापकहरूको प्रभावकारी नेतृत्व कार्यसम्पादनको सकारात्मक पक्षलाई स्वीकार गर्ने र त्यसको उपयुक्त मूल्याङ्कन गरिनुपर्छ । विद्यालयमा देखिएका समस्याहरूको सम्बोधन गर्नसक्ने, परिवर्तनकारी भूमिका निर्वाह गर्ने जस्ता सक्षमता भएका महिला प्रधानाध्यापकलाई भन्नु सशक्त गर्ने र विद्यालय व्यवस्थापन प्रणालीलाई प्रभावकारी बनाउनका लागि सकारात्मक नीतिका (affirmative policy action) आवश्यकतामा जोड दिनुपर्छ । महिला प्रधानाध्यापकलाई समस्या समाधान गर्न योग्य बनाउन, विद्यालय नेतृत्वलाई गतिशिल बनाउन र विद्यार्थीको सिकाइ उपलब्धि तथा समुदायको सक्रिय सहयोग बढाउन शैक्षिक संस्थाहरूले महिला प्रधानाध्यापकको संख्या वृद्धि गर्ने आवश्यक नीतिहरू कार्यान्वयन गर्नुपर्दछ ।



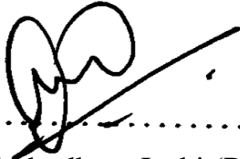
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2024

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I hereby declare that this dissertation, entitled **Performance of Female Heads of Community Schools in Kathmandu Valley of Nepal**, submitted to the office of the Dean, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, is my original work and has not been submitted for candidature for any other degree.

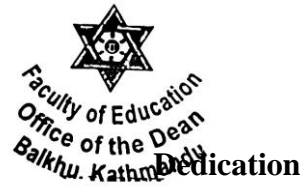
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PhD Scholar

24th July 2024




I dedicate this PhD degree to my late parents, Pitamber Nandalal Joshi and Janaki Pitamber Joshi, whose life-long parenting and mentoring brought me to the stage where I am today.

The PhD study entitled **Performance of Female Heads of Community Schools in Kathmandu Valley of Nepal**, carried out by Mrs. Yashodhara Joshi (Pant), is supervised by me. The research scholar has completed all the requirements prescribed by the Graduate School of Education to come to this stage.

In this context, I recommend the dissertation for the final defense by the research committee to allow the candidate to appear in the final viva.

I am satisfied with her research work and, therefore, with this recommendation.

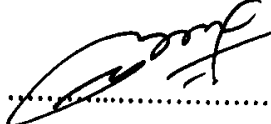


.....
Prof. Basu Dev Kafle, PhD


Supervisor

The undersigned certify that we have read, approved, and recommended the Dean's Office, Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, for accepting this PhD dissertation entitled **Performance of Female Heads of Community Schools in Kathmandu Valley of Nepal**, carried out by Mrs. Yashodhara Joshi (Pant).

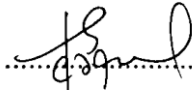
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Date: 24 July, 2024

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Yashodhara Joshi (Pant)

PhD candidate



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Abbreviations

CCA	Co-Curricular Activities
DEOr	District Education Officer
ECA	Extra-Curricular Activities
EDCU	Educational Development and Coordination Unit
FHT	Female Head Teacher
GSE	Graduate School of Education
GAO	General Accounting Office
HRM	Human Resource Management
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
INGO	International Non-Government Organization
LPC	Least Preferred Co-worker
M.ED.	Master In Education
NCED	National Center for Educational Development
NGO	Non-Government Organization
PR	Public Relation
PTA	Parents Teachers' Association
RBVT	Resource-Based View Theory
RBV	Resource-Based View
SMC	School Management Committee
SLT	Situational Leadership Theory

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Chapter One

Introduction

In today's world, remarkable scientific innovations drive rapid technological progress, shaping our societies in profound ways. However, these advancements are not evenly distributed globally, leading to new divisions across professions and work cultures. As a result, educational leaders face significant challenges in providing contextual schooling and effectively delivering relevant knowledge. This dynamic landscape has brought the role of the school head teacher into sharp focus for research. In this context, this study aims to explore the performance of female head teachers (FHTs), examining their impact and strategies in navigating these complex educational environments.

The exploration of the performance of female head teachers (FHTs) is situated within a broader context marked by pressing issues aimed at enhancing competitiveness and fostering equity through educational reform. This entails a redefinition of the fundamental principles of education and the restructuring of educational system, particularly in terms of management and administration. As education has evolved significantly over the decades, leaders and policymakers grapple with the challenges posed by shifting educational landscapes. With changes in education policies, standards, practices, and student demographics, the attainment of quality education hinges upon the ethical understanding and competencies of educational leaders (Earley, 2013).

Schools play a crucial role in shaping societal norms, fostering family involvement, facilitating socialization, and promoting lifelong learning. Globally, educational systems are tasked with the responsibility of acquiring, disseminating, and applying knowledge effectively within varied contexts. Within this context, proficient

teachers, functioning as educational leaders, leverage their expertise through strategic approaches and refined skills. These leaders serve as the cornerstone of educational progress, driving transformative initiatives and contributing to a promising future for both students and communities.

In the realm of education, school leaders assume significant responsibility as they traverse dynamic terrain marked by escalating expectations. Their role in driving substantial change and fostering sustainable growth within educational settings has gained prominence. Functioning as visionary architects, they shape the educational landscape to optimize outcomes for all stakeholders. With adeptness, these leaders navigate the complexities of school improvement, undertaking a spectrum of roles and responsibilities (Earley, 2013). Guided by a diverse array of leadership practices and competencies, they equip themselves with the requisite tools to lead with confidence.

There is a concern surrounding the possibility that school leaders may find themselves burdened with an excessive workload, stretched by the countless demands pulling them in numerous directions. With education facing heightened expectations, increased global interdependencies, and improved communication channels, there exists a risk of shifting from perceiving education as a solution to attributing societal challenges to it. Therefore, striking a harmonious balance between meeting these demands and steadfastly maintaining a focus on delivering quality education becomes of paramount importance for school leaders in this dynamic landscape.

The crucial role of school leadership in achieving educational excellence cannot be overstated. Effective Head Teachers exhibit purposeful leadership, active participation in classrooms, higher expectations, and a sense of control over school functioning. Their behaviors significantly impact student and teacher performance, job satisfaction, and overall school effectiveness. Strong administrative leadership is

identified as a key factor in bringing together the elements of good schooling. In short, school leaders are the driving force behind positive change and successful education (Boggs & McPhail, 2016).

Promoting effective school administration within a democratic and transparent society necessitates the establishment of gender-neutral settings. Addressing the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions is vital, with research revealing disparities in the perception of FHTs' leadership skills. Advancing gender equality and empowering women in school leadership can foster diverse and inclusive educational environments, driving transformative change and excellence in educational leadership (Korostyleva & Kovaleva, 2019). This aligns with the recognition that leadership dynamics are shaped by power dynamics and influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors.

Research focusing on female leadership dynamics, as evidenced by Pulakos and O'Leary (2011) and Aidis and Schillo (2017), and further explored by Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), Crawford and Unger (2004), and Triana et al. (2017), provides valuable insights into the complexities of leadership as experienced by women. This specialized perspective delves into leadership models, stereotypes, barriers, and the developmental aspects of female leaders, highlighting the multifaceted challenges they face. By emphasizing the importance of empowering women in leadership positions, this research plays a pivotal role in advancing gender equality, dismantling stereotypes, and creating environments that enable the success of women in leadership roles. In essence, this specialized focus contributes significantly to the promotion of female leadership and the establishment of more inclusive and equitable schooling.

The role of school leadership in meeting educational challenges requires a blend of personal and technical skills (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2000), including adaptability and managing competing commitments (Linsky & Lawrence, 2011). Empowering leaders, especially through collective leadership efforts with teachers, is crucial for enhancing the instructional program (Mullen & Browne-Ferrigno, 2018). These insights emphasize the pivotal role of strong, empowered leadership in driving meaningful educational change.

Effective school leadership, regardless of gender, is essential for navigating complex challenges and exceeding educational demands. Empowered leaders are key drivers of tangible educational transformation. By supporting and enabling school leaders, we ensure the success of educational endeavors in our dynamic world, unlocking the full potential of our education systems for a brighter future.

Female leadership in the community school system of Nepal is a thing of contemplation. Utilizing my professional experience of teaching at the school level and of school management, this study specifically examined schools led by FHTs. Through this engaging research, I explored the crucial issue of female leadership in Nepal's community school system. By drawing on my extensive experience, I aimed to contribute to the ongoing conversation about gender equality in leadership. The research was centered on schools helmed by female head teachers (FHTs) as the leader performers.

Background of the Study

Destiny led me to Kathmandu, Nepal, where I had the opportunity to teach at a prestigious middle school following the completion of my bachelor's degree from Mumbai University in India. With my husband's encouragement, I continued my higher studies in education, management, and economics while working at the school.

Eventually, I was offered a position at the Faculty of Education (FoE) at Tribhuvan University, where I further developed my skills in curriculum building, educational development, and assessment design. My time at FoE also inspired me to pursue a PhD degree in educational leadership.

Throughout my experience as a teacher, teacher educator, and education administrator, I have become increasingly interested in the management aspect of education. I observed that the support of parents, teachers, staff, and society or community was crucial for the effective operation of a school. This realization led me to conduct a study on the current situation of schools where quality management is an issue, specifically those effectively managed by FHTs. My goal was to explore and assess better practices and initiatives that could help schools consistently perform better under the able leadership of FHTs.

As I dove deeper into this research, I came to appreciate the incredible impact that committed leaders and teachers can have on any educational system. This realization was reinforced by my travels to countries like China, the United States, the United Kingdom, India, and Thailand, where I visited schools and studied their systems. I was surprised to learn that many of the most effective schools I visited were led by female head teachers.

Throughout my career as a teacher, administrator, and trainer, I have always been driven by the prospect of improving my education. I have come to believe that effective schooling requires strong management and dedicated individuals who truly believe in the power of education. As I reflect on my past experiences, I am drawn to the many ways in which I was able to contribute to effective schooling. I have also come to appreciate that there are various indicators/components of quality education beyond just exam results, including admission pressure, dropout and retention rates,

societal perception, extracurricular success, teacher success, infrastructure, and resource management.

Research suggests that while examination results are commonly used to evaluate school performance, other factors also play crucial roles. Tumlovskaja (2022) highlights the influence of evaluation processes on recognizing educational values, while Zvoch and Stevens (2008) emphasizes considering within- and between-cohort status and growth-based estimates of performance. Quality indicators in teacher education programs, including faculty and professional development, were identified by Dilshad and Iqbal (2010). Moreover, Bedi and Edwards (2001) underscore the positive impact of school quality on earnings and educational returns. These studies advocate for a comprehensive evaluation approach beyond examination results.

Observations indicate that people assess school performance based on various components, including admission demand, dropout and retention rates, societal perception, recognition at different levels, extracurricular success, teacher effectiveness, resource management, and infrastructure management.

The period of 1918–1929 AD marked a significant shift in the role of women, transitioning from passive participants to active contributors in commercial activities. With increasing attendance in schools and participation in the workforce, a small percentage of women began working outside the home. This transformation had a notable impact on women's roles, particularly during the subsequent transitional decades towards an industrial economy (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994).

Research on the status of Nepalese women reflects a complex scenario. While improvements have been observed in literacy, marriage age, and fertility rates, employment disparities persist, often relegating women to lower-paid positions (Upadhyaya, 1996). Although gender-friendly practices and reservation policies in civil

services have boosted representation, women predominantly occupy junior roles (Bhandari, 2018). Patriarchal norms, especially prevalent in rural areas, continue to impede progress (Upadhyaya, 1996), while the notion of empowerment has yet to translate into significant socio-economic advancements (Mahat, 2003). Addressing these challenges necessitates targeted policies and the establishment of a gender-specific database.

Nepalese women are becoming more and more noticeable in their respective fields, not just within the traditionally developed Western world but even elsewhere, including in Nepal. Women today serve in a variety of sectors throughout the country, including banking, government officials, security services, police, the army, and hotel personnel, besides being schoolteachers. Many may be merely subordinates, but many more are superiors in their respective work settings. This underscores the need to advocate for women's advancement, particularly in education, to enhance their opportunities and status further.

In some countries, an important link between leadership and learning can be understood to involve incumbent senior leaders in schools, allowing teachers to improve their practice by fostering and supporting ongoing teacher professional development (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2009). Leadership is becoming an increasingly important part of a teacher's professional life (Malm, 2009). Teacher education in the post-modern era emphasizes leadership development alongside conflict literacy, self-awareness, empathy, collaboration, and personal dispositions. School leaders can have a significant positive impact on student learning and other important outcomes (Waters et al., 2003). Becoming a principal or head teacher is a long and difficult process. During the process, Head Teachers or head teachers will undoubtedly face a variety of challenges and problems.

As cited by Killingsworth et al. (2010), women are still underrepresented in positions of educational leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Trinidad & Normore, 2005). There is a significant disparity between the number of female teachers and the number of female administrators (Shakeshaft, 2011). While there may be other explanations, researchers have suggested that one reason for this disparity is due in part to social and cultural perceptions that women do not fit the mold of deep-rooted masculine conceptions of leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Northouse, 2007; Rusch, 2004).

The underrepresentation of women in higher-level leadership roles in education is a global issue, characterized by both horizontal and vertical barriers (Cubillo & Brown, 2003). These barriers, consistent across cultures and regions, encompass personal, organizational, and societal factors (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Cultural and structural conditions, such as the presence of a "glass ceiling," an invisible barrier that prevents women from reaching top leadership positions, further impede women's access to leadership positions (Ballenger, 2010). Despite efforts to increase women's representation in leadership, structural factors associated with the selection process, including mobility constraints, conservatism, and homo-sociability, continue to perpetuate gender imbalances (Shepherd, 2017). The dominance of women in the teaching force on both national and international scales emphasizes the significance of addressing this issue in educational institutions. Gender and leadership studies have identified numerous obstacles hindering women's advancement in educational leadership and management roles.

Fifty years of theory and research offer increasing levels of support for the assertion that principal leadership makes a difference in the quality of schooling, school development, and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). In the current context of

global education reform, however, recent inquiries have focused on identifying how teams of school leaders contribute to school improvement and student learning (Spillane, 2008).

In the late 1990s, research comparing the leadership styles of men and women was reviewed, and evidence was found for both the presence and absence of gender differences. More specifically, barriers to gender equity in educational leadership are identified, as are the qualities or strategies used by successful female administrators where such barriers have been broken. Eagly and Johnson (1990) in their study and found that in contrast to the gender-stereotypic expectation that, women lead in an interpersonally oriented style and men in a task-oriented style, female and male leaders did not differ in these two styles in organizational studies.

In the present era, scholars emphasize the importance of leadership reflecting a diversity of global experiences, advocating for the inclusion of Indigenous individuals, people of color, as well as both men and women (Bhatti & Ali, 2020; DeMars, 1998). However, prevailing societal biases persist, reinforcing the belief that effective leadership is inherently male, thereby constraining women's access to leadership roles and imposing substantial challenges and social barriers (Bhatti & Ali, 2020; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). Women navigating these hurdles often face skepticism, leading to the abandonment of their leadership aspirations. The evolving landscape necessitates a redefined leadership paradigm that is inclusive and draws from a broad spectrum of experiences and expertise (DeMars, 1998). Despite these challenges, women resiliently embrace an androgynous concept of leadership and perceive themselves as deserving leaders (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). To surmount these obstacles, the strategic deployment of culturally informed approaches and the sharing of success stories emerge as vital tools, enhancing women's visibility in leadership (Bhatti & Ali, 2020).

As cited by Chliwniak (1997), leaders are individuals who provide vision and meaning for an institution and embody the ideals toward which the organization strives. Traditional scholars viewed leaders as alike and genderless. If general impressions are correct about leaders, then why are women having a difficult time gaining employment as administrators in the educational arena? Do men make better administrators than women simply because they are men? Research does not support that assumption. Different research literature has declared that schools administered by women on average are superior in performance to those managed by men. (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). During the last few decades, different organizations have focused on utilizing female leaders' traits for their own benefit. These specific feminine characteristics are social interaction, communication style, social skills, acceptance of differences, and the ability to work in groups (Lahti, 2013).

Leaders and other key stakeholders in global organizations must better understand the benefits of attracting, retaining, promoting, and empowering women in their groups and organizations. This is especially important for global entities in this fast-changing world. Research conducted on women in the workplace before 1990 tended to focus on discrimination and bias and not on success factors (Sharpe, 2000). From the 1990s to the early 21st century, various studies suggested that leadership in culturally and linguistically diverse settings often operates differently and independently of managerial functions and traditional conceptualizations of educational leadership found in the frequently cited literature.

Research consistently affirms that schools led by female administrators demonstrate heightened pupil learning quality and improved teacher professional performance (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018). However, they face enduring biases and misconceptions about their capabilities (Kaufman &

Grace, 2011). These biases are influenced by factors such as cultural and social norms, women's roles and responsibilities, and stereotypes about women's leadership abilities (Kaufman & Grace, 2011). Despite these challenges, female education leaders have been found to positively impact pupil learning and teacher performance (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Kusnawawati, 2022; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018). To address the discrepancy in gender representation in top educational leadership positions, it is crucial to challenge these biases and provide support and mentorship to female leaders (Fry & Bi, 2013).

Equality of opportunity in educational leadership is influenced more by gender than age, experience, background, or competence, revealing a prevailing bias that influences an individual's role in education (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018). The highest levels of educational management should strive to fill positions with individuals who align best with the existing standards.

There is still much more to learn about leadership. Despite the advances women have made in the workplace, there is limited research done about women's leadership (Levitt, 2010). The same has been the case with female head teachers (FHTs) as school leaders in Nepal. For me, therefore, it appeared well justified as well as necessarily important to discover the 'situated reality' of community school FHTs in terms of their suitability and capability, work challenges, performance effectiveness, and wider acceptability vis-à-vis male head teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Extensive research consistently underscores the indispensable contributions of women to leadership roles across diverse sectors (Madsen, 2015). Women leaders often bring forth unique perspectives and employ interactive and transformational leadership styles (Rosener, 2011; Madsen & Longman, 2020). However, despite their

demonstrable capabilities, women encounter formidable barriers to accessing leadership positions, shaped by various contextual factors (Gipson et al., 2017). As women ascend to leadership roles, they catalyze both personal and societal changes, thereby exerting a profound positive influence on future generations, as elucidated by Eagly and Carli (2018).

A thorough comprehension of the multifaceted approaches employed by women to effectively lead, including leveraging multiple intelligences and embodying authentic leadership, is of paramount importance for recognizing their indispensable roles in leadership contexts. Recent scholarship highlights the undeniable advantages of diverse leadership, with women exhibiting effective leadership styles (Duehr, 2006; Eagly & Carli, 2018; Marinakou, 2014). However, despite these compelling findings, many organizations continue to underestimate the critical importance of women occupying key leadership positions. Addressing this oversight necessitates a rigorous articulation of current demographic realities, challenges, and opportunities while fostering innovative strategies to promote gender diversity in leadership roles.

As Head Teachers (head teachers) provide leadership and organization to their schools, they face a variety of challenges. Evidence is growing that effective school leaders influence achievement by supporting and developing effective teachers and implementing effective organizational practices (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2013). On occasion, specific leadership behaviors from the school head teachers are required to resolve the issues; at other times, organizational and management skills are required. The classroom activity is intended to provide options for an instructor to develop the background knowledge and information required to provide leadership and/or organizational and management skills for educational administrators to begin developing personal approaches to organizational behavior.

On examining women's roles in leadership, the concept of the 'glass ceiling' frequently emerges as a symbol of gender-based inequality and the obstacles women face in their professional pursuits. This glass ceiling is most evident at the upper echelons of organizations, hindering women's progress to attain the same positions as men (Cotter et al., 2001). In their comprehensive study, Jauhar and Lau (2018) delved into the glass ceiling phenomenon, exploring its implications on women's career advancement. Although some argue that the glass ceiling has been shattered, its remnants persist in the professional landscape, potentially evolving into a 'glass labyrinth' that introduces new challenges for women. Despite notable progress, the pursuit of equitable work opportunities and leadership roles for women remains an ongoing concern. Notably, concepts like the glass ceiling and the introduction of quotas for women continue to influence gender dynamics within workplaces (Cotter, et al., 2001; Jauhar & Lau, 2018).

Research shows that the reasons for becoming a teacher are various, but the reasons for becoming a principal or head teacher are similar. Most of them wanted to become a principal or head teacher to have power and because they believed they could manage the school better than the previous principal or head teacher as they had the managerial skills to do the job. However, there is no initial training to prepare the Head Teachers or head teachers for the role. A lot of studies related to leadership have been reported, but previous literature did not discuss much about women's leadership roles and women's mentoring in the context of career development perspectives (Lahti, 2013; Simmons, 2011).

The presence of women teachers in developing countries, including Nepal, has risen noticeably in recent years. However, their involvement in school leadership is comparatively low due to implanted undesirable insights as well as many socio-cultural

barriers. With the rapid progress of technology, global sharing, mechanization, and economic development, national and international cultures are becoming more shared. More importantly, this vital paradigm shift is affecting national and global educational leadership cultures.

A range of studies have identified various challenges contributing to the low participation of women in school leadership. These include self-image issues, such as fear of balancing work and family responsibilities, and cultural barriers, such as the perception of leadership as a male domain (Arar et al., 2023; Dagnev et al., 2020; Muzvidziwa, 2014). In addition, school leaders often lack the capacity for instructional leadership, operating under significant constraints (Sindhvad, 2021). The lack of aspiration for school leadership positions, particularly among the next generation, is also a concern (Williams, 2018). These factors collectively contribute to the underrepresentation of women in school leadership roles.

Community school quality has been an issue of discussion very often in national educational discussions and international reports and concerns. The role of the principal or head teacher in school performance is always important whenever talk about community schools comes up. Any school's effectiveness depends upon the type of leadership role played by the school principal or head teacher. Moreover, when women serve as school heads in community schools, the attitude of stakeholders towards the school heads is not very positive. Therefore, conducting the study about women heads of community schools in Nepal is exclusive due to its diverse culture and common insight.

Female heads in community schools within Kathmandu Valley like other places, grapple with biases affecting their leadership and performance evaluations, marked by doubts, mistrust, non-cooperation, and defiance. This situation is notably distinct from

the experiences of female school head teachers in countries such as India, China, South Korea, and the USA (Sherpa et al., 2020). Achieving equitable representation and support for women in leadership roles within Nepal's community schools remains a significant challenge. It is imperative to explore innovative strategies for increasing the number of women in key leadership positions, as this has the potential to yield benefits for teachers, students, and the overall culture and diversity of the educational institution. Why the performance of female heads intended exploration is the problem to underscore their unique leadership roles, which may be influenced by contextual factors, thereby situating them differently within the educational landscape (Sherpa et al., 2020).

The Rationale of the Study

Nepal is transforming into a more inclusive society, with women asserting their identity in various aspects of life. However, the current analysis of gender roles may overlook the contemporary context. Research by Morley and Crossouard (2015) highlights the lack of gender as a category in higher education policies, which often focus on students rather than staff. Existing research on women in academic leadership roles is limited in scale and funding.

Research consistently reveals barriers obstructing women's progression to academic leadership roles, as elucidated by Ross-Smith et al. (2005), Howe-Walsh et al. (2016), Jaradat (2019), and Aiston (2022). These hurdles encompass discrimination, ambivalence, and gender-specific challenges, grounded in power dynamics, patriarchy, societal acceptance, and confidence issues.

This body of research underscores that discriminatory practices and perceived disadvantages significantly contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in academic leadership. Empirical evidence indicates that women are insufficiently

identified and prepared for leadership roles in academia (Aiston, 2022; Howe-Walsh et al., 2016; Jaradat, 2019; Ross-Smith et al., 2005). The unattractiveness of senior leadership roles to many women academics prompts a critical question: is their exclusion a result of discriminatory practices or a conscious decision to opt out due to perceived disadvantages?

The study highlights the intricate challenges women face in academic leadership, urging a deeper exploration of the factors influencing these trends. In this context, I aimed to illuminate the diverse ways women contribute to educational leadership in community schools in Nepal's capital, providing insights into the current landscape.

The purpose of this study was to explore women's performance in leadership positions. From different literature, it is a known fact that there are fewer female leaders than male leaders, both globally and in Nepal. This study intended to explore and assess the current status of women school heads, leading factors behind women's careers, exploring their style of leadership, and drawing from the international scenario of women school heads with implications to increase the number of women in academic leadership positions.

The performance of Female School Head Teachers in Nepal has gathered significant attention within the Nepalese academic sphere in recent years. This study seeks to explore the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in School Head positions and to assess their performance in such positions. Furthermore, the study extended its scope to an international context, drawing reference from selected countries: India, China, South Korea, Thailand and the United States. By exploring and relating the challenges and issues faced by Female School Head Teachers in some of these nations, the research has provided valuable insights that can inform future critical

perspectives. The findings of this study have the potential to benefit educators, policymakers, scholars, stakeholders, and students of education and educational leadership on a wider scale.

In diverse settings, my study witnesses emergent new ways of leading schools that are receptive to socio-political realities and benefit those populations who have not been preferred for leadership roles over time. Furthermore, this research seeks to advise educational practitioners who are navigating the challenges and opportunities in school leadership. This work complements existing educational leadership research by offering examples of different leadership approaches and, besides, building an understanding of the important role of female school head teachers and perspectives on the current discourse on educational leadership, including future focused guidelines and implications for research and practice. In addition, it will cherish and develop a clear understanding among various stakeholders about the performance of female school heads in community schools in Nepal, adding knowledge to the existing literature and concurrent research on female educational leadership. Moreover, this research will facilitate the enhancement of the educational discourse of the practitioners who are caught between the opportunities and challenges of school leadership.

This research endeavor seeks to underscore the critical importance of appointing female heads in community schools, offering invaluable insights that can inform education policymakers. It aims to provide these policymakers with a deeper comprehension of the obstacles and barriers faced by female head teachers in their leadership roles and the consequent impacts on school operations. Additionally, it highlights the practical significance of advancing women into school leadership positions, emphasizing their pivotal contributions to educational leadership.

Furthermore, it equips policymakers with actionable strategies for addressing the challenges encountered by FHTs.

As this research attempts to enhance our understanding of the significance of appointing female head teachers in community schools, this holds potential benefits for education policymakers. Consequently, this study carries practical implications for recognizing the importance of promoting women as school leaders. This research is valuable in this context because it explores and signifies women's leadership and their performance in community school settings.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the performance of female heads of community schools in selected districts of Nepal and to analyze their leadership behaviors to generate new research-based knowledge in the field of educational leadership. This research therefore purported to achieve the following objectives:

- To examine the performance of Female Head Teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.
- To explore the culture of the schools under the leadership of female head teachers.
- To assess specific concerns and challenges faced by the female head teachers.

Research Questions

The above study objectives are addressed by the following research questions:

- How effective are female head teachers in terms of classroom management, student learning outcomes, co or extracurricular activities, interpersonal relations, and professional development of teachers?
- How have Female Head Teachers employed strategies to foster a positive school culture?

- How do female head teachers manage and allocate different school resources to optimize school performance?
- What are the major challenges and issues faced by female head teachers in their roles in community schools?
- How do female head teachers perceive their leadership effectiveness and influence on overall school performance?

Delimitations of the Study

This study was subject to certain limitations that merited consideration. Firstly, the scope of the research was confined to community secondary schools within the geographical areas of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. Secondly, the research participants consisted solely of FHTs possessing at least a master's degree with a bachelor's degree in education along with a minimum of three years of leadership experience. The study's focus was limited to purposefully selected participants who expressed a willingness to participate in the research and met the criteria of my research. Additionally, potential biases might have arisen due to my prior involvement in a school executive position and my interest in leadership matters. Furthermore, the study overlooked the gender perspective, which could have provided valuable insights into the different challenges and experiences faced by male and female leaders. These limitations constituted the primary constraints of this study.

The study was tied to FHTs in community schools located within the city areas of the above three districts not only because of their easy accessibility and convenience for field visits but also due to their availability in the districts sampled for the study.

Although not originally intended, the study incorporated international perspectives to explore the female school leaders' performance and the challenges they face in the execution of school daily. This inclusion aimed to broaden the analysis by

revealing common challenges and unique opportunities within different educational contexts. Despite these efforts, the study faced delimitations, including difficulties in securing participation from head teachers in the USA due to time-zone differences and reluctance from Chinese head teachers due to systemic restrictions on sharing official information online. Nevertheless, the insights gained from India, South Korea, and Thailand provided a nuanced understanding of female school leadership and enriched the study with a more comprehensive, global viewpoint.

Organization of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured clearly and organised, consisting of seven distinct chapters that guide the audience through the study's progression and findings.

Chapter I serves as an introductory section, presenting a brief overview of the research methodology, objectives, and questions. This chapter underscores the rationale and significance of the study, utilizing personal and professional experiences to engage the audience effectively.

Chapter II thoroughly examines leadership within the educational domain. Through an in-depth review of the theoretical, thematic-conceptual, and empirical literature, the chapter constructs a strong theoretical foundation and identifies areas lacking in current research. This lays the groundwork for a comprehensive investigation into the subject matter.

Chapter III delves into methodological aspects, providing insights into the adopted case study approach within an interpretative research framework. The chapter elucidates the rationale behind participant selection and meticulously outlines the methodologies utilized for both data gathering and analysis. Such meticulous detailing ensures transparency and rigor throughout the research endeavor.

Chapter IV delves deeply into the firsthand experiences of the participants, focusing on the primary theme of the study: visionary female head teachers (FHTs) and school performance. This chapter investigates crucial elements such as nurturing leadership approaches, adept, proficient communication skills, and the capacity to motivate both students and staff. Through exploration and discussion on school climate and culture, this chapter offers valuable perspectives on the correlation between proficient leadership and academic achievement within schools.

Chapter V expands the analysis of female head teachers' (FHTs) impact on effective school management, with a specific focus on the obstacles encountered by these leaders. It delves into the issues, challenges, and prospects they encounter in their professional journeys, underscoring their resilience and unwavering commitment. This chapter deepens comprehension of the intricate dynamics of educational leadership.

Chapter VI explores the contextualized reality and discourse surrounding visionary female leadership. It illustrates the participants' endeavors in formulating and executing a compelling vision for their educational institutions, emphasizing their adeptness in motivating and guiding others. This section underscores the transformative potential inherent in visionary leadership.

Chapter VII presents discussion on the study's findings and conclusions, incorporating participants' experiences and unveiling the unique leadership styles and characteristics that empower educational leaders. The chapter offers insightful reflections and implications, providing a concise summary of the research journey and encouraging future exploration and advancement in the field.

Chapter Two

Review of the Related Literature

A review of the literature is an essential step in the process of embarking on a study (Anderson, 1998). The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality. Qualitative research aims to seek answers to questions of “how, where, when, who, and why” with a perspective to build a theory or refute an existing theory (Leung, 2015).

In this chapter, I attempt to explore the epistemic perspective on leadership. My role as a teacher and leader in an educational setting, as well as my interest in the phenomenon of female leadership, shape my perspective. The aim is to provide a review of the literature that addresses female leaders and the leadership behaviors to contribute to their advancement and success in executive-level positions. It also presents a historical review of patterns in leadership research and highlights the writings that focus on female leadership. This chapter therefore provides for the review and synthesis of literature that explains different standpoints for effective school leadership in diverse situations.

The review encompassed definitions, theories, and practices of leadership in general, with a particular focus on female leadership, and placed the discussion within the context of Nepal’s school leadership practice. The subsequent sections of the literature review delved into theoretical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives. Theoretical literature provides foundational definitions and explores various leadership theories, highlighting their evolution and application over time. Conceptual literature examines constructs and models of effective leadership, focusing on the unique attributes and challenges of female leadership. Empirical literature presents data-driven

insights from diverse contexts, evidencing the practices and impacts of female leadership. This comprehensive review is contextualized within Nepal's school leadership practices, identifying specific research gaps and culminating in the development of a robust theoretical framework to guide future research.

Theoretical Literature Review

The literature review, a pivotal component of any dissertation, serves to contextualize the research and guide the data collection and analysis process (Creswell et al., 2007). It involves a thorough examination and synthesis of existing works within the researcher's field, providing foundational support for developing concepts and hypotheses (Serra, 2015). Writing a literature review demands critical reading, meticulous note-taking, and the use of tools like a synthesis matrix to systematically organize the reviewed literature (Shah, 2018).

Understanding Leadership

Leadership is a widely used term with a multitude of meanings. It is a dynamic process, an interpersonal interaction, and a phenomenon that is contingent on context (Bass, 1985). The study of leadership has been prevalent since ancient times, with Plato, Caesar, and Plutarch addressing the topic in their works. Despite its long history, the formal definition of leadership is a relatively recent academic endeavor. Leadership is a universal reality that people seek and accept but rarely fully comprehend. To fully comprehend the significance of leadership, it is necessary to distinguish it from management. In the past, leadership was often associated with good management or simply considered another skill for a competent manager.

Understanding leadership involves exploring various dimensions, including educational leadership, a critical area focused on the management of schools and educational institutions (Bush, 2007). Educational leadership research has its origins in

the USA and UK, with a notable dearth of studies in Europe, indicating potential for new insights. The foundation of leadership studies dates to the Ohio State University and Michigan Leadership Studies in the 1950s, which laid the groundwork for subsequent theories like Theory X, Theory Y, Path-Goal Theory, and models such as Fiedler's contingency model and normative model.

Leadership holds significant importance in the education literature, with extensive research aiming to define its essence, understand its components, and explore its impacts. However, despite the abundance of research and definitions, a consensus on the true nature of leadership remains elusive. Gunter (2006), as cited in Krüger and Scheerens (2012), shed light on this confusion by comparing administration, management, and leadership, revealing divergent interpretations and overlapping perspectives. While some view administration as encompassing management and leadership, others perceive leadership as a comprehensive concept that influences policy, values, and vision. Richmon and Allison (2003), as cited in Krüger and Scheerens (2012), argued that a clear-cut definition of leadership is challenging to attain a view supported by Krüger and Scheerens (2012), who presented various perspectives, such as influence, leading and following, personality, persuasion, interaction, goal attainment, creating structure, negotiating power relations, and stimulating change. The diversity of viewpoints underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of leadership.

Ogilvie (2012) gives a comprehensive list of definitions of leadership. The most widely cited definition of leadership was provided by Burns (1996), who differentiated between transformational and transactional leadership. Additionally, business magazines often offer anecdotal accounts of leadership, which are often portrayed through new adjectives or metaphors.

For many, leadership is equated with a management role, which involves tasks such as making decisions, setting goals, planning, budgeting, and directing the efforts of followers. The manager role requires group activity to be timed, programmed, controlled, and predictable. According to Fulmer and Conger (2004), leadership is a critical capability for successful senior managers. Despite the importance of leadership, good leadership is still not commonly found in companies (Fulmer & Conger, 2004). Leadership is not a characteristic or trait that is limited to a select few individuals, but rather a transactional process that occurs between leaders and followers. This process-oriented perspective supports the idea that leadership is a pluralistic entity.

Yukl (2006) defines leadership as the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done. Northouse (2007) highlights the role of individuals in this process. According to Mello (2003a), there exists an extensive and, at times, very confusing body of literature surrounding the study, practice, and understanding of leadership, and no single theory has been able to capture the essence of leadership and/or leadership dynamics (Mello, 2003b). These perspectives highlight the diverse and complex nature of leadership as a phenomenon and the need for an interpretive epistemology for its investigation.

Leadership is a robust concept that occurs universally among all people, regardless of culture. Discussions of leadership appear in *The Works of Caesar*, *Pluto*, and *Plutarch*. Leadership is a contextual construct and requires a minute consideration of local concerns. Cranston et al. (2003) argue that the Eastern notion of leadership is predominantly rooted in ethics, focusing on the individual rather than the corporation and having a more servile nature than corporate leadership. This perspective highlights the contrasting views on the relevance of ancient leadership models in today's leadership dynamics.

A range of perspectives on educational leadership, particularly in the context of gender representation, have been explored in the literature. Riski and Bahar (2023) emphasize the importance of intersectional feminist perspectives, while Gunter (2006) highlights the need for a diverse approach to diversity. Hallinger and Heck (2010) suggest that cognitive psychology can provide valuable insights into the adaptation of school administrators, and Smyth (1989) presents a collection of critical perspectives, including feminist critique and reconstruction, reflective action, and organizational democracy. These diverse perspectives underscore the complexity of contemporary issues in educational leadership and the need for a nuanced understanding of gender representation.

The percentage of school administrators who are women has been gradually increasing. Nevertheless, graduate degree attainment by women does not necessarily guarantee proportionate representation in administrative positions in education. The enrollment numbers show a decreasing trend as students' progress to higher levels of education. The basic level (grades 1–5) has almost double the enrollment of the next level (grades 6–8), which further decreases by about 45% for secondary levels (grades 9–10) and nearly 50% for secondary levels (grades 11–12). This regression continues, with only a few hundred students at the advanced PGD level.

Gender distribution is balanced at the basic, secondary, and undergraduate levels. However, at the master's level, male students outnumber females by 8%. This disparity increases at the MPhil and PhD levels, with only 16% and 17% of students being female, respectively. At the PGD level, the difference is smaller at 5% (Education in Nepal [Infographics], 2021).

Asbury (1995) conducted a study to examine recent trends in Alabama public schools regarding the qualifying and hiring of females for secondary school Head

Teacherships. The results of the Asbury (1995) study revealed that females perceived a significantly higher degree of discrimination in the hiring practices of their districts than did their male counterparts. According to Asbury (1995), the top three inhibiting factors listed by females for not holding secondary Head Teacherships or head teachership were lack of interest, belief that male supervisors think that females should not hold secondary Head Teacherships, and lack of experience in leadership activities. Based on the findings of his study, Asbury (1995) recommended that further research of this nature be conducted on a regional and national basis to determine trends at those levels. With further study on both a national and an international basis, perhaps the cultural influences on institutional behavior could be determined.

Jankowicz (1994), as cited in Roberts and Woodhead (1995), stressed the limitations and dangers of an oversimplified model of cultural change processes. The origins of the concept of experiential learning and teaching have been traced to the work of John Dewey in the middle of this century and later to the student-centered philosophy of Carl Rogers. More specifically, the founder is usually thought of as David Kolb, who in 1974 produced his 'Cycle of Learning'. This has been adapted and developed by Roberts and Wood (1995) in their training course for effective school administration in Lithuania.

Cheupalakit (2014) identifies the factors contributing to the glass ceiling for Thai women in educational leadership. The study emphasizes the need for equal opportunities in recruitment and provides recommendations to overcome barriers and promote gender equality. Practical suggestions are given to aspiring female leaders. The paper underscores the importance of inclusivity in the education sector for fostering gender parity in leadership.

Leadership Theories and Styles

The study of leadership theories and styles traces back to the mid-19th century with Thomas Carlyle's "great man" theory (Carlyle, 1888, as cited in Nikezic & Nikezic, 2020). Through the examination of the biographies of notable figures such as Shakespeare, Napoleon, and Lincoln, Carlyle identified attributes and inspirations that contributed to their exceptional leadership abilities. This early approach to leadership study perpetuated the belief that leaders were born as 'great men', highlighting the early gender biases and limitations in the field of leadership studies. This historical context is significant for understanding the evolution of leadership theories and styles and the changing perspectives surrounding the concept of leadership.

The domain of leadership theory is characterized by its intricate nature and ongoing debates, as numerous definitions and theories have been put forth to elucidate this multifaceted phenomenon. The Great Man theory asserts that leaders possess innate, extraordinary qualities from birth (Benmira & Agboola, 2021, as cited in Dickson, 2023). Trait theories, on the other hand, argue that effective leaders encompass specific traits, whether inherited or acquired (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). Shifting the focus to learned behaviors, behavioral theory underscores their significance in effective leadership (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). In the era of situational emphasis, contingency theories like Fiedler's gained prominence, aligning leaders' styles with varying contexts (Deshwal & Ali, 2020). Subsequently, the new leadership era emerged, acknowledging the intricate interplay among leaders, followers, contexts, and systems (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Deshwal & Ali, 2020; Gentsoudi, 2022). This evolution leads to transformational leadership, igniting inspiration and motivation amid change, and transactional leadership, employing rewards and penalties to achieve goals.

These theories demonstrate a remarkable adaptability to swift changes and intricate challenges, encapsulating the evolving landscape of effective leadership

(Benmira & Agboola, 2021). As we embark on an insightful journey to explore various types of leadership theories, we delve into the complexities that shape effective leadership (Gentsoudi, 2022). Ranging from theories rooted in inherent attributes to those emphasizing learned behaviors and adaptive responses to situations, each type of leadership theory offers a unique vantage point on how leaders influence and inspire their followers (Gentsoudi, 2022). This exploration not only casts light on the past and present but also illuminates a trajectory for navigating the intricate terrain of modern leadership within an ever-evolving world (Benmira & Agboola, 2021; Deshwal & Ali, 2020; Gentsoudi, 2022).

The performance of female head teachers in public schools in the Kathmandu Valley is significantly impacted by societal and cultural biases, which restrict their access to leadership roles and professional development opportunities. Leadership theories like the Great Man theory and trait theories fail to account for these biases, which manifest as entrenched gender stereotypes and expectations. Behavioral theories, emphasizing learned behaviors, do not fully address the compounded difficulties female head teachers face. Contingency theories stress the need for alignment between leadership styles and contextual demands, but female head teachers often operate within an institutional framework with inadequate support and resources. The literature on the new leadership era fails to fully capture the resilience and adaptability required for female head teachers to overcome systemic adversities. To address these challenges, a critical and systemic overhaul is necessary, including promoting gender equity, implementing robust professional development programs, and creating resilient support networks.

Great Man Theory

The great man theory of leadership suggests that certain individuals are born with inherent qualities that make them exceptional leaders. This theory implies that leaders possess unique traits and abilities that set them apart from ordinary people. However, this theory has received criticism for its gender bias and the lack of consideration for contemporary research that recognizes a more diverse range of leadership qualities. While the great man theory prompted early research on leadership traits, it is important to acknowledge that leadership is a complex combination of innate attributes and developed skills.

The great man theory of leadership, which suggests that leaders possess inherent qualities that make them exceptional in their ability to lead, has been a significant aspect of leadership studies (Ololube, 2013). This historical perspective views leaders as heroic figures who emerge when there is a need for leadership. The term "great man" was used in recognition of the prevailing belief that leadership was primarily a male quality, particularly in military contexts (Ololube, 2013). While the Great Man theory provides valuable insights into the evolution of leadership perspectives and theories, it is essential to consider its historical context and the evolving understanding of leadership.

Trait Theory

Trait theories of leadership posit that certain qualities or traits are inherent to individuals, making them better suited for leadership. According to this theory, leaders possess specific personalities or behavioral characteristics that differentiate them from non-leaders (Amanchukwu, et al., 2015). Despite its popularity, the trait theory has been criticized for its inconsistency in linking specific traits to leadership effectiveness.

This has led researchers to explore alternative explanations for leadership, resulting in a shift away from this paradigm in leadership studies.

The trait theory of leadership, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, built on the earlier 'great man' theory of the mid-19th century. This theory was rooted in psychology and aimed to identify the inherent traits that made individuals effective leaders. Psychologists such as Allport, Freud, Jung, and others examined the personality traits and other characteristics of individuals that could be used to predict future behavior and leadership abilities (Maurik, 2001).

The trait model of leadership examines the characteristics and traits that are associated with effective leaders. Research has identified core traits such as achievement drive, self-confidence, and cognitive ability, among others. While the theory has strengths in its research validation and assessment potential, it also has limitations in subjective judgment and a lack of consensus on important traits. The theory highlights the importance of self-evaluation and the continuous development of leadership qualities. Leadership is a combination of innate qualities and acquired skills that require ongoing growth.

Behavioral Theory

Behavioral theories of leadership propose that leaders can be developed through learning and experience, as opposed to having inherent or innate qualities. This theory focuses on the observable actions and behaviors of leaders rather than their personality traits or internal states. As such, it emphasizes the importance of training and development programs in shaping effective leadership skills (Naylor, 1999). Ngozi (2015) further highlights that the interest in behavioral leadership theories was sparked by the comparison of autocratic and democratic leadership styles and the impact of different leadership behaviors on outcomes.

Behavioral theories of leadership were a departure from the earlier trait theory, which focused on the inherent qualities or traits that made individuals effective leaders. Skinner was among the pioneers of behavioral leadership theory in the 1940s, who argued that leadership could be learned through experience and training instead of being solely attributed to innate characteristics (Maurik, 2001). Behavioral leadership theories emphasize the importance of choosing the right behavior for leadership rather than relying on one's inherent traits. This shift in perspective allowed for a more inclusive view of leadership, as it emphasized that leadership could be taught to anyone rather than being limited to the 'great man' as previously assumed in the trait theory (Maurik, 2001).

Contingency Theory

Contingency theories of leadership propose that the appropriate leadership style depends on situational variables and factors such as leadership style, follower qualities, and environmental conditions. Charry (2012) notes that this theory holds that no single leadership style is effective in all situations and that the success of a leader is determined by the interaction of several factors. (Fiedler, 2015). The development of contingency theories was influenced by previous leadership theories, such as trait and behavioral theories, which believed that a leader's style was fixed and based on innate personality traits (Maurik, 2001).

De Souza (2020) discusses Fiedler's contingency theory, exploring how leadership style affects group performance in various situations. The theory focuses on leader behavior, situational orientation, and leader-member exchange, with three situational dimensions contributing to situational control. Leadership effectiveness is shaped by the interplay of leader style and the work environment, influenced by personality and situation. The literature highlights the impact of leadership styles and

contingency theories on follower performance. Leaders' roles include self-awareness, team monitoring, and environmental consideration. Psychological types' link to leadership behavior emphasizes understanding the inferior function during challenges. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) knowledge enhances leadership by identifying growth areas and addressing employee needs. Combining MBTI with situational leadership provides insights into oneself and others, improving leadership.

Fiedler's contingency theory of leadership emphasizes the importance of matching leadership style with the situational context. It highlights the role of leader-member relations, task structure, and position power in determining leadership effectiveness. The theory offers flexibility by suggesting that different leadership styles may be more appropriate in different situations. However, limitations exist, including the subjective nature of the LPC scale. The LPC (Least Preferred Co-worker) scale is a tool developed by Fred Fiedler in the 1960s as part of his Contingency Theory of Leadership. It is designed to measure a leader's style by evaluating their attitudes toward their least preferred co-worker and is also used to measure its applicability to self-managed teams and open groups. Despite these limitations, the theory provides valuable insights into leadership adaptation and offers a framework for understanding the complex dynamics between leaders and their environments. Further research is needed to refine the theory and enhance its practical applicability (Fiedler, 2015).

In summary, Fiedler's contingency theory recognizes the importance of situational factors in leadership effectiveness, but its subjective measurement and limited applicability in certain contexts call for continued exploration and refinement. Contingency theories highlight the need to match leadership style with the situation, considering factors like follower qualities and environmental conditions. Fiedler's theory, discussed by De Souza (2020), focuses on behavior, situational orientation, and

leader-member exchange. It acknowledges the influence of leadership styles and contingency theories on follower performance and encourages self-awareness and team monitoring among leaders. While valuable, challenges include subjectivity in measuring leadership style and its applicability to various team structures. Fiedler's theory offers insights into dynamic leader-environment dynamics, with room for further research to refine practical applicability.

Situational Theory

Situational theories of leadership emphasize the need for leaders to adapt their style to different situations to be effective. Leadership effectiveness varies depending on factors such as employee preferences and the demands of the industry or business setting. Different theories have been developed to address the situational aspects of leadership. One prominent theory is Hersey & Blanchard's Situational Leadership Theory, which focuses on matching the leader's style with the followers' maturity levels. Hersey & Blanchard's situational leadership model, initially known as the "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership," considers two crucial elements for effective leadership: the leader's style and the maturity level of individuals or groups. According to the model, leaders should adapt their leadership style based on the task at hand and their relationship with the group (Hersey & Blanchard, 1997). The model outlines four main behaviors that leaders should employ, namely telling, selling, participating, and delegating, depending on the specific situation.

Situational Leadership Theory (SLT) suggests that leaders should modify their leadership style based on the specific circumstances they encounter. This theory acknowledges that various decision-making situations call for different leadership styles, and leaders must select the most suitable approach based on the situation at hand

(Charry, 2012). In essence, leaders need to adapt and choose the most effective course of action, considering the specific situational conditions.

Situational Leadership Theory has gained popularity, but criticisms have surfaced over time. McCleskey (2014) noted that as experience with the original Hersey & Blanchard model grew, flaws became evident. Nicholls (1985), Bass (2008), and Glynn and DeJordy (2010) as cited in McCleskey (2014) identified shortcomings in Situational Leadership Theory, including issues of consistency, continuity, conformity, and a lack of internal consistency, along with conceptual contradictions and ambiguities. These critiques shed light on challenges within the theory. Additionally, research revealed the absence of a universally effective leadership style, highlighting the difficulty in identifying abstract leadership types (Glynn & DeJordy, 2010). These criticisms underscore the need for a more comprehensive and refined understanding of leadership theories and their practical implications.

Transformational Theory

In the rapidly evolving landscape of organizations, the significance of effective organizational leadership has grown substantially, emerging as a crucial determinant of success (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). This pertains not only to top-level managers but extends to managers across all organizational tiers, who must collaboratively drive toward desired outcomes. Irrespective of their roles, these leaders must possess the capacity to exert influence, inspire action, and shoulder accountability for results. Transformational leadership stands out as a paradigm in which leaders not only generate novel ideas and perspectives but also chart new trajectories for organizational growth and prosperity. This involves cultivating commitment, passion, and loyalty among managers and staff, thus galvanizing the organization to undergo profound shifts

and develop essential competencies, fostering progress, and achieving elevated performance levels.

A transformational leader embodies inspiration and creativity, guiding individuals to exceed their inherent capabilities within the organization. This leadership approach prompts employees to go beyond their potential, encouraging innovation and invention within their respective domains of success (Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016). Scholars and theorists concur that transformational leadership holds greater efficacy compared to pragmatic leadership. Transformational leaders foster a sense of purpose, making employees recognize the intrinsic value of their contributions. In essence, transformational leadership catalyzes organizational evolution, driving individuals to surpass their limits and engender meaningful innovation.

Transformational leadership is a dynamic and inspiring leadership style that brings about positive change among followers. These leaders exhibit traits such as energy, enthusiasm, and passion and actively engage with group members to ensure their success. By effectively communicating a clear vision, they motivate and invigorate the group, fostering a sense of collective purpose. Transformational leaders prioritize supporting and guiding individual followers, fostering teamwork, and fostering loyalty. They stimulate growth, cultivate loyalty, and instill confidence in group members. This leadership style involves components such as intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Transformational leaders are role models who inspire followers to change their expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work towards common goals. They possess traits such as effective communication, adaptability, creativity, emotional intelligence, and a willingness to take responsibility and risks. Overall, transformational leadership fosters success, loyalty, and commitment among followers. (Prachi, 2019).

Transformational theories, also known as relationship theories, focus on the connections formed between leaders and followers. In these theories, leadership is the process by which a person engages with others and is able to 'create a connection' that results in increased motivation and morality in both followers and leaders (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Relationship theories are often compared to charismatic leadership theories, in which leaders with certain qualities, such as confidence, extroversion, and clearly stated values, are seen as best able to motivate followers.

Avolio et al. (2001) argued that transformational leaders influence perceptions of team members' ability, benevolence, integrity, and information exchange (and, by extension, group effectiveness) by highlighting the importance of cooperation in performing collective tasks. Transformational leaders can also enhance collective efficacy by providing emotional and ideological explanations that link followers' individual identities to the collective identity of their organization (Kark et al., 2003).

Krishnan (2007) emphasizes the vital role of leadership in times of rapid change and organizational transformation. Transformational leadership has garnered substantial research interest due to its significance in identifying opportunities and developing organizational capabilities. Extensive literature has accumulated over the past three decades, showcasing the impact of transformational leadership on various outcomes at both individual and corporate levels. This study specifically explores the relationship between transformational leadership, the leader's power, the follower's duty orientation, and spirituality. It seeks to analyze how a leader's power enhances transformational leadership and how transformational leadership influences followers' duty orientation and spirituality.

Transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes inspiring and motivating followers through a clear vision and strong social ties, provides a solid conceptual

framework for investigating the study performance of female head teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley. This leadership style emphasizes the significance of producing new ideas and viewpoints while also fostering staff participation, passion, and commitment. Female head teachers, working in a culture fraught with societal and cultural biases, can use transformational leadership concepts to promote an inclusive and supportive school climate. Female leaders may inspire creativity and push their teams to surpass their potential by actively interacting with teachers and staff, overcoming institutional limits and resource limitations that frequently impede educational success.

Furthermore, transformational leadership's focus on relationship growth and moral motivation aligns with the issues that female head teachers face in these schools. The theory asserts that effective leaders can influence the views of team members of their skills, ethics, and teamwork, which is essential to overcoming gender biases and stereotypes. Female head teachers can connect individual identities to the school's collective identity through providing emotional and intellectual support, generating a strong sense of purpose and belonging among staff and students. This approach not only boosts overall performance at school and morale, but also enables female leaders to resolve conflicts and handle additional challenges. Thus, transformational leadership serves as an important framework for understanding and enhancing the study performance of female head teachers in the Kathmandu Valley's community schools.

In summary, transformational leadership is a dynamic and inspiring style that brings about positive change by engaging and motivating followers at all levels of the organization. These leaders exhibit visionary qualities and inspire others through their charisma. However, it is important to recognize that transformational leadership requires more than just charisma to drive meaningful organizational change. It involves

fostering collaboration, empowerment, and loyalty among group members. Ultimately, transformational leadership enhances organizational effectiveness and unlocks the full potential of the workforce.

Participative Theory

Participative leadership theories emphasize the importance of considering others' input in decision-making. Leaders who adopt this style encourage participation and contributions from group members, making them feel valued and committed. By involving others in decision-making, participative leaders enhance collaboration, improve commitment, and facilitate better quality decisions, leading to increased business success. Originating from the Hawthorne experiments in the 1930s, participative leadership follows a democratic approach, engaging everyone in the organization. While applicable to smaller teams or departments, this leadership style promotes collaboration, commitment, and effective decision-making.

Participative leadership in a school setting offers numerous benefits. It fosters a sense of unity among students and staff by involving them in decision-making, resulting in a stronger school community. This approach also leads to higher retention rates and boosts morale among students and staff, creating a positive and engaging learning environment. Participative leadership encourages the adoption of policies and initiatives, as stakeholders feel a sense of ownership and support for decisions made. Additionally, it promotes creative thinking and innovation by tapping into diverse perspectives. Overall, participative leadership enhances school culture, engagement, and collaboration, benefiting the entire learning community.

Transactional/Management Theory

Transactional leadership, first introduced by Max Weber and later explored by Bernard Bass, is primarily utilized by managers and focuses on control, organization,

and short-term planning. This leadership style relies on motivating and directing followers by appealing to their self-interest and operates through the leader's formal authority and responsibility within the organization. Followers are expected to comply with the leader's instructions, making it a 'telling style of leadership. Transactional theories, also known as management theories, emphasize supervision, organization, and group performance, as well as the exchanges between leaders and followers, and revolve around a system of rewards and punishments (Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Charry, 2012). Leaders in this style establish clear expectations and associated consequences, rewarding successful performance and reprimanding or punishing failure (Prachi, 2019). Successful performance is met with rewards, while failure results in reprimands or punishments (Charry, 2012).

Skills Theory

Leadership skills-based theory suggests that effective leaders possess technical, conceptual, and human skills. Technical skills involve proficiency in the tasks and processes related to the company's core business. Conceptual skills encompass strategic thinking, planning, goal-setting, and visualization. Human skills involve empathy, active listening, conflict resolution, and the motivation of employees. A balanced combination of these skills is crucial for effective leadership, as overemphasizing one skill set at the expense of others can lead to inefficiencies or failures. The required skill blend may vary as leaders progress from supervisory to managerial to executive roles.

The theory emphasizes that effective leadership is influenced by acquired knowledge and learned skills. While acknowledging the role of inherited traits in leadership capacity, skills theory argues that developed skills, acquired knowledge, and a cultivated leadership style are the true drivers of leadership performance. This viewpoint underscores the importance of dedicating significant effort and resources to

leadership training and development (Wolinski, 2010, as cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

Leadership Styles

Leadership styles are the approaches used to motivate followers. Leadership is not a 'one size fits all' phenomenon. Leadership styles should be selected and adapted to fit organizations, situations, groups, and individuals. It is thus useful to possess a thorough understanding of the different styles, as such knowledge increases the instruments available to lead effectively. Below are several leadership styles discussed.

Autocratic Leadership

Autocratic leadership, also known as authoritarian leadership, is an extreme form of transactional leadership in which leaders possess absolute power and authority over their staff. This style is characterized by minimal opportunities for staff and team members to contribute suggestions, even if these suggestions may be beneficial for the team or organization.

Autocratic leaders primarily rely on their ideas and judgments, disregarding input or advice from their followers. They exercise complete control over the decision-making process within the group.

Khan et al. (2021) conducted a study on the autocratic leadership style, exploring its appropriateness in management. The research aims to comprehensively review the literature on autocratic leadership and draw conclusions regarding its benefits and drawbacks within organizations. The findings indicate that autocratic leadership is suitable for guiding new and inexperienced employees. However, it can hinder employee innovation, reduce self-motivation, and dampen employee alignment with organizational goals.

While autocratic leadership can have some advantages and be effective in certain circumstances, it is crucial to strike a balance and avoid excessive reliance on this style. Overuse of autocratic leadership can stifle creativity, limit autonomy, and decrease motivation among team members. Therefore, leaders need to consider alternative approaches that foster collaboration and engagement within their teams.

Bureaucratic Leadership Style

Bureaucratic leadership is a style of leadership characterized by a strict chain of command, rigid delegation of duties, and a hierarchical structure. It is commonly found in heavily regulated institutions, large companies, and government sectors. While it can be effective in managing such environments, it often lacks room for creativity and innovation. The term was coined by Max Weber in 1920, influenced by the structured nature of the Industrial Revolution.

Bureaucratic leadership requires leaders with technical expertise, strong determination, and a hardworking attitude. The characteristics of bureaucratic leadership, as defined by Weber, include decision-making hierarchies, transactional relationships, role-specific specialization, career orientation, impersonality, defined responsibilities, and professionalism. Bureaucratic leadership emphasizes a strict hierarchical structure, consistent workflow, and adherence to rules and regulations. It focuses on achieving organizational goals rather than individual accomplishments, promoting job security, and fostering a fair understanding of responsibilities. While it may lack the flexibility and creativity of other leadership styles, bureaucratic leadership aims for maximum consistency and professionalism (Amanchukwu et al., 2015).

In conclusion, while bureaucratic leadership offers benefits such as clear roles and job security, it also comes with limitations such as reduced creativity and

adaptability, hindering personal growth and posing challenges for small-scale organizations.

Charismatic Leadership Style

Charismatic leadership theory describes what to expect from both leaders and followers. Charismatic leadership is a leadership style that is identifiable but may be perceived with less tangibility than other leadership styles (Bell, 2013). Often called a transformational leadership style, charismatic leaders inspire eagerness in their teams and are energetic in motivating employees to move forward. The negative side of charismatic leadership is the amount of confidence placed in the leader rather than in employees. This can create the risk of a project or even an entire organization collapsing if the leader leaves. Additionally, a charismatic leader may come to believe that s/he can do no wrong, even when others are warning him or her about the path s/he is on; feelings of invincibility can ruin a team or an organization.

Democratic/Participative Leadership Style

Democratic leaders make the final decisions but include team members in the decision-making process. They encourage creativity, and team members are often highly engaged in projects and decisions. There are many benefits to democratic leadership. Team members tend to have high job satisfaction and are productive because they are more involved. This style also helps develop employees' skills. Team members feel a part of something larger and more meaningful, and so they are motivated to buy more than just a financial reward. The danger of democratic leadership is that it can falter in situations where speed or efficiency are essential. During a crisis, for instance, a team can waste valuable time gathering input. Another potential danger is team members without the knowledge or expertise to provide high-quality input.

Servant Leadership Style

Servant leadership, a style that prioritizes the needs and well-being of followers, is a flexible and effective approach, particularly in changing circumstances (Wong & Page, 2003). It is a foundational philosophy that can be applied in various contexts, including Indian organizations (Kantharia, 2012). Despite its ancient roots, the concept is still evolving and gaining acceptance in modern organizations (Gandolfi, 2017). In the Nepalese context, the servant leadership style can be seen as a way to empower and serve the people, drawing on the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita (Marothia & Vyas, 2020).

Laissez-Faire Leadership Style

Laissez-faire leadership may be the best or worst of leadership styles (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Laissez-faire, the French phrase for “let it be,” when applied to leadership, describes leaders who allow people to work on their own. Laissez-faire leaders abdicate responsibilities and avoid making decisions; they may give teams complete freedom to do their work and set their own deadlines. Laissez-faire leaders usually allow their subordinates the power to make decisions about their work. They provide teams with resources and advice, if needed, but otherwise do not get involved. This leadership style can be effective if the leader monitors performance and gives feedback to team members regularly. The main advantage of laissez-faire leadership is that allowing team members so much autonomy can lead to high job satisfaction and increased productivity. It can be damaging if team members do not manage their time well or do not have the knowledge, skills, or motivation to do their work effectively. This type of leadership can also occur when managers do not have sufficient control over their staff (Ololube, 2013).

Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leadership is a leadership style that operates on a clear, structured exchange between the leader and team members. When individuals join an organization, they implicitly agree to follow the leader's guidance and adhere to the established rules and procedures. In return for their commitment and effort, team members receive compensation and benefits as stipulated by their employment agreements (Bass, 1985).

Recent research has highlighted the complex effects of transactional leadership on follower performance. Young et al. (2021) found that while contingent reward, a key aspect of transactional leadership, can foster positive leader-follower relationships, it may also hinder follower empowerment, leading to a mixed impact on performance. This underscores the need for leaders to carefully consider their approach to transactional leadership. Santosa and Wahyuningsih (2024) further emphasized the significance of transactional leadership, noting a consistent increase in research on the topic. However, Dubinsky et al. (1995) provided a contrasting view, suggesting that a transactional approach may be more effective than a transformational one in certain contexts, such as sales management. These studies collectively highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of transactional leadership and its impact on team performance.

Transactional leadership, with its emphasis on clear expectations, monitoring, and feedback, has been found to be effective in various organizational contexts. In the nursing profession, it has been shown to foster accountability, efficiency, and innovation (Lai, 2011). In small-scale enterprises, this leadership style has a significant positive effect on performance (Obiwuru et al., 2011). Similarly, in a contemporary business organization, the "carrot and stick" approach, a form of transactional leadership, predicts employees' job satisfaction (Dartey-Baah, 2016). These findings underscore the value of transactional leadership in organizations with well-defined

processes and routines, where consistent results and operational efficiency are paramount.

Transformational Leadership Style

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that focuses on inspiring and motivating team members to achieve their full potential and exceed their own expectations. Leaders who adopt this approach often have a compelling vision for the future and effectively communicate this vision to their teams, creating a sense of shared purpose and enthusiasm (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In the context of transformational leadership, leaders encourage innovation, creativity, and continuous improvement. They foster an environment where team members feel empowered and valued. These leaders are highly supportive of individual and team development, aiming to nurture the personal and professional growth of their followers (Northouse, 2018).

Transformational leaders exhibit charisma, a strong sense of ethics, and the ability to connect with and inspire their teams. They lead by example and are willing to take risks to achieve their vision. Their approach often results in increased employee motivation, higher job satisfaction, and improved overall organizational performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leadership theory, when integrated with other leadership theories including the Great Man theory, trait theory, behavioral theory, and contingency theory, provides a comprehensive framework to assess the performance of female head teachers in Kathmandu Valley community schools. Transformational leadership, that emphasizes on inspiring and motivating staff through a clear vision and strong relational associations, allows female head teachers to develop a sense of purpose and innovation, each of which are vital to overcoming societal and cultural

biases. Trait and Great Man theories highlight the inherent talent and unique qualities that good leaders may possess, which aids in the recognition of the particular abilities that female head teachers bring to their positions. Behavioral theories emphasize the significance of acquired behaviors in helping female leaders build and refine their abilities and effectiveness.

Behavioral theories emphasize the importance of acquired behaviors, which helps female leaders build and refine effective leadership practices. Contingency theories, such as Fiedler's, emphasize the significance of adapting leadership styles to circumstances, which helps female head teachers in responding to the many challenges of their specific circumstances. Collectively, these theories contribute to a more nuanced understanding of leadership at work dynamics, providing strategic insights and practical approaches for improving productivity and addressing challenges confronting female head teachers in Kathmandu Valley community schools.

Table 1 below provides an exploration of diverse leadership styles, detailing their main ideas and distinguishing features. It offers a comprehensive overview of various approaches to leadership, emphasizing their unique characteristics and practical applications within organizational contexts.

Table 1

Exploring Diverse Leadership Styles: Characteristics and Applications

Leadership Style	Main Ideas
Transformational Leadership	Inspires and motivates through a shared vision. Encourages innovation and change.
Transactional Leadership	Promotes humility and selflessness. Emphasizes structure and efficiency. Uses rewards and punishments for motivation

Charismatic Leadership	<p>Focuses on short-term goals and objectives.</p> <p>Relies on the leader's personality and charm.</p> <p>Inspires loyalty and devotion from followers.</p> <p>Often seen as a visionary and inspirational</p>
Bureaucratic Leadership	<p>Fosters a sense of inclusivity and equality</p> <p>Emphasizes adherence to rules and procedures</p> <p>Focuses on structured processes and hierarchy</p> <p>Ensures consistency and conformity in operations</p>
Servant Leadership	<p>Focuses on individual and team development.</p> <p>Emphasizes serving and supporting others</p> <p>Prioritizes the needs of the team and community</p>
Laissez-Faire Leadership Style	<p>Minimal direct involvement and decision-making</p> <p>Provides freedom and autonomy to the team</p>
Democratic Leadership	<p>Allows team members to make choices and decisions.</p> <p>Encourages participation in decision-making.</p> <p>Values team input and collaboration</p>

The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

RBV and Effective Resources Management: The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory can be applied to understand how female head teachers (FHTs) effectively manage resources in community school settings. Armstrong & Taylor, (2023) emphasize the importance of identifying and leveraging internal resources, such as physical, human, and organizational capital, to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. FHTs can optimize resource allocation by effectively orchestrating these resources, as suggested by Gibson (2021). Additionally, Gibson highlights the value of the community as a strategic resource, which FHTs can leverage to further enhance resource management. However, Khanal (2013) cautions that FHTs' accountability in

resource management can create paradoxes, suggesting the need for a balanced approach. Overall, the RBV theory provides a framework for understanding how FHTs can leverage their knowledge, skills, and social capital to optimize resource allocation in community school settings. (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory is a strategic framework that emphasizes the importance of a firm's internal resources in achieving competitive advantage. When applied to the context of female head teachers (FHTs) managing resources in community school settings, RBV can provide valuable insights into how their unique capabilities and assets contribute to effective resource management (Paauwe, 2024).

Application of RBV Theory

FHTs' Resource Management: Female head teachers (FHTs) play a crucial role in resource management and school improvement. They bring unique perspectives and skills to the table, such as expertise in educational pedagogy, which allows them to allocate teaching resources more effectively (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). FHTs who continuously seek professional development opportunities can introduce new educational technologies and teaching strategies, optimizing the use of available resources (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). This is supported by Devine et al. (2019), who found that female entrepreneurs have certain advantages in leveraging human and financial capital for high growth. The positive effect of human capital development on head teachers' performance is further emphasized by Richard (2019), who found that training in general management skills, leadership styles, prudent financial management, and career development can enhance their performance. Lastly, Berry (2014) underscores the importance of strategic management of human capital in education, emphasizing the need for investments in teachers and Head Teachers.

FHTs can effectively utilize social capital to enhance school resources and support. This can be achieved through community fundraising events and partnerships with local businesses (Gibson et al., 2021). By fostering strong relationships with parents, FHTs can also ensure better resource allocation through volunteer programs or donations (Tuytens et al., 2023). The importance of social capital in promoting pupils' health and well-being in school communities is highlighted by Turunen (2010), who emphasizes the significance of the social support network and partnership between school and parents. Furthermore, the role of social relationships in accessing resources is underscored by Glover (2006), who discusses the use of leisure episodes in building strong ties. Lastly, Flint (2011) emphasizes the role of effective schools in generating social capital and promoting community engagement, which can have a positive impact on pupils, parents, and the wider community.

The effective use of school resources is a key policy priority across OECD countries (Santiago, 2021; Nusche et al., 2016). This can be achieved through the development and implementation of efficient administrative processes by FHTs, which can maximize the use of these resources (Tuytens et al., 2023). The introduction of new budgeting systems and the creation of programs that make optimal use of available teaching resources are key strategies in this process (Gibson et al., 2023; Tuytens et al., 2023).

Effective resource management by FHTs can be seen in various contexts, such as the introduction of computer-based learning programs in rural schools (Tuytens et al., 2023), leveraging social capital for infrastructure projects in urban areas (Gibson et al., 2023), and sharing resources and best practices across schools (Tuytens et al., 2023). These strategies align with the resource-based view (RBV) theory, which emphasizes the importance of human and social capital in resource management (Arik

& Dunne, 2014). The RBV theory also suggests that the community can be a valuable resource for schools (Gibson, 2021). These findings highlight the potential for FHTs to optimize resource allocation and drive improvements in school performance.

The theoretical framework of transformational leadership and the resource-based view theory is supported by a body of research in educational settings, particularly community schools. Dhakal, et al. (2020) and Adhikari (2019) both emphasize the collaborative and empowering nature of transformational leadership, with Poudel (2022) specifically highlighting the role of the principal in leading effectively. Khana and Ghimire (2022) further support these findings, noting the positive impact of transformational leadership on school development and academic performance. This is in line with the resource-based view theory, which suggests that a school's resources, including its leadership, can be a source of sustained competitive advantage (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The usefulness of transformational leadership and the RBV theory in community schools is a critical factor in driving school development and improving academic performance (Alainati, 2024; Khanal & Ghimire, 2024). Transformational leaders, such as the principal in a successful urban elementary school, emphasize support, care, trust, and participation while also focusing on longer-term, socially transformative principles (Johnson, et al., 2005). The RBV theory, when expanded to include the community as a strategic resource, can contribute to sustained competitive advantage (Gibson, 2021). This is particularly relevant in the context of school leadership, where the integration of transformational and instructional leadership can significantly influence school performance (Alainati, 2023; Marks & Printy, 2003).

The resource-based view (RBV) theory and transformational leadership theory are essential for understanding and enhancing the performance of female head teachers

(FHTs) in community schools in Kathmandu Valley. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring followers through vision, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. FHTs can drive educational improvements by fostering a supportive environment and utilizing internal resources, such as human and social capital, to optimize teaching resources and introduce new strategies. Building strong relationships with parents and the community through fundraising events and partnerships with local businesses contributes to better resource allocation and school improvement.

Thematic/Conceptual Literature Review

Evolution of Inclusive Education Policy in Nepal: A Focus on Gender Justice

Over the years, Nepal has demonstrated a growing commitment to inclusive education, particularly concerning gender justice. While not all initiatives have been equally successful, there are clear indications of progress and dedication toward greater inclusion.

Table 2

Key Education Policies and Programs for Inclusion

The table below highlights the major policies and programs implemented to promote overall inclusion in education, particularly emphasizing gender justice:

Education	Plan/Commission Reports	Policy Intent Proposed Programs
NNEPC (1955)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance women's skills and knowledge to fulfill traditionally assigned roles 	Adult Literacy Program
ARNEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue NNEPC policies, 	Adult Literacy Program

(1960)	adding community development and basic needs components	Expansion of primary schools.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure both boys and girls receive primary education 	
NESP (1970–1975)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote gender equality by eliminating segregated schools 	Co-education implementation
NHLEC (1992)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve women’s literacy • Prioritize women and girls at all education levels • Provide scholarships and prioritize women in teacher training 	<p>Literacy and education programs focused on women’s empowerment</p> <p>70% of scholarships allocated to women</p>
MoE Policy (2003/2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure at least two female teachers per school 	Ten-month pre-service training with scholarships for women, particularly from ethnic groups and Dalit communities
EFA Policy (2002–2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainstream gender in education • Train educators to be gender-sensitive and socially inclusive 	<p>Gender training for headteachers, teachers, and School Management Committee (SMC) members</p>
SSD Program (2016–2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve quality education in alignment with SDGs • Decentralize school sector responsibilities to local governments 	<p>Restructure school organizations based on new regulations</p> <p>Improve access to basic education, with special attention to remote areas, gender, and</p>

-
- Focus on equity, quality, ethnic minorities competence, and relevance in education
 - Enhance vocational education that aligns with local needs
- Develop model schools in every province and district
-

Note. NNEPC: Nepal National Education Planning Commission; ARNEC: All Round National Education Committee; NESP: National Education System Plan; NHLEC: National Higher Level Education Committee; MoE: Ministry of Education, EFA: Education for All, SMC: School Management Committee; SSD: School Sector Development, SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals. (MoE, 2017; Timsina, 2004; UNESCO, 2005)

Educational Leadership Paradigm and Women

The gender gap in leadership positions is a prevalent issue, not only in education but in many areas of the workplace. Society's perception of leadership as a male domain has led to the underrepresentation of qualified women in leadership positions (Alqahtani, 2019; Growe & Montgomery, 1999). This is perpetuated by gender stereotypes and cultural expectations (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Despite the qualifications and capabilities of women, society has created the norm that only men make good leaders, leading to a lack of representation of qualified women in leadership positions. (Kubu, 2018). To address this, it is crucial to recognize and tackle the various barriers to women's leadership, including societal, organizational, and individual factors (Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016). Women who aspire to leadership positions often encounter obstacles that men do not, which can leave them feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. Despite being just as capable and qualified as men, women's contributions to

organizations are often overlooked or undervalued. It is essential to strive towards creating a more equitable workplace that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all individuals (Ely et al., 2011).

According to Chliwniak (1997), leaders are individuals who provide vision and embody the ideals of the organization. However, traditional scholars like Grove and Montgomery (1999) viewed leaders as genderless. If we agree with Chliwniak's definition of a leader, then why are women still struggling to gain employment as administrators in the educational field? Is it because men are inherently better leaders than women? Research does not support this assumption. In fact, studies show that schools managed by women tend to perform better than those led by men.

The study and discussion of the influence of gender on leadership have been ongoing for decades, with each study and scholar adding to the conversation but without a definitive theory emerging (Adler et al., 2001; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Fisher et al., 1999; Hewlett et al., 2005; Kezar, 2000). The study by Ceil (2012) highlights the increasing leadership requirements and the emergence of women in leadership roles, emphasizing their capacity to influence and bring about change. It acknowledges the challenges faced by women in leadership and suggests the need for leadership training initiatives to address these barriers.

According to traditional literature on leadership and gender, there have been varying perspectives on the effectiveness of women leaders. For example, Eagly and Johnson (1990) suggested in their meta-analysis that women were more effective in leadership roles that required interpersonal skills, while men were more effective in roles that required task-oriented skills. On the other hand, Chugh and Sahgal (2007) mentioned that women had unique qualities that were valuable in leadership, such as a more collaborative and participatory approach.

Despite the varying perspectives on women's leadership abilities, the underrepresentation of qualified women in leadership positions persists, leading to a gender gap in many areas of the workplace, including education (Coleman & Bourne, 2018). Society has often perpetuated the notion that only men make good leaders, creating barriers for women seeking leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2021). Women who do seek leadership positions often face obvious barriers and sometimes give up due to the overwhelming challenges they encounter (Chliwniak, 1997). However, research has shown that there is no evidence to support the assumption that men make better administrators than women. In fact, schools administered by women, on average, have been shown to perform better than those managed by men (Coleman & Bourne, 2018). Similarly, Campos-García and Zuniga-Vicente (2019) found a positive correlation between FHTs and improved school performance.

Studies have shown that female administrators in schools are associated with a higher quality of pupil learning and the professional performance of teachers compared to male administrators. (Porat, 1991. Women are breaking barriers and becoming strong leaders in business and government, challenging old beliefs (Stufft & Coyne, 2009). According to Growe & Montgomery (1999), their research supported the findings of Ryder (1994) and Hensel (1991) as cited in Pwadura (2016), indicating that female head teachers were highly effective, equally capable, and productive compared to their male counterparts in the academic field. However, despite this evidence, there are still individuals who maintain the belief that women are less capable, competitive, or productive than men.

Recent research suggests that effective school administration is more aligned with feminine than masculine modes of leadership behavior (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Female leadership attributes, such as nurturing, sensitivity, empathy, intuition,

compromise, care, cooperation, and accommodation, are increasingly recognized as essential for effective administration. However, women with these qualities still face higher attrition rates and slower career mobility, particularly in higher education (Porat, 1991). Moreover, gender, more than age, experience, background, or competence, determines the role an individual will be assigned in educational administration, highlighting the persistence of gender-based discrimination (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). Despite progress towards gender equality, women still face challenges such as the glass ceiling and gender-based barriers. These obstacles hinder their advancement in leadership positions and economic growth. Efforts are needed to address and overcome these challenges to create a more inclusive and equitable society (Maseko, 2013).

Woolnough and Davidson (2007) and Singh-Sengupta (1997) have discovered that factors associated with career aspirations play a significant role in leadership aspirants. They suggest that race is a greater obstacle to career advancement than gender. Next, the argument that the traditional norms in management favor male and middle-aged individuals for top-level positions creates barriers for women in leadership. As a result, women may feel compelled to adopt male leadership styles to gain acceptance and recognition (Porat, 1991; Phelps & Taber, 1997).

This bias against women and minorities in leadership positions is not uncommon. For instance, in one case, the male administrator discouraged women and underrepresented minorities from pursuing administrative careers, claiming that they lacked the requisite leadership characteristics (Allen et al., 1995, as cited in Growe & Montgomery, 1999). As a result, women in male-dominated positions often feel the need to be better qualified than their male counterparts to compete successfully.

The issue of diversity and inclusion in leadership positions is not limited to a particular region or country but is a global concern. In many parts of the world, there is

a significant underrepresentation of women and minorities in leadership roles. Research has shown that race can be a more significant obstacle to career advancement than gender (Allen et al., 1995, as cited in Growe & Montgomery, 1999). Management tends to fill high-level positions with individuals who fit the existing norm, which is typically Caucasian, male, and middle-aged (Phelps & Taber, 1997, as cited in Growe & Montgomery, 1999).

In their 2020 research, Martínez and Molina-López investigate why there are fewer women than men appointed as school Head Teachers and whether the gender differences in management quality are due to organizational or individual factors. Their study introduces a model for appointing school heads, analyzing the demand and supply sides of the market. Results indicate that only highly skilled females are appointed as Head Teachers, resulting in a gender gap in principal positions. Furthermore, the data suggests that FHTs are linked to higher management quality, indicating barriers to female promotion. The researchers suggest changes to the principal's selection process to ensure the maximum utilization of available talent.

However, there have been some positive developments in recent years. The hiring of women and minorities as superintendents and in administrative positions has increased in many countries (Wesson, 1998). Nevertheless, there are still significant disparities in representation in leadership positions. Women and minorities are often concentrated in smaller and less cosmopolitan districts, where they face more stress, less satisfaction, and a higher risk of school board conflict. In many cases, Caucasian women are hired for low-paying positions with varied duties in very small districts, while African American women are hired in troubled urban districts with inadequate financial resources or districts with a large concentration of poor minority students with low achievement test scores.

In a 1990 meta-analysis by Johnson and Eagly (2014), 144 studies on leadership style and gender differences were examined over a 30-year period. The analysis indicated that women exhibit qualities conducive to effective leadership, such as promoting collaboration. It also acknowledged the gradual progress of women in leadership roles during that time. However, it is important to critically evaluate the impact of stereotypes, biases, and systemic barriers that have historically impeded women's advancement in leadership.

Pounder and Coleman (2002) highlight the ongoing issue of women's underrepresentation in senior management positions, despite their increasing presence in the workforce. The study emphasizes the need to investigate the factors behind this disparity and calls attention to the disproportionate attention given to the topic. Job stress research also suggests unique challenges faced by women in leadership roles.

According to Grove and Montgomery (1999), traditional scholars have varying perspectives on the gender of leaders. Some view leaders as genderless individuals, while others emphasize their role in embodying organizational ideals and providing vision. However, research contradicts the assumption that men are superior administrators based solely on their gender. In fact, studies indicate that schools led by women tend to perform better than those led by men. Despite these findings, women still face obstacles to obtaining employment as administrators in the educational field.

Research on the impact of gender on leadership has been conducted by numerous scholars over the years for example Adler et al. 2001; Eagly and Johnson, 1990; Evans et al. 2011; Fisher et al. 1999; Hewlett et al. 2005; Kezar, 2000; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; Evans et al. 2011. The studies emphasized the importance of leadership training and development programs in enhancing skills and promoting multicultural advocacy. The study highlighted the need for guidance, access to resources, and

comprehensive leadership opportunities to support effective leadership growth.

However, research also highlights the unique strengths and perspectives that women bring to leadership, such as their collaborative and relational leadership styles and their commitment to promoting equity and social justice (Eagly & Carli, 2021). A meta-analysis of studies conducted in the United States found that schools led by FHTs had higher levels of academic achievement, particularly in the areas of reading and writing (Stevens et al., 2005). Other studies have found that FHTs are more likely to foster positive school climates and promote teacher collaboration and professional development (Brunner et al., 2016; Fisher, 2020). Despite these findings, women continue to be underrepresented in top leadership positions in education, highlighting the need for continued research and efforts to address systemic barriers to gender equity in leadership.

Studies have shown that gender and race continue to be significant obstacles to career advancement in educational leadership. Gender bias and discrimination, as well as limited access to leadership development opportunities, prevent women from advancing to top leadership positions in education (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Similarly, management often seeks to fill its ranks with individuals who best fit the existing norm, which is typically Caucasian, male, and middle-aged, further perpetuating the inequitable status quo.

Despite the encouraging trend of more women and minorities being hired for superintendent and administrative positions, there are still disparities in their placement and the challenges they face. Proportionally, women tend to occupy superintendent positions in the smallest and least cosmopolitan districts, which are associated with declining student enrollments, more reported stress on the job, less satisfaction, and fewer resources (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). However, studies have shown that

promoting diversity in educational leadership is essential to ensuring that all voices are heard and to creating a more equitable and inclusive educational system (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022).

In conclusion, education leadership is a complex issue that has been studied extensively for decades. The impact of gender and race on leadership effectiveness and career advancement is a significant area of concern. While progress has been made in promoting diversity and inclusivity in educational leadership, barriers to career advancement and systemic bias continue to exist. It is crucial to continue to study and address these issues to create a more equitable and inclusive educational system that reflects the diversity of the student population it serves. By promoting diverse leadership practices, we can create a more inclusive environment that supports all students' success and creates a more just and equitable society.

Educational Leadership and School Effectiveness

Wallin (2003) asserts that a strong correlation exists between the performance of schools and the integrity of the leadership. According to Wallin (2003), improving teacher effectiveness is a crucial first step to enhancing students in the school. As per Stone-Johnson (2014), the culture of high expectations fostered by the school's principal, teachers, staff, and students is the foundation of high-performing schools.

Creating effective schools in developing countries requires three major elements. The first consists of necessary inputs in terms of curriculum, instructional materials, and quality time for learning. The second element includes the facilitating conditions: community and parent involvement. Donkor (2010) emphasizes the positive influence of parental involvement on school effectiveness in Sub-Saharan African countries. Drawing from Levin and Lockheed (1993), as cited in Chapman et al. (2012), the study underscores the significance of collaboration between parents, community

leaders, and schools in creating a supportive educational environment. Recognizing the role of parental involvement in school reform is essential for enhancing overall school, community, and educational system performance (Yu, 2006). The research also acknowledges the challenges associated with promoting parental engagement, particularly within township communities (Africa ISS, 2007). The third element crucial for change and action is the will, which represents the inner driving force. In many parts of the world, there is recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers.

The South African Task Team Report (1996), as cited in Bush (2007), states that good management is an essential aspect of any education service. Its central goal is the promotion of effective teaching and learning for students. In schools where care is not evident, the performance and achievement of teachers are weaker. An absence of care further leads to lower levels of school effectiveness. The caring roles of both the principal and teacher concerning learners have already been researched.

An effective leader uses several techniques and strategies to guide the school towards effectiveness. Schechter (2014) states that school leadership has a significant impact on school effectiveness and school improvement. Schechter (2014) believes that leaders develop a particular culture by imposing their assumptions and values on the group. As per the study of Salahuddin (2012), effective leadership is characterized by good interactions among Head Teachers, students, teachers, parents, and community members. Discussion is an important element of effective decision-making, and the only way teachers can be encouraged is by providing rewards and punishments.

Sammons (1995) conducted a review of school effectiveness and identified key factors including professional leadership, shared vision, a conducive learning environment, focused teaching and learning, high expectations, positive reinforcement, and home-school partnership. The review highlighted the importance of flexibility in

teaching approaches rather than a specific style for achieving effectiveness. Limited evidence was found regarding the impact of school processes on social and affective outcomes.

The research study by Singh (2016), as cited in Poudel (2022), examines the influence of head teachers' practices on students' learning outcomes in Kathmandu public schools. The findings highlight the importance of instructional leadership in well-performing schools, where proactive head teachers foster collaboration and motivation and implement initiatives. In contrast, low-performing schools lack such leadership, impacting educational outcomes. Moreover, Poudel (2022) emphasizes the crucial role of a safe and positive school climate, which supports academic achievement and holistic development. Creating and maintaining a positive school climate is essential for enhancing student success and overall school effectiveness. Educational leaders are critical to cultivating instructional leadership and creating a conducive learning environment.

There are no formal training programs for school Head Teachers in leadership and management. Often, good classroom teachers become school Head Teachers without having the necessary skills and knowledge to lead and manage people effectively (Bush, 2008). The purpose of this study is to examine how Head Teachers rate their caregiving toward teachers. It also discusses the discrepancies that emerged between the Head Teachers' self-perceptions of caring for teachers and the perceptions held by the teachers themselves.

Van der Vyver et al. (2014) state that few formal leadership and management training programs are available for school Head Teachers in underdeveloped nations. Despite government financial attempts, poverty still prevails in rural areas, where

schools continue to suffer. Oftentimes, effective classroom teachers who lack leadership and management abilities become school Head Teachers.

Teachers working under caring Head Teachers experience higher morale and greater job satisfaction, which consequently enhances their quality of work life (Beck, 1994; Roffey, 2007, as cited by Van der Vyver et al., 2014). A caring principal contributes to enhanced parental involvement in schools, and decisions are more likely to be directed by an ethic of care.

School administrators generally come from the ranks of teachers. Therefore, a historical perspective on women and minorities in teaching provides a framework for understanding the role of women and minorities in administration. White males did almost all formal teaching in the United States of America until the late eighteenth century, and it was not until the end of the colonial period that women began to teach in elementary school. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, women had outnumbered men in the teaching profession. This was due in part to the high demand for males in the private sector and the rapid growth of elementary schools (Shakeshaft, 2011).

Feistritzer et al. (1990) indicate that this trend is escalating; since 1985, 78% of new teachers hired were women, and 92% were white; only 5% of teachers hired since 1985 were African-American; 2% were Hispanic; and 1% were Asian. The number of Native American teachers hired since 1985 is negligible (Feistritzer et al., 1990). So, while the number of women in the teaching profession is increasing, the number of minority teachers is declining.

According to Lewis & Simpson (2012), Kanter proposed that when an organization faces uncertainty, having a homogeneous management group becomes crucial for its members. Having studied corporate organizational structure, she

concluded that the higher the level of management in the organizational hierarchy, the more discretion the occupants have in performing their jobs. Kanter showed that often those whose social characteristics are different from those of the management group are clustered in positions that have well-defined criteria for determining success or serve as experts rather than decision-makers.

Wesson (1998) referenced Wheatley (1979) to examine leadership dilemmas as expressed in "Voices from the Field." Kanter's theory of public schools suggests that when management seeks homogeneity within its group to minimize uncertainty, it creates constraints for all teachers, particularly disadvantaging women and minorities (Lewis & Simpson, 2012). This theory helps explain the career patterns of minorities. After the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation ruling, employment patterns in the South experienced significant changes. According to Tillman (2004), there was a significant decline in the number of African American high school Head Teachers in southern and border states during the 1960s, with a potential even greater decrease among elementary Head Teachers. This decline had a profound impact on the African American community, leaving a significant void in leadership positions that remains unresolved.

Yeakey et al. (1986) examined the socialization theory proposed by Ortiz (2000) to explore the occupational and organizational participation of women and minorities in school settings. They utilized social science theories of socialization and role to gain insights into these dynamics. Building upon the socialization theory, Yeakey et al. (1986) emphasized that socialization in organizations, as defined by Ortiz (2000), leads to distinct experiences for women and minorities compared to white administrators within the school context. The placement of women and minorities in special projects and schools with minority populations contributes to this differentiation. The authors also highlighted the influential role of Head Teachers and other key administrators in

shaping the socialization process, as they serve as gatekeepers and provide opportunities for aspiring administrators to advance.

Research indicates that women in educational leadership face significant barriers, including "glass ceilings" and "glass walls" (Cubillo & Brown, 2003). Despite their qualifications, they are often underrepresented in top management positions due to a lack of support from male colleagues, gender stereotyping, and their own uncertainty about their abilities (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula 2018). Feminist research has highlighted the persistent underrepresentation of women in high-paying and prestigious leadership positions (Young et al., 2021). These disparities are further perpetuated by the perception that men have more leadership qualities, particularly in decision-making and empowering employees (Aziz, 2017).

Ortiz (2000) supported the findings of Valverde (1974), indicating that minorities are often excluded from administrative positions due to a lack of sponsorship. The underrepresentation of Native Americans, Asians, African-Americans, and Hispanics as secondary Head Teachers and superintendents (4.6% and 4.2%, respectively) and the limited presence of women in these positions (7.6% and 5.6%, respectively) demonstrate a significant imbalance in the gatekeeping roles responsible for sponsoring and socializing women and minorities into educational administrative positions. This imbalance poses a substantial challenge to promoting diversity and inclusion within educational leadership.

Wesson (1998) stated that schools and postsecondary institutions, including both public and private ones, have prioritized equity in higher education. Bell (2013) discussed how Clark et al. (2021) stressed the importance of ongoing efforts to bring about change within the university system. This change is exemplified by the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report, 'A Nation at Risk', which

emphasized learner outcomes and excellence while overlooking issues of equity. The education reform debate that emerged in the mid-1980s also neglected the topic of equity, as evidenced by a content analysis of 138 articles on the reform movement, where gender equity received less than 1% of the coverage.

Wesson (1998) explores Ragins and Sundstrom's (1989) integration of power and gender dynamics in organizations to shed light on the underrepresentation of women and minorities in administration. The model considers individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal factors, emphasizing the stronger influence of larger societal and organizational contexts over smaller interpersonal and individual factors. This perspective aligns with the findings of Yeakey et al. (1986), who underscore the importance of broader societal change in conjunction with attitudinal shifts and training programs to address the exclusion of women and minorities from administrative roles. Ultimately, the subordinate role of women and minorities across society emerges as a fundamental issue that needs to be addressed.

Kulophas and Hallinger (2020), in their literature review, critically analyze successful school Head Teachership in Thailand, highlighting its unique definition and practices compared to Western countries. They emphasize that success is primarily determined by excellence in school management and professional recognition, rather than the demonstrated impact on school effectiveness. The review also acknowledges the significant influence of political and societal factors on Head Teachers' values and decision-making processes. However, the authors note the ambiguity in scholars' conclusions and emphasize the need for further research in this field.

Over the past two decades, various feminist frameworks have emerged to explain the persistent underrepresentation of women in formal leadership positions. Despite some progress, the position of women in Australian society and in Western

countries has not significantly improved. Educational institutions continue to embody a dominant masculine culture that devalues or overlooks feminine models centered on care, concern, and consensus. While organizational theory sheds light on implicit biases and exclusionary practices within educational administration, external constraints beyond the organization's scope may have a more substantial impact on achieving gender equity.

The importance of effective school leadership cannot be overstated, as it has a direct correlation with the school's performance and effectiveness. To create effective schools, inputs such as quality curriculum, instructional materials, and quality time for learning are necessary. Facilitating conditions, such as community and parental involvement, along with the will to change and act, are also essential elements. Effective school leadership includes fostering a culture of high expectations, caring for teachers, encouraging discussion, and effective decision-making. Historically, women and minorities have faced challenges in entering leadership positions in education, resulting in a lack of role models and leadership in their communities. Effective school leadership and management training programs are crucial for school Head Teachers, especially in developing nations, to enhance teacher effectiveness and students' learning outcomes.

Transformational leadership theory, closely intertwined with change theory, provides an effective framework for studying the performance of female head teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley. Transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating followers towards a shared vision, fostering commitment and enthusiasm. This theory emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, which directly address the unique challenges faced by female head teachers, such as societal biases and limited

professional development opportunities. By aligning with change theory, transformational leadership helps these leaders initiate and manage organizational change, build strong relationships, and create adaptable environments. Additionally, its emphasis on emotional and moral support enhances resilience and builds trust among staff. Thus, transformational leadership theory is an ideal choice for interpreting and guiding the study of female head teachers' performance in the Kathmandu Valley.

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership involves four key elements: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. These elements create a sense of shared vision and purpose and inspire followers to achieve their full potential. Cummings et al. (2016) explored Kurt Lewin's enduring impact on change management. They discussed the concept of 'refreezing', which represents a reframing of Lewin's original 'freezing' concept and serves as the initial phase of the change process. Lewin's three-stage model of change, consisting of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing, remains a significant contribution from his earlier work. This framework emphasizes the vital role of stabilizing and solidifying changes to establish new behaviors and practices as the organizational norm.

Unfreezing, as a stage in change theory, entails generating a sense of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. The subsequent stage, changing, involves the implementation of new behaviors and practices. Refreezing, the final stage, focuses on reinforcing these new behaviors and integrating them into the organizational culture. Both transformational theory and change theory highlight the significance of effective communication, collaboration, and support in facilitating enduring change within an organization.

Effective leaders can use these theories to promote change and innovation within their organizations. By creating a shared vision and inspiring followers to achieve their full potential, leaders can build a sense of trust and cooperation that supports successful change initiatives. Leaders can also use Lewin's change theory to guide the implementation and management of change within their organization by creating a sense of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, implementing new behaviors or practices, and reinforcing new behaviors to create lasting change. Overall, transformational theory and change theory provide valuable insights into the role of leadership in promoting change and innovation within organizations and can help leaders develop effective strategies for managing change and promoting organizational success.

Empirical Literature Review

Following a comprehensive literature review across leadership, women in leadership, school leadership, and leadership in higher education, with a specific emphasis on effective leadership within educational settings and the challenges and barriers faced by Female Heads in effectively fulfilling their roles, I further delved into leadership studies and research in both the Nepali context and the international arena. Particularly, a limited number of empirical studies (Bhattarai & Maharjan, 2016; Dhakal, 2019; Jha, 2019; Kafle, 2013; Pokharel, 2024; Sharma, 2019; Subba, 2019) have explored leadership practices within Nepali schools. Additionally, foreign empirical studies (Asbury, 1995, Schuster, 1993; Ummannel, 2012) have significantly contributed to enriching our empirical understanding of global school leadership dynamics.

In a study by Subba (2019), challenges faced by first-generation female students in Nepal pursuing higher education were examined. Strategies to overcome obstacles,

such as balancing academic and domestic roles, were shared. Barriers, including gender discrimination, early marriage, and inadequate implementation of women's rights, were identified. The study emphasized the significance of higher education for independence and future security. Issues such as insufficient infrastructure, unfair attitudes from teachers, and the absence of maternity leave policies were raised. Overall, the study sheds light on the challenges and motivations of female students in Nepal's higher education system.

The findings reveal concerns about barriers to higher education access and gender equity at advanced levels. Despite the increasing number of women with graduate degrees, proportional representation in educational leadership roles remains a challenge. Enrollment numbers decline as students' progress to higher levels, with a growing gender disparity favoring males. This has implication for selecting not only female teachers for teachership but also for leadership position.

The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) USA reveals that there has been an increase in the percentage of FHTs in both public and private elementary and secondary schools from 2011–12 to 2020–21. In 2020–21, females accounted for 56% of public-school Head Teachers and 63% of private school Head Teachers. Additionally, there has been a decrease in the percentage of Head Teachers with 20 or more years of experience during the same period. The NTPS provides valuable data on the demographics and experiences of Head Teachers in the United States (NCES, 2023).

Guinée's (2014) study in Nepal examined the empowerment of educated women from disadvantaged backgrounds. While education is often touted as a means to empower women, the study found that empowerment is intricately tied to family and societal dynamics. It highlighted that education alone cannot fully empower women;

rather, it must be understood within the context of their broader social interactions and intimate relationships. This insight underscores the multifaceted challenges faced by female leaders seeking empowerment in complex social structures, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to address these interconnected issues.

Because of social and cultural norms that primarily identify leadership as a man's domain, women are disproportionately underrepresented in leadership roles in business, politics, and higher education (Alqahtani, 2019). These gender stereotypes and societal norms play a significant role in perpetuating the unequal distribution of leadership and power among genders.

According to Schuster (1993), the lives of women have been significantly affected by gender role socialization and gender discrimination. Her studies revealed that a consciousness of the struggle for gender equity has shaped the expectations and influenced the well-being of educated American women. Schuster (1993) suggested that even women still feel somewhat limited in their choices and perhaps even disenfranchised by a society that does not provide structures for women to comfortably sustain multiple career and family roles during their early adult years.

Openness and willingness for self-examination and a lifelong commitment toward personal mastery are critical for anyone who takes up the challenge of being an educational administrator (Carrow-Moffett, 1993). To become effective educational administrators, educators must first challenge themselves to explore and develop their awareness of the barriers and enhancers that they bring to the educational process.

According to Bhattarai and Maharjan (2016), although males and FHTs grow up in similar cultural settings, their relationship with the setting differs in many cases. Thus, it causes differences in their ways of thinking and behaving. In turn, the female way of leading an organization has many differences from that of male Head Teachers.

Dhunge (2013) explored the opportunities and challenges faced by female school head teachers in Nepal. The research was based on a subjective, humanistic model of social research, utilizing a case study approach. The study involved five public schools, three from rural and two from urban areas, all led by women school heads, selected through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted, and the data was analyzed thematically.

Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) explored women's self-perception and the challenges they face in leadership roles concerning workplace and home equality. Despite advancements in senior management representation, persistent obstacles were identified. Contrary to prevailing literature, the study revealed that women maintain an androgynous view of leadership, integrating traditionally masculine and feminine qualities. This challenges conventional perceptions that associate leadership exclusively with masculine traits. Emphasizing androgynous leadership underscores the importance of embracing diverse leadership styles beyond gender stereotypes, promoting inclusivity, and recognizing the effectiveness of varied leadership approaches in achieving organizational goals. Despite facing career prejudice, these women assert their rightful place as leaders.

The study by Bhatti and Ali (2021) explores how socio-cultural factors influence the experiences of women in academic leadership. It reveals that cultural norms constrain women's advancement to senior roles, presenting challenges such as gender stereotypes and aggravation. Despite these obstacles, women achieve success through support from society and cultural strategies. The study underscores the importance of sharing success stories to enhance visibility in higher education leadership.

One of the key findings of Bhatti and Ali's (2021) study was gender-based discrimination, with the origin of discrimination often rooted in the participants' own homes. The school's key stakeholders and society at large were also found to hold biases against women head teachers. Time management emerged as a major challenge for these women leaders, leading to frustration and a desire to step down from their roles. The study highlighted the lack of a conducive environment for women in school leadership, limited policies to promote women's leadership, and the difficulty in translating these policies into practice, mainly due to social, cultural, and biological limitations.

Bhatti and Ali's (2021) study's conclusion emphasized that women in leadership roles face significant barriers, with traditional patriarchal mindsets serving as a significant obstacle to women's empowerment. The need for a cultural revolution to challenge these deeply ingrained biases and promote equity at all levels of society was underscored.

This study sheds light on the complex challenges faced by women in leadership roles within the Nepalese educational system. It emphasizes the urgent need for societal and cultural transformation to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for women in leadership positions. However, it also points out the entrenched nature of these challenges, which require systemic changes beyond just policy implementation.

The various studies by different scholars' study revealed that all Head Teachers faced challenges in their roles, but those from lower-performing schools identified a higher number of challenges. In contrast, Head Teachers from higher-performing schools provided more comprehensive accounts of their roles as school leaders. The findings suggest that the understanding and practices of Head Teachers' leadership roles have a significant impact on students' learning outcomes. The study highlights the

importance of effective leadership in improving academic performance in public secondary schools in Kathmandu, Nepal.

The study by K. C. (2013) focused on women school head teachers in Nepal, examining opportunities and challenges. It followed a case study approach, selecting five public schools led by women and conducting in-depth interviews and observations. The study revealed gender-based discrimination starting in participants' own homes and bias against women head teachers in society. Time management was a major challenge, leading some women to contemplate leaving their leadership roles. Limited policies, coupled with social, cultural, and biological constraints, hindered women's leadership. The deeply rooted patriarchal mindset was identified as a key obstacle to women's empowerment, emphasizing the need for a cultural revolution to promote equity at the grassroots level.

Singh's (2016) study on academic performance in community schools in Kathmandu Metropolitan City revealed disparities between high- and low-performing schools. The research focused on school Head Teachers' perceptions and practices, focusing on six key dimensions of effective leadership: vision building, goal setting, positive school culture, support, leadership development, resource management, and continuous improvement. The findings highlight the importance of effective school leadership in driving academic success.

Azzari (1988) emphasizes the crucial role of interpersonal skills in effective school administration. The study delves into different areas of administrators' responsibilities and highlights the importance of interpersonal techniques in managing them. Topics covered include building trust, motivation, conflict resolution, managing resistance to change, and fostering creativity. The author underscores the significance of administrators possessing qualities such as tolerance, empathy, and control when

interacting with stakeholders. Overall, the study offers valuable insights into the role of interpersonal skills in educational leadership.

Adhikari and Adhikari (2021) examined the significance of women's participation in promoting good governance in community schools in Nepal. They utilize interpretative inquiry, participation, and feminist standpoint theories in their study conducted in two community schools in Lalitpur. The findings suggest that meaningful representation of women in school governance can address challenges like absenteeism, low parental participation, resource mobilization issues, and a lack of transparency and accountability. These positive transformations contribute to community development. However, creating an enabling environment is crucial to ensuring women's meaningful participation in school governance. The article provides valuable insights for educationists, planners, and development workers, emphasizing the importance of women's participation in fostering inclusive and equitable educational environments that uphold good governance practices.

Grubb (2015) addresses the significance of high school leadership and the specific challenges that differentiate high schools from elementary and middle schools. The book delves into the history and criticisms of high schools, emphasizing the need for reforms that can effectively tackle these challenges. The concept of multiple pathways is proposed as a promising approach to reform. The implications for high school leadership are explored, including the preparation of leaders through pre-service and in-service programs. The role of districts in supporting high schools and the potential future of these developments are also examined. The author recognizes the contributions of Head Teachers, assistant Head Teachers, and teacher-leaders, offering valuable insights for high schools and reformers seeking to understand and address the unique demands of high school leadership.

Khadka and Bhattarai's (2021) qualitative study in community schools showed that political interests often outweigh qualifications and experience in school affairs. Their research, conducted in both urban and rural schools, identified a concerning "integrity triad" comprised of nepotism, negative party politics, and impunity, significantly influencing school integrity practices in Nepal.

Horth and Buchner (2014) in their book, delved into various innovative thinking skills that play a vital role in fostering innovation within institutions and organizations. They emphasized the importance of skills such as paying attention, personalizing, imaging, imagining, patterning, and playing, which enable the development of fresh perspectives, creative solutions, and a culture of innovation. Additionally, the authors highlighted the value of skills like serious play, crafting, collaborative inquiry, and synthesis, which encourage unconventional approaches, the acceptance of paradoxes, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and the ability to connect unrelated information. By nurturing these skills, institutions and organizations can enhance their problem-solving capabilities and drive successful innovation.

The research and studies cited by Funk and Polnick (2005) focus on effective practices for FHTs in educational leadership. The studies by Gupton and Slick (1996), Gupton and Slick (1996), and Mullen and Browne-Ferrigno (2018) highlight key strategies for success in this role. These include being prepared, psychologically and politically aware, highly qualified, persistent, fair, and learning from failure. Additional emphasis is placed on developing people's skills, maintaining professionalism, establishing support systems, upholding ethics, and fostering self-belief. The studies also emphasize the importance of the 'human touch' in leadership, acting as change agents, empowering teachers, and implementing innovative programs. Stress management, relationship-building, and mentorship are recognized as crucial factors for

success. Wilmore (1998) highlights the importance of personal well-being, finding a hobby, and having a broader vision beyond the immediate role. Ultimately, the primary objective of FHTs is to ensure effective learning for all students in their schools.

Funk and Polnick (2005) have cited the findings of Helterbran and Rieg (2004), highlighting the persistent barriers faced by women aspiring to become school Head Teachers. These barriers include a lack of encouragement, a scarcity of female role models and mentors, higher qualification expectations, concerns about discipline management, gender-related challenges, relocation obstacles, and difficulties in achieving work-life balance. To overcome these barriers, it is crucial to create supportive environments, implement mentorship programs, challenge biases and stereotypes, promote work-life balance policies, and provide targeted support for women in educational leadership.

Equal standards for hiring Head Teachers should be emphasized, recognizing the unique skills and abilities that FHTs bring, including their humanities skills in student discipline. Administrators should provide strong support and encouragement to help women overcome barriers and succeed in their roles as school leaders (Adhikari, 2019; Alainati, 2024; Arik & Dunne, 2014; Santiago, 2021; Villamor et al., 2014).

Grogan and Andrew (2002), as cited in Funk and Polnick (2005), further highlight challenges faced by FHTs, such as balancing personal backgrounds with stakeholder expectations, addressing institutional barriers, navigating gender dynamics, and adapting to changing roles and demands. FHTs must work towards systemic change, understanding the complexities of the educational system, and continuously enhancing their leadership skills.

Morley and Crossouard (2015) uncovered that the rapid expansion of education in Nepal has strengthened established hierarchies, leading to substantial barriers for

women to attaining senior academic and decision-making positions. Research indicates that deeply ingrained patriarchal cultures, gender stereotypes, and societal preconceptions play a significant role in perpetuating a predominantly male-oriented management model. These findings underscore the intricate and multifaceted challenges associated with gender and education in Nepal and the wider region.

Pappu's (2021) study explores the education of girls and women in Afghanistan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka within the context of gender and education in South Asia. The research investigates similarities, differences, and the transformative impact of education on gender roles and hierarchies in these countries. It adopts a feminist perspective, emphasizing education's role in enhancing women's social recognition through participation, completion, and quality learning. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study provides a comparative analysis of gender-related education issues across these South Asian nations.

To sum up, effectively addressing the challenges encountered by women seeking to become school Head Teachers necessitates a comprehensive approach. This involves establishing an inclusive and supportive environment, questioning existing biases, and offering personalized assistance. These efforts are essential in advancing gender equality and fostering the empowerment of women in leadership positions within the education sector.

Theoretical Construct

Drawing on transformational leadership theory, this study aims to explore the performance of female leaders in Nepal's community school system. The theoretical construct asserts that transformational leadership can be an effective approach for female education leaders, as it emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating

followers to work towards a common vision. This, in turn, can lead to enhanced organizational performance and greater job satisfaction among employees.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework acknowledges the impact of gender stereotypes and cultural norms on the performance of female leaders in this context. Gender biases and stereotypes can create significant barriers for women in leadership positions, potentially impeding their performance and effectiveness. Cultural norms associated with gender roles and expectations may also influence how female leaders are perceived and evaluated in the education sector.

The transformational leadership theory posits that effective leaders inspire and motivate their followers by utilizing a range of techniques, such as setting high expectations, offering personalized support, modelling behavior, and providing feedback. For female leaders in Nepal's community school system, this theoretical construct offers a valuable perspective on the challenges and opportunities they may face.

Transformational leadership theory also highlights the importance of creating a shared vision among stakeholders in an organization. In the community school system in Nepal, where there may be multiple stakeholders with varying perspectives and interests, developing a shared vision can promote greater collaboration and support among stakeholders, ultimately resulting in improved outcomes for students.

In essence, understanding the relationship between transformational leadership and the performance of female leaders in Nepal's community school system can inform efforts to promote gender equity and enhance the quality of education in the country. Female education leaders can drive better outcomes for students by leveraging their unique strengths and perspectives, inspiring and motivating their followers, and developing a shared vision (Peters, 2014). They can use technology to enhance student

engagement and create a collegial learning environment (Peters, 2014). Female representation in school leadership has been linked to improved school outcomes (Alves, 2022), and female Head Teachers in Ghanaian junior high schools have been found to create work environments that encourage creative thinking and challenge the status quo (Kwadzo, 2010). Feminist educational leadership, as demonstrated by female Head Teachers in New Zealand, is characterized by a commitment to social justice and the ability to construct unique leadership practices (Strachan, 1999).

The figure one below highlights key performance components that influence school culture, impacting professional development, collegial support, and the learning environment. Central to this framework is performance components divided into resource management, instructional management, interpersonal relations, and public relations including school culture. Resource management includes the management of physical and human resources, along with financial aspects. Instructional management focuses on professional development, learning outcomes, extracurricular and co-curricular activities (ECA/CCA), and classroom management. Interpersonal relations cover the dynamics among staff and students, while public relations emphasize engagement and communication with parents, the wider community, and various stakeholders. These elements collectively shape the school culture, fostering a supportive environment that promotes professional growth, collegial support, and a conducive learning atmosphere.

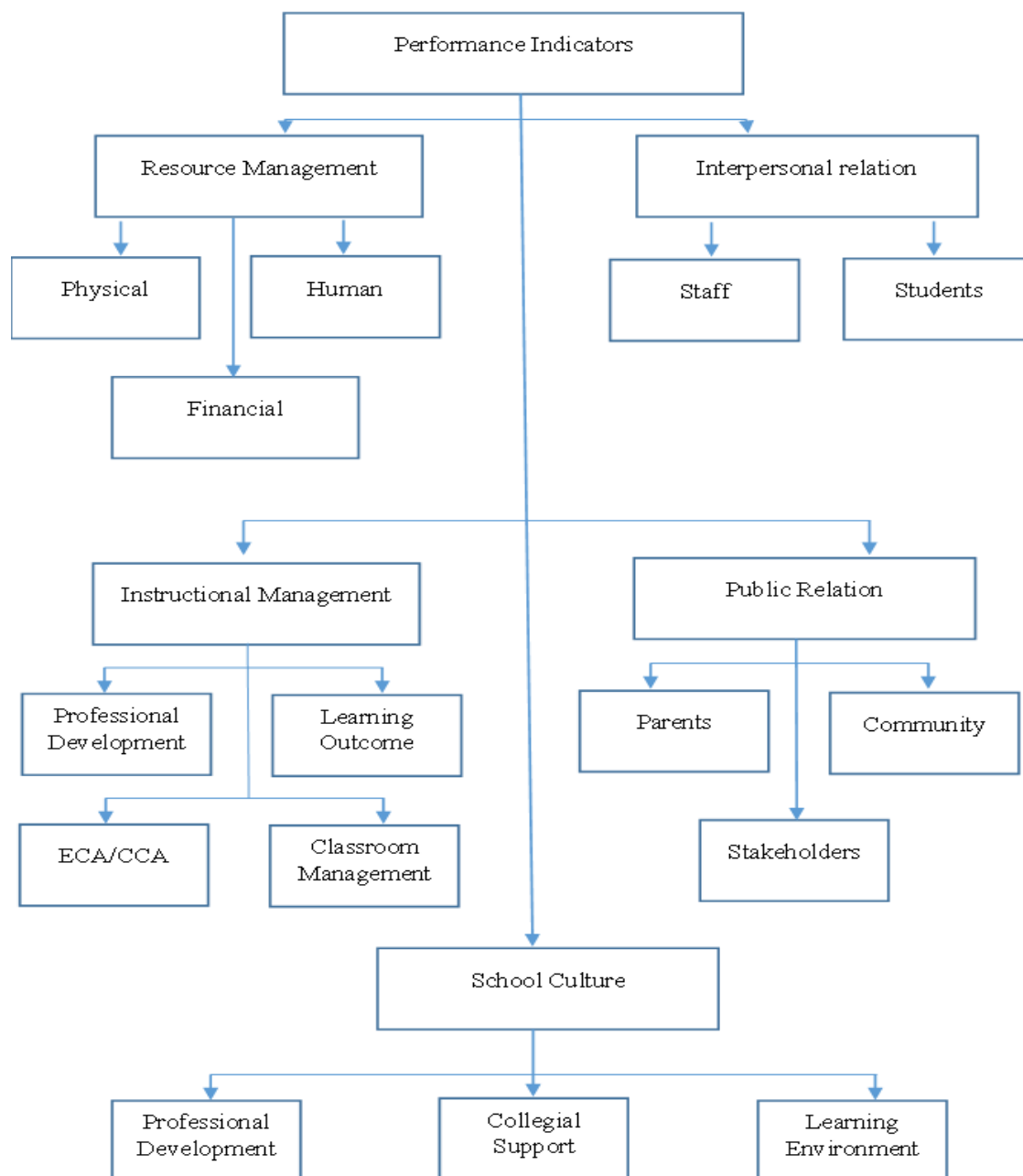
Figure 1*Conceptual Framework: Performance of Female Heads*

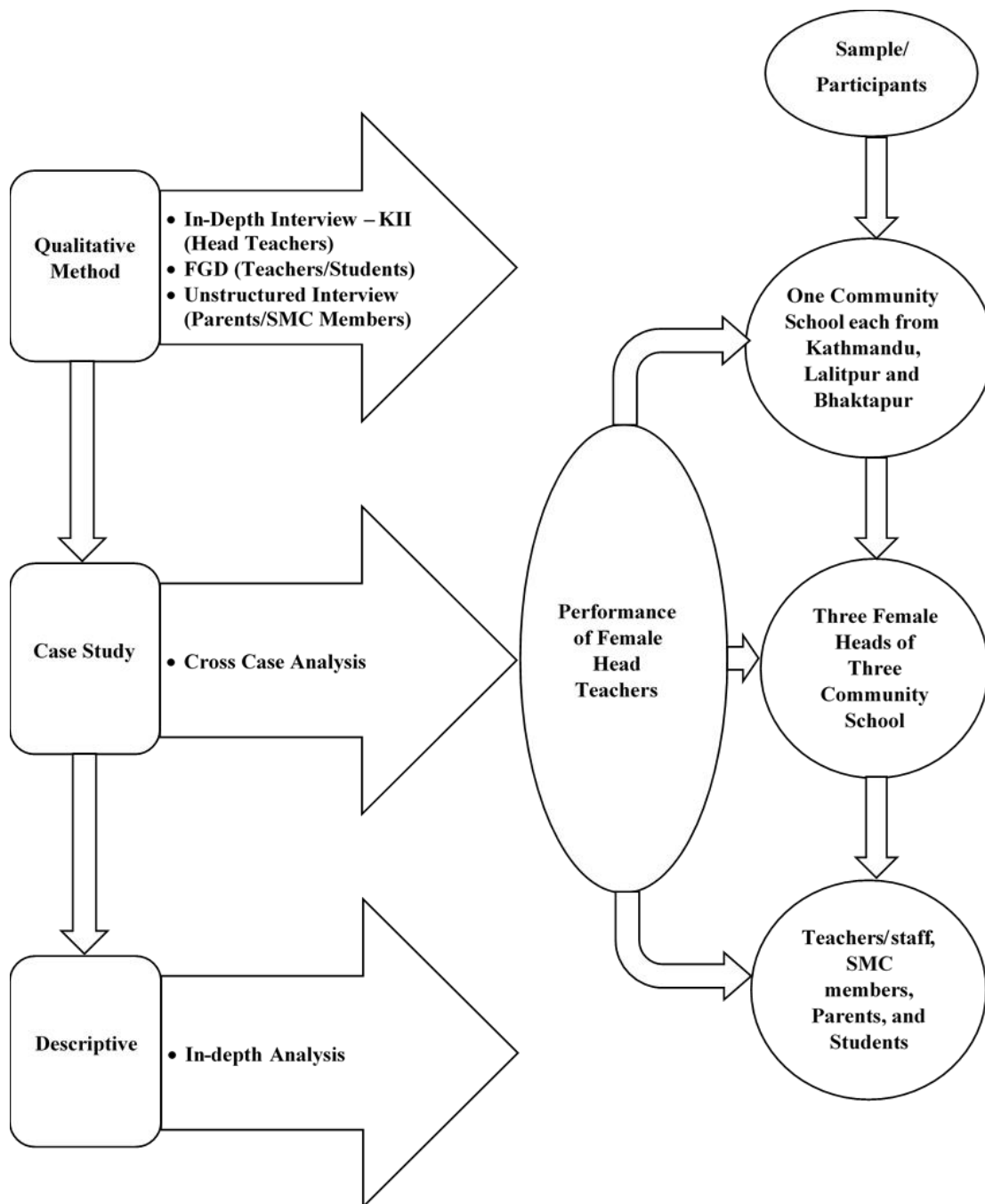
Figure one presents a comprehensive framework for exploring the performance of female school heads, combining qualitative methods, case studies, and descriptive analysis. The qualitative approach includes in-depth interviews (KII), focus group discussions (FGD) with teachers, and school and class observations, providing rich insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The case study encompasses cross-case and cross-sectional analysis, facilitating comparative picture to understand the broader context and variables affecting Female head teachers' performance. The descriptive analysis emphasizes pattern matching and coping strategies, offering a detailed account of the observed phenomena and the strategies employed by the head teachers.

Participants in this study comprise three Female Heads of community schools, teachers, and School Management Committee (SMC) members. Additionally, the study involves five school heads from five different countries to provide a reference to Nepal. In Nepal, the research includes one school head each from the districts of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. This integrated approach ensures a thorough and nuanced evaluation of the effectiveness of Female head teachers across various contexts and perspectives, contributing valuable insights to the field of educational leadership.

Figure 2

Performance of Female School Heads: Methods, Design, Tools, Sample, and

Approach



Implications of the Review for the Study

The implications of the review of the research on the performance of female head teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, can be understood through its relation to the major areas of research: resource management, interpersonal relations, public relations, instructional management, and school culture.

Resource Management

A literature review by Nzeli (2013) emphasizes the importance of effective resource management by female head teachers in enhancing school performance. This underscores the need for strategies like budget planning, infrastructure maintenance, and staff allocation. Further research is recommended to explore specific resource management practices employed by female head teachers in Kathmandu Valley. Additionally, Joshi et al. (2022) highlight the role of female teachers in improving academic performance, particularly in science and the Nepali language. Khanal and Ghimire (2024) identify effective leadership models, including a commitment to the job and dedication to identifying challenges, as crucial in successful community schools in Nepal. Furthermore, Muliati et al. (2022) discuss the effectiveness of school resource management in improving the quality of education, focusing on the implementation of school-based management (SBM). These findings collectively emphasize the significance of effective resource management and leadership in enhancing school performance. Future research could delve deeper into specific practices and their impact on Kathmandu Valley schools.

Interpersonal Relations

Khanal and Ghimire (2024) identify various leadership styles and strategies, such as a strong commitment to the job and the ability to identify and address challenges, as significant factors contributing to the success of community schools in

Nepal. Su (2022) underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships in school management, particularly in fostering a harmonious and relaxed atmosphere. Majid's (2017) research emphasizes the critical role of interpersonal communication skills, including effective speaking and communication, in enhancing teaching and learning quality. Additionally, Alasheev and Tsvetkova (2000) highlight the impact of interpersonal relations, particularly the teacher-student-parent "triangle," on shaping young people's personalities and the learning process.

The review underscores the pivotal role of interpersonal relations in the leadership approach of female head teachers. It suggests that cultivating positive relationships with staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders contributes significantly to a conducive learning environment and overall school performance. Further exploration could delve into the specific communication strategies and conflict resolution techniques employed by female head teachers in Nepali community schools to maintain effective interpersonal relations.

Public Relations

Sharma (2008) emphasizes the importance of community involvement in school management and discusses the benefits and prerequisites of transferring management responsibility to the community. This aspect is particularly relevant for female head teachers, as highlighted by Sperandio (2011), who underscores the empowering effects of women leading non-formal schools in rural Bangladesh. Kirk (2004) explores the potential of female head teachers to promote gender-just peace through their role in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. Khanal et al. (2023) complement these perspectives by examining the context-specific leadership practices of successful community school head teachers in Nepal, emphasizing the importance of understanding the context and applying effective leadership models.

These studies collectively underscore the significance of community involvement and effective leadership, especially for female head teachers, in enhancing public relations and community engagement in school governance. The review underscores the importance of establishing strong public relations for female head teachers to effectively engage with the broader community. It suggests that forging partnerships with local authorities, community leaders, and educational organizations can support school improvement initiatives and foster a sense of collective responsibility for educational outcomes. Future research could further explore the strategies employed by female head teachers in Kathmandu Valley to enhance public relations and community involvement in school governance.

Instructional Management

The exploration of instructional management and its impact on academic achievement, especially under the leadership of female head teachers, emerges as a pivotal research area (Aureada, 2021; Emiru, 2020; Khanal & Ghimire, 2024; Zulu, 2004). Both Emiru (2020) and Zulu (2004) underscore the necessity for effective instructional leadership, with Emiru particularly noting a lack of familiarity with this concept among school staff. Additionally, Aureada (2021) emphasizes the importance of monitoring and evaluating teachers' competencies, while Khanal and Ghimire (2024) highlight the significance of context-specific leadership practices in driving student progress and attainment. These studies highlight the importance of exploring the instructional leadership practices of female head teachers in Nepali community schools and their impact on teaching effectiveness and student achievement. They emphasize the critical role of instructional management in fostering academic success, particularly under the leadership of female head teachers. Key factors include curriculum planning,

pedagogical innovation, and teacher professional development, all essential for high-quality instruction and positive student learning outcomes.

School Culture

The acknowledgement of school culture's impact on the performance of female head teachers and their leadership of change initiatives presents a nuanced and multifaceted issue. Sperandio (2011) underscores the empowering effects of women assuming non-traditional roles in education, which can be further amplified by a positive and inclusive school culture. Syaputra and Santosa (2022) highlight the pivotal role of organizational culture in enhancing teacher performance while acknowledging the challenges of implementing change. McLeod (2012) emphasizes the correlation between teachers' sense of efficacy and school culture, suggesting that a supportive culture can boost teacher morale and performance. Additionally, Khanal and Ghimire (2024) underscore the significance of context-specific leadership practices, which play a pivotal role in fostering a supportive and empowering school culture.

In summary, the review highlights the significance of effective resource management, interpersonal relations, public relations, instructional management, and school culture in enhancing the performance of female head teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The findings underscore the pivotal role of these factors in driving school improvement efforts under the leadership of female head teachers.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Research is based on observable experience or empirical evidence. Quantitative and qualitative research methods are often viewed as opposites (Newman et al., 1998). Quantitative research is thought of as theory testing, while qualitative research is theory building (Newman et al., 1998). Other researchers believe that quantitative and qualitative research can be combined successfully, even in the same study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Newman et al. (1998) suggest an alternative that neither the qualitative research philosophy nor the quantitative research philosophy encompasses the whole of research. Both are needed to conceptualize research holistically.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of user research play important roles in product development. Data from quantitative research, such as market size, demographics, and user preferences, provides important information for business decisions. Qualitative research provides valuable data for use in the design of a product, including data about user needs, behavior patterns, and use cases. Each of these approaches has strengths and weaknesses, and each can benefit from combining them with one another.

The topic of this study was initially proposed in the synopsis and has been refined through a detailed literature review and informal discussions with various stakeholders (research scholar, supervisors and experts). This process has helped clarify and focus the research question. In recent decades, more researchers in various disciplines have increasingly embraced qualitative research paradigms. Qualitative data offer advantages such as preserving chronological flow, tracing causal relationships clearly, and providing rich explanations. Moreover, qualitative research often leads to unexpected and valuable discoveries, known for their credibility. Words and narratives

convey vivid and meaningful details, which can be more persuasive to readers—whether other researchers, policymakers, or practitioners—than mere numerical summaries (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Research Design and Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research approach, specifically adopting a case study method. Qualitative research methods encompass a variety of data sources, including interviews, published data, documents, and observations, enabling in-depth interpretive analysis (Davies & Dwyer, 2007). This approach provides nuanced insights into human behavior, emotions, and personality traits that quantitative research cannot capture.

The choice of research design considered factors like the audience's familiarity with the approach, the researchers' experience with various qualitative designs, and department preferences (Creswell et al., 2007). Researchers' comfort with the structure, writing style, and outcome of the chosen design also played a role in the decision-making process.

Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources, such as interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, were used in the empirical phase of the study. Secondary sources, including government documents, internet resources, and articles, contributed to the theoretical literature.

The study's primary objective was to explore the performance of female school heads in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. Specific schools were carefully selected, with female head teachers (FHTs) as the principal participants in the investigation. A case study approach was utilized, incorporating in-depth interviews, key informant interview (KII), and focus group discussion (FGD) to gain a comprehensive understanding of these schools and their female head teachers.

The research aimed to assess the performance and challenges faced by female heads in community schools. The study's participants included school head teachers, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, School Management Committee (SMC) members, education officers, and students. The research was conducted in three schools, each located in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur.

Furthermore, the study sought international viewpoints on female school leadership by interviewing school head teachers from India, China, South Korea, Thailand, and the USA through online platforms. Data collection methods encompassed in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, literature review, analysis of various documents, internet resources, journals, articles, and virtual meetings.

Primary data sources, specifically in-depth interviews, KII and focus group discussions, offered valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of female school leaders. Secondary sources, such as literature, government documents, and articles, provided theoretical context. The purposeful selection of schools in the Kathmandu Valley with FHTs yielded a rich source of information for the study. The case study approach effectively delved into the specific experiences of female school leaders, yielding a profound understanding of the challenges they face and the strategies they employ.

The chosen research methodology was a case study approach. The primary aim of this study is to address essential research questions exploring the effectiveness of female head teachers in community schools across three districts of the Kathmandu Valley. The unit of analysis in this study was female school heads, revealing significant insights into their leadership styles, the obstacles they encountered in their roles, and the support they received from colleagues and the broader education system.

Site Selection

The primary goal of this research was to uncover universal principles, a task impractical to achieve by studying entire populations (Best & Kahn, 1999). Qualitative research, often focusing on specific phenomena within intricate social settings, led to the adoption of a 'case study' design. In this study, one school from each of the three districts in the Kathmandu Valley—Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur—was selected for intensive analysis. This approach allowed for a deep understanding of the effectiveness of female head teachers in community schools, in Kathmandu Valley.

Various data sources were explored to assess the performance of female head teachers, including fieldwork, interviews with female head teachers, and study of existing articles, government documents, and dissertations. Additionally, insights were gathered from international contexts through online interviews conducted on platforms like WhatsApp, Messenger, and Zoom with female head teachers from different countries.

To establish a rich understanding of the subject, the research followed qualitative backgrounds, emphasizing the importance of involvement in the everyday experiences of individuals and organizations, guided by scholars like Wolcott (2008). The researcher's role was to adopt a holistic approach, aiming for a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the topic.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants, specifically three experienced female head teachers from community schools in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. The case sampling technique allowed for logical generalizations by selecting specific, representative cases that aligned with the research focus. This method ensured that insights from these cases could be applied to other similar contexts, thereby enhancing the relevance and applicability of the study's findings.

In qualitative research, sampling is strategic, allowing for valid inferences from modest populations. The research focused on female head teachers in community schools within the Kathmandu Valley, ensuring the selection of sites and participants that served the research purpose and questions.

In summary, this research utilized a qualitative 'case study' approach, combining local and international data sources. By delving into specific schools within the Kathmandu Valley. The study aimed to comprehensively understand the effectiveness of female head teachers in community schools. The sampling techniques and data collection methods were chosen to align with the research objectives, ensuring a demanding and insightful exploration of the subject matter.

Participants Selection

The study's participants primarily consisted of three female head teachers (FHTs) from three districts within the Kathmandu Valley. Additionally, the sample encompassed schoolteachers, non-teaching staff, parents, one accessible community member, one accessible member of School Management Committee (SMC) representatives, one education officer each from the local municipality, and a group of five students each from the respective schools. The selection of female head teachers (FHTs) for this study in the Kathmandu Valley was guided by the case sampling technique, as recommended by Engel and Kuzel (1992) and Patton (1990), as cited in Miles and Huberman, (1994). This approach prioritizes logical generalization and the application of findings to similar cases rather than aiming for statistical representativeness, aligning with the principles emphasized by Glaser and Strauss (1967), as cited in Miles and Huberman (1994).

Criteria for selecting FHTs included holding a Master's degree and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree, ensuring a robust educational background. Moreover, each

FHT had at least three years of experience in leadership roles within community schools. This focused selection aimed to provide insightful perspectives from experienced leaders, essential for understanding the dynamics within community schools in the Kathmandu Valley.

As suggested by Yin (2018), qualitative research often emphasizes a single case, which can provide rich and illuminating insights, especially when the case is 'critical.' Furthermore, within a school case study, individual classrooms can be considered as distinct cases. To avoid the complexities associated with studying three cases, including variability, data overload, comparability challenges, and time and cost constraints, this research chose to conduct case studies of single schools within each of the three districts of Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur.

Purposeful sampling prioritizes depth and richness in information collection, aiming to achieve comprehensive insights (Ritchie et al., 2013). The decision for purposeful sampling was preceded by obtaining necessary permissions, and it involved identifying schools with unconditional access to facilitate prolonged interviews and support from school authorities. In the context of qualitative research, where random sampling can introduce bias, purposeful sampling is often preferred, especially when dealing with a limited number of cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

An additional rationale for employing a small sample relates to the philosophical underpinnings of case study, a method that values depth and detail over quantity. Engaging deeply with participants' experiences is more manageable with a smaller, well-selected sample.

Englander and Morley (2021) highlight the importance of whether participants possess relevant experiences rather than merely focusing on sample size, especially in qualitative research like case studies. In the realm of human science, Giorgi (2009), as

cited by Padilla-Daz (2015), suggests that working with at least three participants is recommended to manage the complexity of unique perspectives.

Considering these insights, the study's choice of three participants, each representing a different district, is well justified. This approach prioritizes data richness while maintaining practical manageability for a comprehensive exploration of the research topic.

All three community schools selected from three different districts share several common features that are integral to this study. Each of the three participants, who serve as school head teachers, possesses a substantial foundation in teaching, having spent several years as educators prior as head teachers. This prior teaching experience equips them with a valuable perspective, allowing them to reflect on their current responsibilities as head teachers through the lens of their earlier teaching roles.

Each of the three participants in my study has accumulated experience from a substantial five-year tenure as a school head teacher. This extended experience equips them with an in-depth understanding of the intricate nuances and challenges associated with leadership in the context of community schools. Importantly, their collective background also encompasses a minimum of five years serving as school head teacher, granting them profound familiarity with the unique leadership issues and challenges that prevail within community schools.

A shared feature among the three participants is the variation in student populations within their respective schools. The deliberate selection of these participants considers the complexities that school head teachers face in leading such diverse student bodies, representing various cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. This selection ensures an in-depth exploration of the challenges and experiences inherent in their roles.

Selection of High School Head Teachers

In many countries, including Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA, the process for selecting school Head Teachers for high schools varies. In Nepal, school Head Teachers are appointed by the government, based on their academic qualifications and performance in an open competition process. The candidate's experience and leadership qualities are also taken into consideration during the selection process (Malla, 2017).

In India, the process of selecting school Head Teachers varies by state and school board. Generally, candidates must meet certain educational and experience requirements and then undergo a written and oral examination to test their knowledge and skills in education management (Bhowmick, 2018).

In China, school Head Teachers in high schools are generally selected by a combination of appointment and election. In many cases, candidates are first appointed by the government and then elected by a committee of teachers and other education professionals (Chen, 2016).

In South Korea, the process for selecting school Head Teachers involves a rigorous evaluation of candidates' academic and professional qualifications, as well as their leadership abilities. The evaluation process includes a written examination, an oral presentation, and a review of the candidate's work experience and performance in education management (Kim, 2018).

In the United States, the process for selecting school Head Teachers for high schools is typically managed by local school districts. Candidates must meet certain educational and experience requirements, and then undergo a rigorous selection process that may involve multiple rounds of interviews, assessments of their leadership abilities, and a review of their past performance in education management (Smith, 2018).

In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, several other criteria may be considered in the selection of school Head Teachers for high schools in countries such as Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA. These can include experience in curriculum development and implementation, communication skills, and the ability to work collaboratively with teachers and other stakeholders (Sahoo, 2016; Shah, 2018; Zhang, 2021).

In some countries, there may also be a focus on ensuring diversity in the selection of school Head Teachers, to promote equitable access to education and ensure that schools are representative of their communities. For example, in the United States, some districts have implemented policies that require a certain percentage of school Head Teachers to be women or members of underrepresented racial or ethnic groups (Lapan, 2019). In recent years, there has also been an increasing emphasis on the need for school Head Teachers to possess strong digital literacy skills to effectively manage and utilize technology in education (De Bruyckere et al., 2016).

Overall, the selection of school Head Teachers for high schools in countries like Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA is a complex process that involves careful consideration of a range of factors, including educational and professional qualifications, leadership abilities, and performance in education management.

Data Collection and Generation

Data collection is vital for research, involving the gathering of information through methods like interviews, FGDs, and observations. Good data forms the basis for analysis and measurement scales, making effective data collection essential for research success.

According to Patton (2014), qualitative research methods exhibit four key characteristics: the utilization of qualitative data, consideration of context, empathic

neutrality, and inductive analysis. Qualitative research offers rich, in-depth descriptions of events and phenomena, leading to a deeper understanding than experimental methods. The emphasis on context acknowledges its impact on research. Inductive analysis allows for the exploration of data without predefined hypotheses, fostering the discovery of new insights.

I have employed a case study approach, gathering data through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and documentation, with a primary focus on schools as the study context. This approach, as highlighted by Wolcott (1994), involves 'watching, asking, and examining,' enabling a comprehensive understanding of the cultural context being investigated (Anderson, 1998).

The study utilized a diverse range of data sources that informed and complemented each other, integrating realist, idealist, and critical perspectives to avoid polarization and promote a hybrid approach (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Given the pandemic-induced closure of schools, most activities, including classes and administrative functions, shifted to online delivery mode. Consequently, data collection methods were employed continuously for eighteen months to ensure comprehensive information gathering.

Thematic analysis was conducted on the data to answer the research questions, with specific scenarios captured from the study schools. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research method that involves identifying and analyzing patterns or themes within a set of data. It is a flexible and adaptable approach that can be applied to a variety of data types, including interviews, focus groups, surveys, and other forms of textual data. Thematic analysis involves a systematic process of coding and categorizing data to identify recurring patterns or themes, which can then be used to

generate insights and draw conclusions about the research question or topic of interest. The resulting themes are often used to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of the participants and to explore the complexities and nuances of the research topic. The pictures and raw data collected were processed for six months through correction, editing, and transcribing.

In qualitative research, the selection and utilization of research instruments are crucial for systematic data collection and generation. Common qualitative research instruments include interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis. Each of these tools was carefully considered in line with research goals, with their respective strengths and limitations in mind. This systematic approach ensured the comprehensive collection of rich and detailed information, enabling the identification of significant patterns and themes through thorough analysis.

Case Study

I used a case study approach to explore the experiences and challenges of female head teachers (FHTs) in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. The study is process-oriented, adaptable, and aims to uncover rich, context-specific insights. The 'Illustrative' model provides realistic examples, enhancing understanding of educational practices and policies. This approach aligns with the interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the complexities inherent in FHTs' roles and experiences in the field.

Education is a process and, at times, requires a research method that is process-oriented, flexible, and adaptable to changing circumstances in a dynamic context. Given these boundaries, a case study is often appropriate, which is true with this research as well. It is focused on understanding the significance of everything related to the case or cases. It seeks knowledge about the history and/or development of the case (e.g.,

person, group, school, community) and probes deeply to discover knowledge about the case. I used it in my study; I have further explained it below.

A case study is a way of organizing social data to view social reality. It examines a social unit, which may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution, or a community (Best & Kahn, 1999). Radley and Chamberlain (2012) discussed Bromley's study, which highlights that a case represents not only an individual but also serves as an exemplar or even a prototype for a specific category of individuals. In other words, a case study can provide valuable insights and understanding that extend beyond the individual being examined.

According to Kaiser (2007), a case study is defined as a method used to study complex instances. In this approach, a thorough understanding of a specific instance is achieved through detailed description and analysis. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of the case, enabling a deeper understanding of its intricacies and dynamics. This method is known for its eclectic nature, as it examines significant incidents or events to uncover valuable insights into the dynamics of a particular situation (Anderson, 1998).

The strongest argument in favor of a case study is that it incorporates a chain of evidence—a tight and interconnected path of recording evidence—so that readers who were not present to observe the case can follow the analysis and come to the stated conclusion. Hence, the case study itself strives for internal validity, trying to understand what is going on in the studied situation (Anderson, 1998). Besides, the case study approach involves an in-depth examination of one or multiple real-life cases to explore complex issues (Anisza, et al., 2023). Case study research is interpretive and seeks to bring a case to life. It is, therefore, a qualitative form of inquiry defined by an interest in a specific phenomenon in its real-life context with dependability on multiple sources of

information. Kaiser (2007) and Flyvbjerg, (2011), mentioned that they identified six types of case studies, viz., illustrative, exploratory, critical instance, program implementation, program effects, and cumulative, to provide a useful directionality for researchers to select a specific type for their study. Among these, I have adopted the ‘Illustrative’ model because it is descriptive and intends to add realism and in-depth examples to other information about a program or policy.

A case study approach was employed, focusing on three schools located in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. This method was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the research topic by exploring the issues and challenges faced by female head teachers in community schools, as well as their performance status. The case study approach was particularly suitable due to the limited number of schools with qualified female heads. This allowed me to conduct a selective, in-depth analysis, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of female leadership within these educational settings.

In the case study approach, I, as a researcher, meticulously utilized a diverse array of data collection instruments to gather comprehensive insights from various participants involved in the study. Observation served as a foundational tool, enabling me to immerse myself in the daily activities, interactions, and nuances of the selected schools. Through direct observation, I was able to grasp the organizational culture, instructional practices, and overall dynamics permeating the school environment. This firsthand observation provided invaluable context for understanding the contextual factors influencing the performance and challenges faced by female head teachers and other stakeholders.

Furthermore, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews played instrumental roles in capturing the rich perspectives and experiences of key

stakeholders, ranging from female head teachers (FHTs) and teachers to school non-teaching staff, parents, School Management Committee (SMC) members, students, and education officers from municipal authorities. These methods offered participants a platform to articulate their viewpoints, share personal anecdotes, and express their concerns and triumphs within the educational landscape. By engaging in dialogues and probing discussions, I delved deeply into the multifaceted realities and intricacies of the school community, thereby enriching the qualitative data collected.

Additionally, semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted through video conferencing or Zoom meetings with school leaders from diverse international contexts provided a valuable global perspective (during the Pandemic). These interviews facilitated comparative analyses, offering broader insights into the experiences, challenges, and innovative practices of female school heads beyond the borders of Nepal. By tapping into this international network, I broadened the scope of my inquiry, enriching my understanding of the implications and best practices for female school leadership on a global scale.

The subsequent cross-sectional analysis of the data involved a meticulous comparison and synthesis of information drawn from various sources, including case studies, international interviews, literature reviews, government documents, internet sources, and scholarly articles. Through this qualitative analysis approach, I discerned patterns, detected trends, and identified commonalities across different contextual settings and temporal frames. By triangulating data from multiple sources, I corroborated findings, deepened my understanding, and derived comprehensive insights into the multifaceted issues and challenges confronting female head teachers in community schools in Nepal. Moreover, the inclusion of global perspectives enriched

the discourse, providing valuable insights into the broader landscape of female school leadership and its implications for educational practices worldwide.

Interview Process and the Activities

As a case study researcher, my research journey involved thorough preparation and in-depth engagement with the participants, primarily female school-functioning heads. Drawing upon insights from an extensive literature review and my own experience in a school leadership role, I identified three fundamental themes: initiation, operation, and continuity, which underpinned the functioning of the schools under study.

The initial step in the research process was to establish contact with potential participants and obtain their approval. This involved initiating contact through phone calls, where I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study, and proposed a series of interviews at their preferred time and location. Subsequently, I provided each interviewee with an information summary and a consent form, ensuring they had a clear understanding of the study's objectives and procedures and guaranteeing the confidentiality of their participation.

The core of the research focused on conducting interviews with female school heads, involving direct field interactions to gather their insights and experiences. During these interviews, I encouraged participants to share their experiences, insights, and perspectives related to school functioning. Using a semi-structured interview format, I posed open-ended questions designed to explore the themes of initiation, operation, and continuity, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and provide rich qualitative data. Additionally, I employed active listening techniques and probing inquiries to delve deeper into specific topics of interest and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. Through these

interviews, I gained detailed insights into the challenges, successes, and strategies of female school heads in managing school leadership.

In conducting qualitative research, I prioritized active listening, a spirit of exploration, and a curiosity-driven approach that allowed participants to freely narrate their unique stories while avoiding overly structured conversations (Maple & Edwards, 2010). Following Polkinghorne's (1995) advice, as cited by Maple & Edwards (2010), I aimed to gather stories from interviewees by asking them to share their events, experiences, and perspectives related to the research topic.

To facilitate this narrative-driven approach, I engaged myself in a deep and immersive process of interaction with participants that extended well beyond the confines of structured interviews. During interactions, I actively listened to participants' responses, allowing them the space and freedom to express themselves fully. I adopted an open-ended questioning technique, encouraging participants to share their stories in their own words without imposing predefined categories or frameworks. This approach fostered a sense of trust and rapport, enabling participants to feel comfortable and empowered to share their experiences authentically.

In addition to verbal communication, I also utilized audio recording as a tool to capture the richness and nuances of participants' narratives. By recording interviews and interactions, I ensured that no valuable insights were lost during the data collection process. These recordings served as a valuable resource for later analysis, enabling me to revisit and transcribe participants' stories with precision and accuracy. Moreover, the use of audio recording allowed me to focus fully on the interaction at the moment without the distraction of taking extensive notes, thereby facilitating a more natural and fluid exchange with participants.

Overall, by embracing a narrative-driven approach and leveraging audio recording as a complementary tool, I was able to engage in a meaningful and authentic dialogue with participants, eliciting rich and detailed accounts of their experiences, perspectives, and insights relevant to the research topic.

Visiting participants' schools multiple times was integral to the research methodology, allowing for a thorough exploration of the identified themes. These visits were carefully planned with flexible intervals, ranging from daily interactions to longer periods of 15 days or up to a month. This approach accommodated the dynamic nature of the study and the varied schedules of participants while facilitating an in-depth examination of evolving dynamics within the schools.

During these visits, I was engaged in extensive informal interactions and observations, complementing formal research activities. Immersed in the school environment for entire days, I participated in daily rituals, ceremonies, and activities like report card distribution, felicitations, parent-teacher meetings and teacher meetings, gaining firsthand experience and insights into school functioning. Actively participating in these events enabled me to develop a very good understanding of the educational context and the facts of school life.

Moreover, my presence extended beyond passive observation as I accompanied female school heads, teachers at different levels (basic and high school level teachers), and occasionally students throughout the research process. This approach facilitated diverse perspectives and insights from various stakeholders within the school environment. Whether participating in administrative meetings, observing classroom activities, or engaging in informal conversations, I actively immersed myself in the school community's everyday experiences and interactions.

Repeated visits to participants' schools and various interactions provided a thorough understanding of the research themes. This approach gave me a deeper insight into how schools operate and helped build strong relationships with participants. By actively participating in school life, I captured rich and contextualized data, enhancing the depth and quality of the research findings.

The study extended over a period exceeding six months, incorporating an online phase, to facilitate a thorough exploration of the selected schools. This extended duration provided ample time for in-depth interactions, participatory observations, and informal dialogues, significantly enhancing the depth of understanding of the research. Rather than sporadic involvement, the study fostered ongoing and meaningful relationships with the school communities, thereby enriching the authenticity and depth of the investigation.

Central to this case study was the comprehensive engagement with both participants and the school environment. This approach highlighted the complex nature of school operations, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how these institutions were started, managed, and maintained from the perspective of female school heads.

In case study research, the primary data sources are the narratives that emerge from interactions with research participants. These narratives were collected through unstructured interviews and personal conversations. Subsequent sections offer a detailed account of the preparations for and execution of these interviews, elucidating the methodology employed to gather and analyze primary data.

Key Informant Interview/ In-Depth Interviews

The key informant interview is a crucial data collection technique in qualitative research as it recognizes the expertise of individuals in their own experiences, enabling them to provide detailed and insightful descriptions of their environment (Anderson,

1998). This method serves two main purposes: to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues related to the case and to identify the central figures in the case. Informal conversations with interviewees are conducted to collect specific information that can help interpret observations and verify emerging themes and ideas. This technique provides an insider's perspective and illuminates values, concepts, and beliefs that cannot be directly observed. Therefore, I effectively utilized the key informant interview technique in my study to gather valuable insights.

According to Patton (1990), as cited in Best and Kahn (1999), the primary aim of interviewing is to explore the thoughts and perspectives of the interviewee. The objective of open-ended interviewing is not to influence or shape the interviewee's ideas but rather to comprehend their viewpoint. Therefore, an interview is a deliberate and focused activity that transcends casual conversation (Anderson, 1998).

Interviews are a valuable data collection tool in qualitative research as they allow for deeper engagement with participants and more in-depth information than questionnaires. Additionally, interviews provide the opportunity for researchers to observe non-verbal cues and contextual factors during the interview process. The interview setting is often the respondent's place of work or home. Each interview is unique and can provide valuable insights for the researcher. There are two main types of interview protocols: normative and key informants. The normative protocol is used to gather views from many people using straightforward questions, while the key-informant protocol targets unique respondents who can provide valuable feedback on the subject being studied. (Anderson, 1998).

I considered adopting normative and key-informant interview protocols alternatively, through (both) selected semi-structured and/or most of unstructured instruments, as may be necessary during data collection. The interviews are considered

to be comprehensive and open-ended, and the data from interviews consist of direct quotations from the respondents about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 1990, as cited in Best & Kahn, 1999).

I conducted in-depth interviews with all three female school head teachers who were research participants. In addition to face-to-face interviews at the respective schools, I maintained contact with them through email and telephone, particularly when visiting the school wasn't possible due to the pandemic or when I needed clarifications regarding the information they provided. Subsequently, after transcribing the data, I revisited the participants to verify the accuracy of their initial responses, and all participants confirmed the reliability of their statements.

The in-depth interviews occurred at the participants' schools, with the choice of location being a collaborative decision. All interview sessions were audio-recorded, ensuring a comfortable and secure environment for the head teachers in line with recommendations. The one-on-one interviews with each head teacher varied in duration, ranging from one to three hours. Some interviews took place online during the pandemic, lasting approximately one hour each, while others were conducted on-site with prior consent and appointments with the head teachers. Throughout these interviews, the female head teachers shared their experiences as teacher leaders.

In my study, I conducted a substantial portion of the interviews in an informal style, actively seeking unique situations to introduce predetermined themes. The method of recording the interviews varied depending on the context, the interviewee, and the topic of discussion. On certain occasions, I used my mobile phone to electronically record the conversation, while on others, I opted to make notes in a dedicated study diary. Additionally, there were instances where I preferred to be an attentive listener during the conversation and document the details afterwards.

However, I exercised caution when using electronic recording, as it had the potential to disrupt the intimacy of the conversation. Therefore, I primarily employed this technique during focus group discussions, personal interviews, and meetings to ensure accurate information capture.

To guide the in-depth interviews effectively, I developed semi-structured interview guidelines, which were piloted with mock participants, including three male head teachers and two female head teachers from both public and private schools. These mock interviews served as a preparatory step before conducting the actual sessions with the female head teachers, who were my research participants. Distinct interview guidelines were created for various groups, such as FHTs, high school, middle school, primary level, pre-primary teachers, admin staff, and lower-level staff. Each set of questions aimed to unearth the lived experiences of participants at their respective levels. The interview sessions were conducted in an open and discussion-oriented manner. The interview schedules contained specific questions tailored to the nature of work for each participant group, as outlined in the annexes.

The study involved in-depth interviews with female head teachers (FHTs) to gather data on their experiences in their roles. The interviews began by asking FHTs about their early teaching experiences, challenges, and support from individuals like teachers and School Management Committee members. They were then asked to identify their most important subordinate and explain their choice. They were also asked about any barriers they faced and the individuals who provided support. The aim was to provide a comprehensive understanding of FHTs' perspectives and experiences in their leadership roles. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed, providing valuable insights into their role management and support from the school community.

The study also focused on conducting interviews with a few teachers who had extensive, long-term working experience with different head teachers of the school, such as the previous head teacher (HT) before the current head teacher. The participants were selected based on their long-time service to the school. The interview began by asking the teachers about their first working experience as teachers in the school to create a comfortable environment.

They were then asked to describe one of the most memorable events or incidents involving the previous and present head teacher of the school that they would like to share. The teachers were prompted to explain why they chose that particular event or incident and to describe the challenges the head teacher experienced. They were also asked to explain how the HT effectively dealt with or resolved the situation.

This approach aimed to gather rich data about the teachers' experiences working with different head teachers of the school and the challenges they faced. The data collected through the interviews was coded for analysis. The resulting data provided insight into how teachers perceive the role of the head teacher and the qualities that are important for effective leadership in the school.

I used the second approach to get accurate information from secondary sources that I required for my investigation.

Reflective Journal

Following each interview, I diligently maintained a reflective journal, an essential component of my research methodology. This journal served as a repository for my thoughts, emotions, and reflective insights, capturing nuances and reactions that may not have been fully captured in the audio recordings. It provided a comprehensive record of my engagement with the study, offering valuable insights into the research process.

The importance of maintaining a research journal in qualitative research is underscored by scholars such as Glesne (2016), as cited in Limberg et al. (2020). Such a journal serves as a platform for researchers to document personal feelings, perceptions, and thoughts that naturally arise during interactions with participants, data collection, and subsequent analysis. This reflective practice allowed me to navigate the complexities of the research process with heightened self-awareness.

Furthermore, my research study served as a tool for introspection, enabling me to reflect on both the research process and my role within it. By documenting my thoughts and experiences, I gained insights into how I positioned myself for the study, fostering transparency and reflexivity in my research practice.

The study also facilitated a comparative analysis of my experiences with those of the participants, offering a unique perspective for understanding convergences and divergences. This comparative element added depth and context to the research findings, enriching the overall understanding of the study.

In essence, the research study emerged as a valuable companion throughout my case study, aligning with Glesne's (2016) insights as cited by Limberg et al. (2020). It served as a repository of insights, a tool for self-awareness, and a platform for comparative analysis, significantly enhancing the depth and complexity of the research process.

Observation (School and Classes)

Observation, particularly non-participant observation, is a valuable method in qualitative research, offering insights into social contexts (Fry et al., 2017; Lynes, 1999). This approach allowed me to observe phenomena as they naturally occur without actively participating, maintaining objectivity while gaining valuable insights (Lobo,

1992). In educational studies, non-participant observation has been instrumental in understanding leadership practices (Lynes, 1999).

In this study, I did non-participant observation to examine leadership practices in school decision-making meetings. These meetings are pivotal for shaping school policies and resource allocation. By observing them, I could gain insights into leadership dynamics and decision-making processes.

To ensure thoroughness and consistency, I used structured forms to document key details during observations. These forms included agendas, discussion topics, decisions made, and participant roles. Structured forms help maintain consistency in data collection across sessions (Lobo, 1992).

Before conducting observations, I obtained prior consent from participants, and ethical guidelines were strictly followed. This included respecting privacy and obtaining permission for audio or visual recordings.

In addition to audio recordings, I utilized supplementary methods such as checklists and photographs to enhance data collection. Checklists provided information on school resources and facilities, offering context for decision-making processes. Photographs, taken with permission, offered visual documentation of the school environment, enriching observational data.

Overall, non-participant observation provided valuable insights into leadership practices in educational settings. By systematically observing decision-making meetings and using supplementary methods, I gained a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics within schools.

The study utilized non-participant observation to analyze leadership practices during school decision-making meetings. It examined dynamics, processes, agenda structure, participants' roles, hierarchies, power dynamics, and decision-making

methods. Documentation included structured forms, checklists, and consent-based photographs. The study offers a comprehensive examination of leadership practices in educational settings.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

In addition to individual interviews, I facilitated focus group discussions (FGDs) in each of the three schools, involving eight to ten participants who met the same criteria as the individual interviewees. Drawing guidance from Silva (2008), these discussions provided a platform for participants to articulate their experiences and understandings, offering valuable insights into teachers' perspectives on female head teachers' (FHTs) performance.

Guided by Silva's methodology, the FGDs enabled participants to crystallize and articulate their experiences, fostering an environment conducive to listening to their colleagues' opinions and understandings. Leveraging the diversity within the groups enriched the conversations with a variety of perspectives and insights. Notably, the content of these discussions served the crucial purpose of triangulating data gathered from individual interviews and document analysis.

Furthermore, these FGDs significantly enhanced the exploration of the multifaceted nature of leadership within the school context. I scheduled these sessions during school breaks and immediately following school meetings, ensuring convenience and productivity. This strategic timing facilitated active participation and fruitful discussions among the participants.

Additionally, drawing insights from Belle (2012) and Tichenor and Heins (2000), the collaborative environments fostered during the FGDs were instrumental in supporting leadership development. Pehmer's et al. (2015) emphasis on professional development resonated with the study's exploration of changes in teaching routines,

which apply to the development of FHTs. Moreover, insights from Balasubramaniam (2019) provided a comprehensive framework for designing and implementing focus group discussions, further enriching the study's methodology. These studies collectively underscored the value of collaborative environments and professional development in enhancing leadership and teaching practices within educational contexts.

Three FGDs (one in each school) to analyze the perspectives of school teachers and staff towards female head teachers in three schools and three FGDs with students of three schools were conducted. Participants shared their experiences, leadership styles, interpersonal relationships, school culture development, and conflict resolution skills. The diverse group composition provided a range of viewpoints. The FGDs were strategically scheduled during school breaks and meetings to promote active engagement and in-depth discussions on leadership styles. The collaborative environment supported ongoing leadership development and explored potential changes in teaching routines, emphasizing the importance of dialogue in enhancing professional development and educational outcomes.

Field Notes

Field notes play a crucial role in qualitative research, particularly in case studies, serving as rich data sources for validation and context analysis (Best & Kahn, 1999). These notes are essential for documenting observations, audio recordings, or photographs taken during site visits, providing a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Despite their benefits, challenges such as avoiding interference and maintaining impartial, accurate observations exist (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). However, with proper training and practice, field notes become valuable tools for qualitative data collection and analysis.

During on-site visits, I diligently took comprehensive field notes, ensuring accurate and unbiased documentation of my observations. Following Patton's (2002) recommendation for direct and personal contact with study subjects in their natural environment, I recorded even the smallest details using a diary or mobile. This meticulous documentation process allowed for the creation of a clear audit trail for my study, capturing not only external observations but also my thoughts and reflections.

I incorporated field notes with careful attention to context and my positionality as emphasized by Burkholder and Thompson (2020) and Stokes (2024). The focus was on maintaining objectivity and avoiding interpretation during observations to preserve the integrity of the data. Katz (2015) underscores the significance of field notes in strengthening causal explanations and adding robust evidential support to the study.

I utilized archival field notes based on insights from Rinaldo et al. (2013), which highlight their importance in documenting observations and thought processes. This practice enhances the credibility and transparency of the research process by providing a detailed record of data collection and analysis. By integrating field notes effectively, informed by literature and practical study, I enriched the depth and richness of my qualitative study.

Meaning Making

Following each interview and observation, I started the process of sense-making by thoroughly documenting my experiences, thoughts, and emotions in a research study. Upon completing data collection and receiving feedback from participants, I started the task of analyzing the narratives and synthesizing meaningful insights. Both narratives and interviews proved indispensable in qualitative research, offering profound insights into personal stories, perspectives, and intricate human phenomena, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of diverse experiences.

It is widely acknowledged among researchers that there is no singular correct approach for analyzing and presenting narratives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2019). In this context, Clandinin and Connelly (1996) propose three distinct approaches that narrative inquiry can adopt: broadening, which involves generalizing, burrowing, and focusing on an in-depth exploration of a specific event; and restoring, which entails creating new narratives, imbuing them with meaning, and exploring their significance within the larger life story. For this study, I chose the restoring approach to meaning-making. I delved into the FHTs' experiences in leadership, positioning each experience within their narratives as well as the narratives of others.

To extract meaning from the narratives, I meticulously employed the transcribed interviews and field notes to identify pertinent categories, following a methodology akin to traditional qualitative analyses, as suggested by Polkinghorne (1995, as cited in Maple & Edwards, 2010). I placed particular emphasis on categories that contributed to a deeper understanding of the contextual backdrop of my study. In this phase of my analysis, I employed the constant comparative method, comprising four essential steps: (1) initial coding, (2) category integration, (3) reduction of the number of categories, and (4) theory comparison. This method facilitated a structured and systematic exploration of the narratives, leading to the emergence of meaningful insights within the study.

In the initial phase of analysis, I applied open coding to the interview transcripts, systematically scrutinizing each line of the interviews. This process was guided by the exploration of distinct incidents, ideas, or events related to the experiences of female head teachers within the context of case study research (Bartrum & Karp, 2018). During this coding stage, two types of categories emerged: those that I constructed as part of the narrative explanation and those drawn from the relevant

literature on case study approaches in education. Moving on to the second phase, I revisited the interview transcripts and my field notes, paying meticulous attention to the properties and intricate details within each category. This phase aimed to uncover nuanced relationships among these categories, all within the specific context of female head teachers' experiences and the case study approach.

In the third phase, I performed a judicious reduction of categories, prioritizing those directly aligned with my research questions. These categories were selected to provide a deeper understanding of the broader case study framework and the unique experiences of female head teachers.

Finally, in the last phase, a comprehensive comparative analysis was undertaken, systematically comparing the refined categories with the existing literature on case study approaches and the specific experiences of female head teachers. The results of this narrative analysis are presented in the subsequent chapter, shedding light on the rich tapestry of insights derived from this research endeavour.

Documentation

Document analysis is a crucial tool in qualitative research for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the case being investigated (Best & Kahn, 1999). In my study, I utilized a variety of written materials, such as government and school records, reports, letters, and autobiographies, among others, to gather valuable data in the form of quotes, articles, and reviews. To ensure thorough analysis, I collected these documents from a range of sources, including libraries, government departments, and online educational websites.

In descriptive qualitative research with a case study approach, field notes taken during site visits are also highly significant. These notes provide a detailed account of

real-life situations and experiences related to the case and can uncover contextual factors that may not be apparent through other data collection methods.

In the following paragraphs, I have provided a brief overview of the data measurement instruments used in my research, as well as their reliability and validity.

Trustworthiness and Transparency

According to Anderson (1998), the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research, regardless of the method used to gather data (such as observation or interviews). Researchers need to interpret social reality from both emic and etic perspectives, where emic represents the participant's viewpoint and etic represents the researcher's perspective. The researcher must first comprehend the phenomena through the participant's eyes and then analyze them within their theoretical and conceptual framework, considering the participant's perspective to define, unravel, reveal, or explain the study world.

In qualitative research, reliability relates to the consistency and transparency of responses among multiple coders of data sets. This can be enhanced by detailed field notes, recording devices, and the transcription of digital files. On the other hand, validity in qualitative research is referred to as 'trustworthiness' by Lincoln and Guba (1985), which is achieved through credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To establish credibility, long engagement in the field and triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators are needed. Qualitative researchers focus on trustworthiness rather than reliability, ensuring that results are subject to change and instability. Kihlgren (2016), referring to Eisner (1991), put forward standards such as structural corroboration, consensual validation, and referential adequacy to establish the credibility of qualitative research, moving away from the term 'validation'. Similarly, Moss (2003), discussed the reconceptualization of

validation and identified four types: triangulation, construct validation, face validation, and catalytic validation.

In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary data collection tool (Anderson, 1998). Researchers must comprehend and interpret social reality from two perspectives: emic (mine) and etic (theirs). To ensure trustworthiness, which is the naturalist's equivalent of internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A thick description is necessary to confirm the transferability of results between the researcher and the studied individuals. Rather than relying on consistency, qualitative research emphasizes dependability, which confirms that results are subject to change and instability. Kihlgren (2016), citing Eisner (1991), proposed standards like structural justification, consensual authentication, and referential appropriateness to establish the credibility of qualitative research. Triangulation is used to interpret findings and point the analysis towards a clear conclusion based on the evidence collected through multiple data sources to nullify concerns about reliability (Anderson, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To address the criticism of a lack of trustworthiness in the case study method, researchers use triangulation to ensure their findings are supported by multiple data sources (Anderson, 1998). Triangulation, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), involves using independent measures to agree with or not contradict a finding. Tuchman (1981) emphasizes the importance of considering multiple perspectives to account for bias in primary sources. By self-consciously using multiple sources and methods, researchers can build a verification process largely based on the data collected. Triangulation, therefore, is a way for researchers to arrive at findings through multiple instances and sources while ensuring validity and trustworthiness.

Anderson (1998) suggests that the possibility of generalizability or external validity in a case study depends on the typicality of the case and the phenomena involved. In the case of community schools in Kathmandu Valley, similarities and common occurrences in educational management suggest that the lessons learned from this case study may have potential generalizability to other situations and settings, making it a valuable resource.

Recent approaches to addressing the issues of reliability and validity in descriptive writing have emphasized the importance of reflexivity, which acknowledges that the researcher is an integral part of the study setting, context, and culture (Parajuli, 2002). This understanding highlights the need for an 'ethic' that recognizes the reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the researcher. By engaging in such a practice, the perceived gap between the researcher and the researcher can be reduced, thus mitigating concerns around representation and legitimation (Parajuli, 2002).

In conclusion, expert judgments play a significant role in establishing the reliability and validity of the case study method. Selecting a limited number of observable incidents based on sound, established theories can ensure the accuracy of the findings. Therefore, seeking guidance from experts in the field, including the research supervisor, is crucial for ensuring the success of the study.

Transferability and Transparency of Data

Data analysis is often compared to navigating a maze with multiple paths (Anderson, 1998). Qualitative data analysis is an ongoing process that constantly evolves and follows a particular pattern. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), qualitative data focuses on natural occurrences and everyday events in natural settings over a prolonged period, allowing researchers to gain a strong understanding of what everyday life is like. As a result, qualitative "thick descriptions" are vivid and have an

air of authenticity that can deeply resonate with readers. Qualitative data, with its emphasis on people's lived experiences, is well-suited for uncovering the meanings that individuals attribute to events, processes, and structures in their lives, including their 'perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, and presuppositions' (Ruddell, 2017). This approach is also useful for connecting these meanings to the social world around them.

According to Best and Kahn (1999), the initial step in analyzing qualitative research is to organize the data. This can involve voluminous notes from various sources, such as observations, interviews, and documents. The researcher may organize interview data by individual respondents, while observations may be considered either individually or by grouping similar occurrences together, with a focus on identifying differences among individuals, settings, or times. Once the data is organized, the second stage of data analysis involves describing various aspects of the study, such as the setting (temporally and physically), the individuals being studied, the purpose of the activities, the viewpoints of participants, and the effects of the activities on the participants. After organizing and describing the data, the final and most critical stage of the analysis process is interpretation. I have followed these guidelines from Best and Kahn (1999) in my own case-based research and qualitative data analysis.

Exploring Themes and Patterns

In the study, data analysis and synthesis drew from several methodological approaches. The foundation included the utilization of initial coding schemes, the identification of emerging themes from the data, and a holistic exploration of the phenomenon beyond existing literature. The initial coding schemes were derived from constructs informed by the literature and aligned with the conceptual framework that guided the study. These themes were born out of the data collected from interviews,

observations, and focus group discussions, subsequently organized and categorized to extract meaning from the dataset.

The data analysis commenced with an open-coding process applied to the responses of the female head teachers (FHTs). It aimed to identify themes that naturally surfaced from the data while acknowledging the influence of literature and the conceptual framework. My endeavor was to categorize and label these themes as they emerged within the transcripts. This involved a comparative analysis of the codes originating from the FHTs' transcripts and a sample of teachers' transcripts. This process permitted an exploration beyond the existing literature, enabling the identification of shared themes among the study participants and challenging my initial interpretation of the phenomenon.

Upon analyzing the data collected from interviews, observations, and focus group discussions, I identified various potential themes that described different aspects, including those related to FHTs, teachers, the literature review, and observations. These open codes were used to revise the preliminary conceptual framework, define content categories, and develop a coding scheme. The preliminary conceptual framework was initially grounded in the research questions and literature review, reflecting my initial hypotheses regarding the attributes of FHTs, teachers, and their school environment conducive to development and transformation. Clustering similar open codes under relevant content categories was essential to streamlining the coding process.

In the analysis of interview and focus group transcripts, a systematic and iterative approach was employed to derive meaning from the dataset. Comparative assessments of codes were made to discern similarities and differences, and the literature was consulted to gain deeper insights. Descriptive codes were applied to convey meaning and aid in data organization. This approach, as advocated by Miles and

Huberman (1994), accentuated the importance of conveying the meaning derived from the data, surpassing the use of alpha-numeric codes. To identify recurring and outlying themes, a frequency chart was created, and consistent reference to the literature was maintained to seek explanations for emerging patterns.

The data analysis journey continued with the condensation of clusters, ensuring that none were eliminated while preserving the narrative of the research participants. The initial coding scheme, rooted in the conceptual framework, and the revised scheme resulting from open coding were thoughtfully integrated. This meticulous process of data analysis facilitated an exploration beyond existing literature, uncovering new and recurring themes. Consequently, it contributed significantly to answering the research questions and advancing a more comprehensive understanding of the attributes of FHTs, teachers, and their school environment that fostered development and transformation within the educational context. Details of the initial and revised coding schemes, which encapsulate this methodical approach to data analysis, can be found in the Appendix. A brief description is provided below.

Initial Coding

Initial coding is a fundamental process in qualitative research that involves breaking down the raw data into smaller, manageable segments to identify basic themes and patterns. According to Charmaz (2006), initial coding allows researchers to stay close to the data and understand participants' experiences and perspectives. This phase is typically characterized by the use of descriptive codes (themes) that summarize the primary content of data segments, process codes that highlight actions, and in vivo codes that use participants' own words. The goal of initial coding is to create a comprehensive set of codes that capture the essence of the data, providing a foundation

for deeper analysis (Saldana, 2013). It involves annotating transcripts, field notes, and other data sources to ensure that all relevant information is categorized appropriately.

Revised Coding Scheme

The revised coding scheme builds upon the initial coding by refining and expanding the codes to capture more nuanced insights. This iterative process involves reviewing the initial codes, identifying emerging themes, and reorganizing the codes into more specific and hierarchical categories. Saldana (2013) emphasizes that during this phase, researchers often create subcodes and new codes to reflect a deeper understanding of the data. The revised coding scheme aims to enhance the depth and specificity of the analysis, allowing for a more detailed exploration of complex themes and relationships within the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This phase is crucial for ensuring that the analysis is thorough and that the final themes and conclusions are well supported by the data.

Interpretation Procedure

According to Patton (1990), as cited in Best and Kahn (1999), interpretation is a crucial phase in qualitative data analysis. It involves explaining the findings, providing answers to the 'why' questions, assigning significance to specific outcomes, and framing patterns in an analytic framework. It is important to avoid rushing into the creative work of interpreting data without first establishing solid descriptive data. The discipline and rigor of qualitative analysis depend on presenting coherent answers to major descriptive questions in a manner that enables others to understand and draw their interpretations.

Anderson (1998) notes that researchers often desire to tell the entire story, but it is impossible to know or communicate the entire story. The same is true for case study reporting, which can take two forms. The first is analytic reporting, which presents a

factual account consisting of an introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. The second is reflective reporting, where the researcher's voice is prominent throughout the report and data is interwoven into the story. In my study, the approach will be analytic reporting, but with the benefits of reflective reporting appropriately incorporated.

I have followed Wolcott (1994) in my study, moving across three main stages: description, analysis, and interpretation. Firstly, I have described 'what's going on' by using the words of respondents. The analysis stage aims to systematically identify key factors and relationships to demonstrate how things work. Finally, the interpretation stage aims to make sense of the context and provide insights into what can be done with the information gathered.

To prevent excessive data collection and data overload, I adopted a case study approach, with a specific focus on female heads of community schools in the Kathmandu Valley. This method is chosen to meet the specific needs of the research objectives and the unique context in which these leaders operate.

Case studies offer valuable insights into the daily experiences of professionals in educational settings. Research using researcher-driven diaries and interviews has illuminated the everyday activities and challenges faced by school Head Teachers (Stynes, 2014; Stynes et al., 2018). These methods provide rich, detailed data that goes beyond surface observations, offering a nuanced understanding of leadership practices within specific contexts (Miles, 2015). By focusing on daily interactions and routines, researchers can uncover the complexities of leadership styles, balancing macro-level theories with micro-level realities (Stynes et al., 2018). The personal reflections captured through these methods reveal the intense demands and emotional investment required in educational leadership roles (Stynes, 2014; Stynes et al., 2018).

Additionally, relational methodologies can elicit insights into caring and supportive leadership practices that positively impact both teachers and learners (Smit, 2018). Case studies thus provide a powerful tool for informing everyday educational practice and contributing to broader theoretical understandings (Miles, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted using a structured procedure. The Analysis treated each Female Head Teacher as an individual case, and then cross-case thematic analysis was employed to uncover common patterns and themes.

This case study examines the leadership practices and actions of a community school female head teacher who faced many challenges but worked diligently to improve student achievement and school climate over three years. The different research academics suggest that contextually responsive leadership practices rather than one best practice present better solutions to the complexity of urban school leadership (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

Alignment with Research Objectives

Case study is ideal for exploring lived experiences, as it involves a deep immersion into the daily lives and practices of participants. This approach enables the collection of rich, detailed data that goes beyond surface observations, providing a nuanced understanding of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which Female Head Teachers (FHTs) operate. By focusing on their daily interactions, behaviors, and routines, the research aims to uncover the complexities of their leadership styles and the specific challenges they face.

Exploring Lived Experiences:

The in-depth nature of case study research captures personal narratives and firsthand accounts, which are essential for understanding the lived experiences of FHTs (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach allows for documenting their personal stories,

struggles, triumphs, and day-to-day realities. Such detailed documentation offers insights that other methodologies might miss, helping to identify patterns and themes from the participants' perspectives and providing a holistic view of their experiences.

Investigating leadership styles

The case study allows for a detailed examination of leadership styles by observing FHTs in their natural environments. This method allows researchers to examine the practical application of leadership theories, including how FHTs engage with teachers, students, and the community and navigate the complexities of their roles (Patton, 2014). Through extended observation and interaction, the study aims to uncover the strategies and techniques employed by FHTs to motivate and inspire teachers, staff, parents, community members, and government officials, manage conflicts, and effectively implement educational policies.

Identifying Challenges

This approach is particularly effective for uncovering the specific challenges faced by FHTs, as it provides the opportunity to witness these challenges in real time and understand their context (Yin, 2018). The method allows the researcher to detect the socio-cultural and institutional barriers that FHTs encounter, such as gender biases, resource constraints, limited parental participation, and community expectations. Direct engagement with participants provides insights into how these challenges impact their leadership and the strategies they use to overcome them.

Contextual Understanding

Community schools in the Kathmandu Valley have distinct socio-cultural dynamics. Case Study facilitates a contextualized understanding of this setting, considering local traditions, values, and norms that influence educational leadership (Geertz, 1973). This approach ensures that the findings are grounded in the specific

realities of the research context, making them relevant and applicable to the local educational landscape.

In summary, the case study approach is justified as it aligns perfectly with the research objectives of exploring the lived leadership experiences, leadership styles, and challenges faced by FHTs. This method offers a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of female leadership in Nepalese community schools, contributing valuable insights to the broader fields of educational leadership and gender studies.

Moreover, to uphold confidentiality, all participants have been assigned pseudonyms. The results are conveyed in a narrative style with meticulous consideration of grammatical presentation. The dissertation adheres to the structure outlined in the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition format, as recommended by the Graduate School of Education (GSE), Tribhuvan University.

Transcription, Verification, and Recording

I organized the research data by creating separate folders for each school and recording the interviews, questionnaires, FGD, informal talks, and observation data in separate files. To transcribe the interview data, I listened to the recordings from my mobile recorder and wrote under the relevant theme headings that I had developed.

Transcribing the data was a time-consuming and monotonous task, but it was necessary to accurately capture the responses. I was concerned about the quality of the data for representation during the reporting process, as the participants' responses were not in English and needed translation. However, typing the responses directly into the files helped me accurately capture them.

Compared to the interview data, the observation data were relatively more precise. Despite the tediousness of the process, recording, transcribing, and verifying the data was necessary to ensure the accuracy of my research. After transcribing all the

data, I cross-checked them with the audio and my notes to verify the interview responses and questionnaire responses.

To safeguard the data, I implemented a rigorous backup strategy, storing duplicate files on three distinct devices: my laptop, desktop computer, and Google Drive. Furthermore, I secured an additional copy of the transcribed and typed data on a cloud computing platform and emailed it to my account for added redundancy.

Organizing Data for Analysis

The cross-case analysis model serves as a valuable framework for analyzing data collected from three cases. This analytical approach involves comparing the data across different cases to identify similarities and differences in themes or patterns. By systematically examining these similarities and differences, the researcher can generate explanations that shed light on the underlying factors contributing to the observed variations.

During the process of generating explanations, the researcher aims to provide a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences identified in the cross-case analysis. This step involves considering various contextual factors, theoretical frameworks, and existing literature to develop coherent explanations that align with the observed data.

The next step in the analysis process is developing conclusions based on the explanations generated in the previous step. Drawing upon the insights gained from the cross-case analysis, the researcher formulates well-grounded conclusions that address the research question or problem under investigation. These conclusions are supported by the evidence gathered from the data analysis and serve as the basis for contributing to the existing knowledge in the field.

Organizing the data for analysis is a critical step in qualitative data analysis. It involves converting raw data into something meaningful and readable. This process is typically done in four steps: developing codes, coding data, finding themes, patterns, and relationships, and summarizing data (Kawulich, 2004).

Finding Themes, Patterns, and Relationships

After coding the data, the next step is to take a break and observe the coded data for emerging themes, patterns, and relationships. This step involves checking for similarities and differences and seeing what each group is depicting.

Theme Development

The themes discussed in this chapter were developed through a rigorous and systematic data analysis process. This process of theme development is pivotal and sensitive in my research on the lived experiences of FHTs, with a focus on transformational leadership. I actively engaged with the substantial volume of text, meticulously reading and re-reading the data to uncover its underlying significance. This involved an iterative process of coding, categorizing, and synthesizing the information, allowing me to identify patterns and themes that accurately represent the participants' experiences and perspectives. By immersing myself deeply in the data, I ensured that the analysis was thorough and reflective of the nuanced realities of female head teachers.

The research involved site visits to three schools with female leaders as sample cases, and after each day of interviews, the researcher wrote memos and summaries to capture the key points and observations. These memos and summaries were instrumental in producing detailed reports on each school, which were then verified for accuracy through a member-checking process involving FHTs.

To analyze the interview data, I employed a coding process that involved categorizing the data into five major categories: instructional management, resource management, school culture, public relations, and interpersonal relations. These categories were derived from earlier studies and represented the key areas of focus in high-performing school systems. By employing an explicit and implicit model, the researcher synthesized multiple subthemes within each category to create coherent and meaningful themes that captured the experiences of female leaders at different levels. This analytical process helped uncover the underlying significance embedded within the extensive text data and ensured that the identified themes truly reflected the realities of female leadership in community schools in Nepal.

During the analysis phase, I maintained a record of their insights and interpretations of the collected data in memos. This practice commenced notably after the initial day of interviews, providing invaluable guidance for subsequent data collection. Following each site visit, I diligently crafted comprehensive summaries aimed at deepening data comprehension and shaping the case report's development. These case reports then underwent a meticulous review, engaged a supervisor, and selected FHTs from the respective schools to ascertain accuracy and credibility. This iterative cycle, involving data collection, memo writing, summary creation, and thorough review, persisted until a final draft of the report was achieved.

To facilitate the cross-case analysis, I utilized the five performance components that were selected as the research themes: instructional management, resource management, school culture, public relations, and interpersonal relations. The interview data were coded according to these themes, which were derived from earlier studies and represented the primary areas of focus in high-performing school systems. Additionally, three community schools with female leaders were selected as sample cases for in-

depth analysis based on their exemplary practices in the five major categories and alignment with the organizing themes. The case reports of these schools provided detailed descriptions of their successful approaches to achieving high performance and implementing effective teaching and learning practices. These case reports served as valuable resources for developing recommendations that could be applied to other schools striving to improve their performance.

By linking the research process to the theory and principles of theme development, I have ensured a robust and systematic analysis of the data, resulting in meaningful and relevant findings. The iterative nature of data collection, memo writing, and review, coupled with the careful coding and synthesis of themes, enhanced the credibility and depth of the research outcomes, providing valuable insights into the experiences and practices of female leaders in community schools in Nepal.

By adhering to a logical and systematic approach, I have successfully processed and explained the data collected from case studies. The utilization of the cross-case analysis model has played a crucial role in facilitating a comprehensive examination of the data, ultimately resulting in the generation of meaningful conclusions and the acquisition of valuable insights into the research topic. This rigorous analytical process has allowed me to uncover significant patterns, relationships, and variations within the data, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the research phenomena. By adopting this approach, the overall rigor and credibility of the study is maintained.

Summarizing Data

In the process of organizing data for analysis, the final step entails summarizing the remaining chunk of data while ensuring conciseness. This crucial step aims to streamline the data and make it more manageable for further analysis. By summarizing all parts of the data, the researcher prepares it for in-depth examination and

interpretation. This step helps identify key patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, facilitating a more focused and coherent analysis. It serves as a foundation for subsequent analytical tasks, enabling the researcher to extract meaningful insights and draw accurate conclusions based on the summarized data. Thus, summarizing the data acts as a pivotal bridge between data organization and the subsequent analytical stages, ensuring the coherence and analytical rigor of the research process.

Processing and Explication

One data analysis model that could be used for case studies is the "cross-case analysis" model. This approach involves comparing and contrasting the findings across the different cases to identify similarities, differences, and patterns in the data.

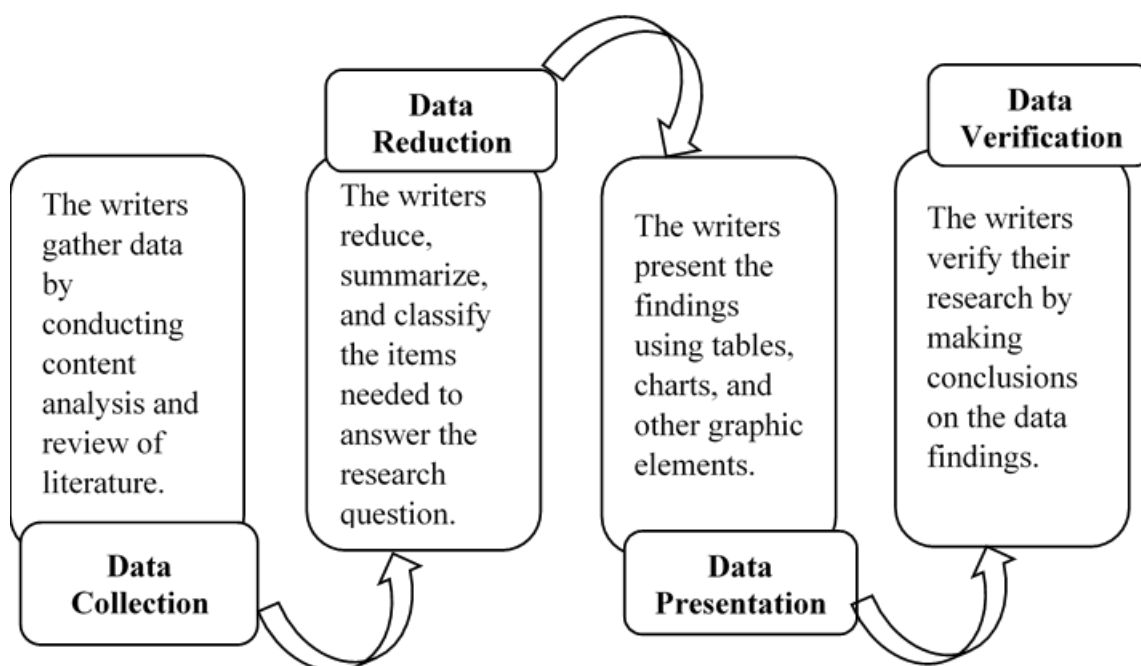
The process of analysis typically involves several systematic steps, as depicted in Figure three, below, which illustrates the Qualitative Data Analysis Model. This model is comprised of four key stages: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and data verification.

During the 'data collection phase', researchers gather data through content analysis and a review of literature, ensuring that the dataset is comprehensive and relevant to the research question. This initial step is critical for laying a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis. The next stage is 'data reduction', where researchers reduce, summarize, and classify the collected data. This step involves filtering out extraneous information and focusing on the most pertinent data that directly addresses the research question. By doing so, researchers can manage the data more effectively and enhance the clarity of the analysis.

In the 'data presentation stage', the refined data is organized and presented using various graphic elements are minimally used, such as tables, charts, and other visual aids. These tools are essential for clearly communicating the research findings,

making the data more accessible and understandable to the audience. The final stage, 'data verification', involves validating the research findings by drawing and confirming conclusions based on the analyzed data. This step ensures the reliability and validity of the research outcomes, reinforcing the credibility of the study.

Together, these stages form a systematic and rigorous approach to qualitative data analysis. This structured process facilitates a thorough examination and interpretation of qualitative data, ensuring that the research findings are robust and well-founded.

Figure 3*Qualitative Data Analysis Model*

Source: Adopted from Miles & Huberman, 1994

Mitigating Limitations in Qualitative Research

As the founder of a private school and Associate Professor at TU, the researcher had a pre-existing relationship with the Head Teachers of their school, which could have potentially influenced the perceptions of teachers and staff participating in the study. Concerns about potential harm may arise if participants fear that their honest responses may negatively impact their image, status, or impression at the school. This could lead to a reluctance to share their perceptions or to provide socially desirable responses.

To mitigate these concerns, the researcher took several steps to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. The researcher assured the participants that their responses would be kept confidential and that only the researcher would have access to the data. Additionally, the researcher emphasized that their

participation was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences for choosing not to participate or for providing honest responses. These measures helped to establish trust between the researcher and the participants and encouraged more candid and open responses.

Researcher's Biasness

The researcher's extensive involvement in the education sector, together with my personal views about the topic of the study, posed a potential risk of researcher bias. As a leader and teacher in the educational institute, I may have brought my approach to supporting the issues and challenges discussed in the study. Glesne (2016) cautions against the challenges of conducting research in one's institution or agency, also known as 'backyard research'. Despite these potential risks, the researcher took steps to minimize bias by using descriptive codes and continually referring to the literature to seek possible explanations for emerging themes or patterns.

Addressing Possible Threats

To maintain the accuracy and reliability of the data collected, I have implemented various strategies to address potential validity threats. The researcher took a formal approach throughout the research process, which helped to establish trust and confidence among participants. Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous, and the researcher created a conducive environment to elicit cooperation and openness from participants during the interviews.

To reduce the potential for researcher bias, I have employed several data collection methods to test and triangulate her developing theories. I gathered data and conducted member checks with both research participants and staff who were not research participants. Additionally, I have sought alternative explanations and challenged my own biases throughout the data collection and analysis process. I used a

critical approach throughout my research to ensure the conformability of my findings. I incorporated multiple sources of data, such as interviews, school observations, FGDs, and document analysis, to cross-verify my findings. Engaging in peer debriefing and member checking allowed me to gather different perspectives and interpretations. I stayed reflective by recognizing my biases and often questioned my interpretations to ensure thoroughness. Additionally, I engaged deeply with relevant literature to contextualize my findings within existing theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. This comprehensive approach significantly enhanced the credibility and validity of my research findings and provided me with a deeper understanding of the complex phenomena under research study.

To further ensure data legitimacy, I involved other doctoral graduates to independently code the data. This process helped to identify and address areas of potential researcher bias and establish greater legitimacy based on trustworthiness.

Overall, my dedication to ensuring data rationality through multiple strategies, such as formal processes, triangulation, member checks, and independent coding, helped to maintain the accuracy and dependability of the data collected for the study.

Ethical Consideration

As a researcher accomplishing a qualitative study on the performance of FHTs in Nepalese community schools, I have considered several ethical considerations. First, I obtained informed consent from all participants, ensuring they were fully informed about the nature and goal of the study, as well as the consequences of their participation. I also assured privacy and anonymity to all participants, taking measures to protect their identities and not disclosing any personal information that could be used to identify them.

Recognizing the power dynamics that exist between myself and the participants, I was aware of any potential power differentials between my status as a researcher and the status of the female participants. In addition, I exhibited respect for the participants' and the community's cultural norms and values, taking into account gender roles, social hierarchies, and other cultural aspects that could influence the research.

Finally, I took sufficient precautions to preserve the confidentiality and security of the data I acquired, ensuring that it was safely preserved and only accessible by authorized individuals. To be clearer, I have committed to carrying out this research in a professional, accountable, and ethical manner, ensuring that all ethical considerations are satisfied.

Chapter Four

School Culture and Female Head Teachers' Performance

School culture has been a significant focus of educational research, with its widely documented importance in leadership and student achievement (Bates, 2006; Kwan & Wong, 2020). Head Teachers play a crucial role in shaping school culture, which affects teacher competency and student outcomes (Kwan & Wong, 2020). Effective leadership, aligned with authentic and transformational models, positively influences school culture, while ineffective leadership can have detrimental effects (Gebczynski & Kutsyuruba, 2022). The study of school culture and leadership has predominantly focused on Western settings, highlighting the need for cross-cultural approaches to understanding the influence of culture on educational leadership across national boundaries (Walker & Dimmock, 1999). Despite the challenges in conceptualizing and conducting cross-cultural leadership research, by adopting a comparative lens we can enhance our understanding of school leadership in diverse cultural contexts (Walker & Dimmock, 1999). This approach can contribute to the development of educational leadership theories and practices.

Female head teachers (FHTs) are pivotal in shaping school culture and enhancing educational outcomes. Research has shown that FHTs significantly impact their schools through clear values, effective communication, and empowering leadership styles (Hall, 1994). Their transformational leadership approach is linked to a positive school culture and improved student academic achievement (Daud & Don, 2012). By employing best practices such as personal mastery, team learning, and building shared visions, FHTs influence school culture and directly affect student performance (Lewis et al., 2016). Additionally, FHTs enhance school culture through

emotional intelligence, transparent management, kinship approaches, inclusive decision-making, and leading by example (Nurvita et al., 2020).

Building on this understanding, it is crucial to examine how FHTs influence and shape the dynamics of school culture. Schools led by female leaders are increasingly gaining attention from various stakeholders, including academia. The unique influence of FHTs on student achievement, teacher morale, and overall school climate highlights their crucial role in shaping effective educational policies and practices. This chapter examines how FHTs' vision of school effectiveness aligns with their performance in fostering a positive learning environment. By reviewing their experiences and perspectives, we gain valuable insights into the transformative impact of their leadership on school culture and sustained improvements.

In school leadership, female head teachers (FHTs) demonstrate visionary leadership by inspiring others with a clear and motivating vision for the future. They focus on long-term goals, embrace innovation, and are willing to take risks. FHTs effectively communicate their vision, creating a sense of urgency and fostering a positive school culture. Their ability to anticipate and adapt to changes, along with their commitment to continuous improvement, helps them drive meaningful improvements in school culture.

Studies indicate that FHTs, through their empathetic and collaborative leadership styles, significantly influence school culture. By aligning their vision with the needs of their school, they contribute to a nurturing and dynamic educational environment. This visionary approach not only motivates their teams but also results in lasting improvements in student performance and teacher morale. As more female leaders take on roles in education, understanding their impact on school culture and

their effectiveness in fostering a positive and innovative environment becomes crucial for shaping effective educational practices and policies.

The emergence of female head teachers (FHTs) in community schools has drawn attention to their significant role in shaping school culture and enhancing educational outcomes. Research demonstrates that women in leadership positions positively influence various aspects of the education system, including teacher engagement, community involvement, and student achievement. However, FHTs often face challenges due to limited formal training in leadership and administration, which can impede their effectiveness in cultivating a supportive school culture.

FHTs have encountered specific obstacles such as gender bias, stereotyping, and restricted access to professional development, which can hinder their ability to foster a positive school environment. To address these issues, FHTs need comprehensive leadership training and ongoing mentorship to build the skills necessary for effective cultural leadership (Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

Creating a thriving school culture requires a combination of essential skills and experiences. Effective FHTs must have experience in teaching at various levels, managing school operations, and collaborating with stakeholders. A deep understanding of curriculum development, assessment strategies, and instructional practices is crucial for promoting a positive school climate and improving student outcomes (Strother et al., 2016; Harris, 2003). Additionally, strong communication, decision-making, and problem-solving abilities are necessary for aligning school culture with the institution's goals (Shaked, 2018). Building a positive school culture also involves fostering strong relationships and promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion (Fullan, 2006; Leithwood et al., 2019).

The path to effective leadership in school culture is ongoing and requires a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. FHTs must actively pursue professional development opportunities, reflect on their practices, and remain open to feedback to enhance their leadership effectiveness and positively impact the school culture (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). This continuous growth is vital for FHTs to successfully lead their schools and drive meaningful cultural improvements.

School Cases

When I initially began my study, there were only nineteen female head teachers in high schools throughout Kathmandu District and just three female head teachers each in Lalitpur and Bhaktapur. However, over time, there has been a modest increase in the number of female head teachers in both – Kathmandu and Lalitpur Districts, indicating some progress towards achieving greater gender representation in educational leadership. Given below are the cases of my study schools:

Case of School A

A secondary school located in the historic Durbar Square at Sakotha, Bhaktapur, is the only community high school (Madhyamik Vidyalaya) in the area. Established 77 years ago as a primary school, it gradually expanded to include higher grades over time. Once considered one of the best schools in Bhaktapur District, School A was a preferred choice for many families when government schools were few but known for their quality. The school has produced many distinguished alumni, including prominent politicians, engineers, doctors, and other respected professionals. Today, the school offers education from Early Childhood Development (ECD) up to Grade 12, serving students from surrounding neighborhoods.

However, demographic changes, shifts in social and economic status, and population migration have transformed the school's student body. Today, the school no

longer has local students from the immediate neighborhood. Instead, the student population is primarily composed of children from nearby areas, many of whom come from families that have migrated for work as masons, carpenters, and other labor-intensive occupations. The school now serves students from Nursery through Grade 12, with many coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, reflecting the changing demographics of the region.

In 2068 BS, the school entered a new phase with the appointment of the female head teacher. Although she was not the first woman to hold this position—her predecessor, Maya Balla, served for only two months in 2067 BS before being replaced due to qualification issues—her leadership marked a significant moment in the school's history. The School Management Committee (SMC) selected her for the role, even though she had initially planned to pursue her PhD study. The chairperson of the school, a distinguished alumna who had topped the district in the SLC exams in 2033 BS, personally requested her to take on the position. At the time of her appointment, the school had less than 200 students.

As the Female Head Teacher, she faced numerous challenges, particularly in increasing student enrollment and rebuilding trust in the school. The quality of education had declined in recent years, and the local community had lost confidence in the school, making it difficult to convince parents to enroll their children. Despite these obstacles, she worked tirelessly with the support of the SMC Chair, members, and her team to boost enrollment during the 2069 BS-2070 BS academic session. Her efforts included extensive outreach, visiting neighborhoods to persuade parents to trust the school again.

Under her leadership, the school's Early Child Development Program (ECDP) became one of the best-operated ECD programs in Bhaktapur. The program attracted

attention from various institutions, organizations, NGOs, and INGOs, who frequently visited to observe and learn from the model ECD program.

The school operates from 9 AM to 4 PM, with Grades 11 & 12 classes run in the morning. It employs 22 staff members, with a majority being female teachers. Notably, around ten teachers, including those for Grades 11 & 12, receive their salaries from the school's resources. In addition to their salaries, all teachers are provided with free snacks and an allowance of Rs. 300. This comprehensive support demonstrates the leadership's resourcefulness in maintaining educational continuity despite ongoing infrastructural challenges.

School A places a strong emphasis on student welfare by providing daily lunches that meet both educational and nutritional needs. The school's financial stability is largely supported by rental income from shops in beautiful Durbar Square area. This revenue enables the school to offer free lunches to all students up to Grade III, free stationery from Nursery to Grade VIII, and free uniforms and bags up to Grade VII. These initiatives, introduced by the Female Head Teacher, have played a crucial role in significantly increasing student enrollment over the past two years.

However, the school's infrastructure remains a significant concern. The main building was destroyed in the devastating earthquake of 2072 BS, and reconstruction has yet to begin. Classes are currently held in temporary tin sheds, and the cracked office building poses a serious safety risk. The school has been unable to celebrate annual events or conduct regular activities since the earthquake due to the damage. Despite these challenges, the school's leadership remains committed to improving the educational environment and ensuring the welfare of its students.

Case of School B

Located in Sanepa, Lalitpur District, this school is a prominent community secondary school established in 2008 BS. The school initially operated as a night school for five years until 2013 BS. It then transitioned to a day-school, serving primary-level students. During its early years, when government schools were few, School B quickly became a preferred choice for local families. It gained a reputation as a premier institution and has produced many distinguished alumni, including prominent politicians, military generals, doctors, and diplomats. To honor its historical legacy, the school continues to invite notable alumni to its annual functions.

Now a full-fledged secondary school, School B is led by a female head teacher and serves a unique student population primarily from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The school currently enrolls 329 students, including 157 boys and 172 girls, providing education from Nursery through Grade Twelve. Many students face challenging living conditions along the *Balkhu Khola*, and some work as domestic helpers in the homes of Sanepa's wealthier residents. Despite its proximity to more affluent neighborhoods, School B remains committed to educating children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, focusing on those facing significant barriers to education and not enrolling students from wealthier families.

When the female head teacher was appointed, the school had around 225 students. She implemented a strategic plan that involved visiting every household to boost enrollment and offering incentives to encourage young children to attend school. These efforts initially resulted in an increase of about 50 new students. Over time, additional strategies were successfully implemented, leading to a gradual and significant rise in student numbers. To enhance teamwork and management efficiency, the head teacher appointed three in-charges from the existing teachers to oversee different sections of the school: primary, middle, and high school levels. This structure

ensures effective monitoring and management across all levels of education. The head teacher aims to increase the student body to at least 500 in the near future. To achieve this goal, the school has introduced English-medium instruction to meet current educational demands and attract both parents and students. Additionally, programs focused on girls' safety, sports, and co-curricular activities have been implemented to further enhance the school's appeal and retention efforts.

The school's financial stability is notable, supported by substantial backing from the local government and ward. This strong financial support allows School B to focus on delivering high-quality education to its underprivileged students without facing financial constraints. The school features a newly constructed, modern infrastructure, including a dedicated office building, a spacious playground, and facilities designed to accommodate senior classes in morning shifts, reflecting its commitment to providing a safe and conducive learning environment.

School B operates from 10 AM to 5 PM, with Grades 11 & 12 classes run in the morning. The school employs 26 staff members, including a majority of female teachers and long-serving senior staff who have been with the school since 2048 BS, as well as 4 additional support staff. Salaries for about 3 teachers are funded by the local ward, while Grades 11 & 12 teachers' salaries are covered through modest fees charged to students. The head teacher works from 6 AM to 5:30 PM. The local ward also provides financial support directly to students, helping alleviate their financial burdens and ensure continued access to education. This reflects the community's strong involvement and pride in the school.

School B is a suitable example of how local government support can enhance educational access and quality for students from marginalized backgrounds. The school's proactive approach to leveraging local resources and government aid to

provide equitable learning opportunities underscores its role as a vital institution within the community. Through its dedication to education and community engagement, School B not only addresses the immediate educational needs of its students but also contributes to long-term community upliftment.

Case of School C

School C is located in Purano Kalimati, Ward No. 8 of Kathmandu district, this school was established in 2010 BS as a pre-primary school. Initially, it operated in a small area near the Temple of Goddess Barahi and the vegetable wholesale market, with classes held in a shed next to a public library and a local youth club. Until 2062 BS, the school struggled with low enrollment, remaining below 150 students, and faced challenges due to inadequate facilities. It was established by local residents who were involved as members of the School Management Committee (SMC).

In 2062 BS, the school saw a major shift when a new female head teacher was appointed. Her leadership brought significant changes, including the expansion of the school to accommodate higher grades. By 2063 BS, the school successfully had its first batch of students appear for the SLC exams. Today, the school offers education from Nursery up to Grade 12, with a total student body of 1,112—549 boys and 572 girls.

The student population is highly diverse, representing a mix of different cultural and economic backgrounds. A large portion of the students come from families that have migrated to the area, with very few local residents. Most families work in the nearby vegetable market, while some students travel from other areas, attracted by the school's strong reputation for providing quality education.

Despite the local community's frequent involvement in school matters, most of their children attend private schools, leaving the school to serve a largely migrant and immigrant population. This dynamic creates a unique environment, as the student body

is constantly changing with families that move frequently due to economic and social reasons. Nonetheless, the school continues to draw students from far and wide, maintaining its status as a reputable institution in the area.

The school operates from 9 AM to 5 PM, with Grades 11 & 12 classes run in the morning. The head teacher works from 6 AM to 6 PM, depending on the school's workload. Despite financial constraints, the school employs 37 teachers, including 28 female staff members, with 30 full-time and 7 part-time positions. While some teachers' salaries are covered by the government, Grades 11 & 12 teachers' salaries are supported through modest fees collected from students.

Previously affected by earthquakes, the school has recently completed necessary retrofitting to address structural damage. It now has a proper building with designated classrooms, staff rooms, a hall for events, and spaces for extracurricular and co-curricular activities. To manage space constraints, morning shifts are implemented for senior classes, addressing high demand and maintaining the school's commitment to quality education.

School C maintains regular communication with its community through quarterly meetings with teachers and staff, triannual meetings with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), weekly meetings with class monitors, and additional student meetings as needed. Funding primarily comes from the government (75%), supplemented by student fees (25%) and other donations (5%). The school has a substantial emergency fund and additional resources allocated for infrastructure renovations and improvements. Despite its challenges, School C continues to be a vital institution, working diligently to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for its students.

The Journey to Head Teachership

Research shows that female leaders have unique strengths that contribute to effective visionary leadership, such as empathy, collaboration, and long-term thinking. While women are sometimes seen as less visionary than men (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009), this is likely due to differences in leadership styles, not ability. Female leaders often take a more collaborative approach, sharing credit and involving others in the process of creating a vision (O'Connor, 2018). They are also very people-focused and driven by a strong sense of purpose, which helps them create visions that inspire their teams (O'Connor, 2018). Empathy allows them to understand and connect with their followers' feelings, making their vision more relatable and motivating (Dewey, 2020). By using these strengths, female leaders can effectively lead change and shape the future of their organizations (O'Connor, 2018; Dewey, 2020).

Female leaders are recognized for their flexibility and adaptability, which allow them to navigate changes and challenges effectively. They prioritize diversity and inclusivity, fostering innovation and creating a supportive work environment. Their ability to build strong teams promotes collaboration and provides opportunities for professional growth.

The academic backgrounds of the participant head teachers. The head teacher at School A in Bhaktapur holds both an M.Sc. and an M.Ed., showcasing a blend of scientific and educational expertise. The head teacher at School B in Lalitpur has earned an M.A. and a B.Ed., reflecting a solid grounding in arts and education. In contrast, the head teacher at School C in Kathmandu possesses an M.Ed. and a PhD, highlighting advanced knowledge in education and notable scholarly achievement. These varied qualifications emphasize the unique areas of expertise each head teacher brings to their leadership roles.

While sharing her perspective, the Female Head Teacher of School A stated,

“Our school thrives because we adapt to changes and recognize the unique strengths of our staff. I encourage flexibility in both work schedules and tasks, allowing everyone to contribute in ways that suit their abilities. This creates a supportive environment where we all grow together, motivated by a shared goal.”

Similarly, the Female Head Teacher of School B expressed,

“I believe in flexibility—adjusting work hours and tasks to fit the strengths and interests of our team. This approach not only helps us adapt to changes but also keeps everyone engaged and satisfied. By valuing diversity, we build a strong, committed team working towards our common goals.”

Echoing these sentiments, the Female Head Teacher of School C stated,

“I focus on making work flexible, tailoring tasks and schedules to fit each person’s strengths. This helps us work better together and adapt to any situation. By promoting a supportive and inclusive environment, we ensure everyone is motivated and working towards our shared success.”

The verbatim statements from the Female Head Teachers of Schools A, B, and C highlight their shared focus on flexible leadership. Each head teacher adapts work schedules and tasks to match their staff’s strengths and interests, fostering a supportive and collaborative environment. This strategy not only boosts team engagement, motivation, and effectiveness but also promotes a positive school culture where diversity is appreciated. By tailoring responsibilities to individual abilities, these leaders create a work environment that meets the school's needs and drives collective success.

Additionally, they are skilled at creating and communicating a shared sense of purpose, inspiring and motivating staff towards common goals, leading to increased engagement and commitment.

To understand how they became Head Teachers and their perceptions of the profession, I asked questions about Head Teachership and the reasons for choosing the teaching profession. Additionally, I closely observed the performance of the three FHTs in their respective schools.

FHTs were questioned about their reasons for pursuing Head Teachership and the motivating factors behind their decision to take women leaders to possess various strengths such as empathy, effective communication skills, the ability to collaborate and build relationships, and a tendency towards inclusive decision-making, which can lead to better outcomes and a positive work environment. Additionally, female leaders are resilient and adaptable, able to navigate challenges and uncertainty with grace and confidence. Their diverse perspectives and experiences can also bring fresh insights and innovative solutions to complex problems to the to the next step in their careers. Each FHT provided a unique response. One of the HTs (School A) was exploring new avenues when a colleague and a member of SMC encouraged her to apply for and accept the position. Another HT (School B) expressed that the teachers were dissatisfied with the existing school Head Teachership and his management. As the Principal/Headteacher was not efficient and cooperative with the teachers, this made it challenging for the teachers and staff to work with the head teacher. As a result, the circumstances led her to pursue new opportunities, and with the encouragement of her colleagues and family, she found herself capable of applying for the position.

Likewise, a third HT (School C) was dissatisfied with the current management due to the school Head Teachership's financial inefficiency, and therefore, her colleagues convinced her to take over the position.

During the conversation with HTs, it was revealed that all of them were promoted to their roles directly from teaching positions. One of them, from School A, expressed surprise at being chosen by the SMC chairman for the role of school Head Teacher. Despite their surprise, they accepted the position. However, as noted by another Head Teacher from School B, since they had little preparation for the role, it proved to be challenging. One of them said,

"I did not find the school leadership position such an easy job." Further she added, "Stepping into the role of Head Teacher was creepy. I felt unprepared and stunned by the responsibilities. There were moments when I questioned my ability to lead, the challenges were immense, I wondered if I was the right person for the job. But over time, I've learned and grown into the position."

Another School B Female Head Teacher shared her experience,
"Becoming the head of the school was not something I anticipated, but I was eager to embrace the role. Initially, political interference and a male-dominated mindset left me feeling frustrated and doubtful. There were times when I questioned my suitability for the job. However, the encouragement and support from my female colleagues inspired me to take on the challenge and advocate for the position of head teacher. Now, I am dedicated to leading effectively and making a positive impact."

One of the FHTs (School C) admitted finding the Head Teachership role challenging and even expressed a desire to go back to teaching in the first few years, saying, *"I find it quite challenging. For the first few years, I would happily give up the Headteacher's position and go back to teaching."*

In summary, the experiences shared by the Female Head Teachers from Schools A, B, and C highlight common challenges faced during the transition into leadership roles. Each head teacher reported initial struggles such as feeling unprepared, overwhelmed, and doubtful about their leadership abilities. The head teacher from School B specifically mentioned obstacles like political interference and male-dominated attitudes, which added to the challenges. Despite these difficulties, support from colleagues and personal perseverance were crucial for their growth and commitment. The difficulties faced could also be attributed to the lack of formal training for the role of Head Teacher, unlike the comprehensive training provided to teachers. As a result, the FHTs encountered challenges in working with teachers, staff, parents, SMC members, local leaders, and handling administrative tasks. These insights underline the importance of providing adequate training and support for female education leaders to effectively manage their roles.

Managers of Multiple Priorities

Female Heads are often more effective at managing and balancing multiple priorities, such as academic excellence, student well-being, and community engagement. They are more likely to take a holistic approach to leadership, which can lead to a more balanced and sustainable approach to school management.

Research suggests that women possess unique leadership qualities that can make them effective visionary leaders. Rosener (2011) found that women tend to adopt a transformative, collaborative leadership style that is particularly effective in large

organizations. Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that women are often perceived as more transformational leaders than men, which positively impacts organizational performance. M. O'Connor (2018) emphasized women's ability to articulate compelling visions for the future, a crucial skill in uncertain times. Carli and Eagly (2001) highlighted the progress women have made in accessing leadership positions, particularly in the 1990s, while acknowledging persistent gender biases and stereotypes. These studies collectively indicate that women's leadership styles, characterized by empathy, collaboration, and long-term vision, align well with the demands of modern organizations. As more women ascend to leadership roles, we may see an increased focus on visionary leadership, sustainability, and social responsibility in the corporate world.

Resource Management in Schools: Strategies for Success

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, effective leadership and strategic resource management have become indispensable components for ensuring the success and sustainability of schools. As organizations and institutions navigate the challenges posed by a rapidly changing environment, it is imperative to enhance the capabilities of their leaders, particularly in the realm of innovation and adaptability. Evan et al. (2011) emphasize the pivotal role of leadership, particularly innovation leadership, in confronting the complexities of the contemporary organizational climate. Concurrently, studies such as those by Horth and Buchner (2014) and De Jong and Hartog (2007) underscore the influential impact of leaders' behaviors on performance outcomes, i.e., effective and efficient leadership behaviors positively influence outcomes (De Jong & Hartog, 2007). This amalgamation of research underscores the critical connection between effective leadership, innovation, and resource management, forming the

cornerstone of our exploration into successful resource management strategies in schools.

Many schools, particularly those in under-resourced areas, face the ongoing challenge of effectively managing limited resources. Inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure, and minimal support often hinder the delivery of quality education. These issues are further worsened by natural disasters like earthquakes, which damage school facilities and strain their ability to meet students' basic needs. In such situations, resource management becomes crucial, with school leaders needing to make tough decisions on how to allocate their scarce resources while still maintaining educational standards.

This challenge is especially apparent in Schools A and C, where resource shortages have created significant obstacles. Despite these difficulties, the Female Head Teachers of these schools have strategically managed their limited resources to sustain operations and preserve educational quality.

School A Female Head Teacher shared,

“Despite our resource constraints and the building damage from the earthquake, we have focused on strategic allocation by prioritizing essential needs and seeking community support. By effectively managing our limited resources, we’ve been able to enhance educational outcomes and maintain a positive learning environment.”

School C Female Head Teacher specified,

“Managing resources efficiently is challenging, especially with the pressure of accommodating many students and limited space. We’ve developed strategies to make the most of what we have by involving the

community and stakeholders in our resource planning, ensuring that every resource supports student success and school development.”

Resource management plays a crucial role in the success and sustainability of community schools, particularly when faced with resource constraints. With limited resources available, it is essential to employ strategies and prioritize allocations to maximize educational outcomes. Here are some of the effective resource management strategies employed by FHTs in community schools in Nepal. Despite limited resources, FHTs have demonstrated successful resource allocation and utilization skills, contributing to improved educational outcomes. Female Head Teachers (FHTs) in community schools in Nepal, detailing their approaches to resource management:

Resource Prioritization

FHTs play a pivotal role in prioritizing resources based on the specific needs of schools and students. Studies have emphasized the importance of prioritizing resource allocation to address critical areas such as teacher training, instructional materials, and infrastructure improvements (Sharma, 2019; KC, 2013). By aligning resources with identified priorities, FHTs can easily optimize their impact within resource constraints. Resource prioritization is a critical aspect of effective school management, and the research studies conducted in the context of FHTs in community schools in Nepal provide valuable insights into their ability to manage limited resources while prioritizing the needs of their schools.

One study by Shrestha, (2019) found that FHTs in Nepal demonstrated remarkable skills in resource allocation and prioritization. Despite facing resource constraints, FHTs effectively managed their available resources by prioritizing the needs of their schools and making strategic decisions. They ensured that essential

resources, such as textbooks, teaching materials, and infrastructure, were allocated based on the immediate requirements of the students and teachers.

Two of the School FHTs highlighted a constraint in their school, stating, *“Due to limited land and space, we face constraints in terms of the number of classrooms and teachers available. As a result, we have implemented morning shifts, with classes for Grades 11 and 12 taking place in the morning. This allows us to utilize the computer lab and other specialized labs effectively. Moreover, since we have a limited number of teachers who are responsible for both school-level and plus two-level students, they can effectively manage their teaching responsibilities within the school.”* In the context of their roles, Female head teachers exhibit proficient resource management skills by strategically prioritizing tasks according to their significance, exemplifying a form of astute resource allocation and utilization.

One of the FHTs further added,

“Given the limited resources and multiple teaching responsibilities, our teachers have become proficient at managing their time efficiently. They ensure that they allocate sufficient time to each class and prioritize their tasks accordingly. This enables them to effectively cover the curriculum, provide adequate support to students, and maintain a balanced workload despite the constraints we face.” Similarly, another FHTs of School C expressed in similar words, *“Given our extensive teaching responsibilities, our teachers have developed their time management abilities. They learn to prioritize tasks effectively, ensuring they manage their workload across both school and +2 levels.”*

Therefore, the observations of FHTs regarding effective management of teachers' time and the prioritization of resource utilization align with one of the components of the existing research. Their strategic allocation of time and resources allows for the optimal utilization of limited resources, contributing to improved student outcomes. Through careful planning, organization, and prioritization, FHTs ensure that they provide quality education while maximizing the use of available resources.

Moreover, the research conducted by Sharma (2019) highlighted that FHTs, being predominantly female, demonstrated exceptional multitasking abilities. They effectively managed their responsibilities both at home and at school, prioritizing the needs of their students and staff while balancing their familial obligations. This balancing act not only showcased their resource prioritization skills but also highlighted their dedication and commitment to their roles as educators and leaders.

The research aligns with Eagly and Carli's (2021) theory of 'multiple role management', which highlights how women, including female head teachers (FHTs), manage multiple roles and responsibilities. FHTs strategically prioritize and allocate resources across their personal and professional domains, achieving optimal outcomes through effective prioritization, resource allocation, and nurturing interpersonal relationships. This research has also highlighted the complexities and strategies employed by FHTs to manage multiple roles, demonstrating the nuanced dynamics of their professional and personal lives.

The research studies and theoretical perspectives provide strong evidence that FHTs in community schools in Nepal excel in resource prioritization as well as management. They navigate resource constraints while ensuring that essential resources are allocated based on the immediate needs of their schools. Their ability to manage multiple roles and prioritize the resources effectively reflects their dedication and

commitment to creating a conducive learning environment for their students. The findings underline the significant contribution of FHTs in optimizing available resources and highlighting their role in sustainable school management.

Singh (2016) and Khanal and Ghimire (2024) both underscored the challenges faced by school leaders in Nepal, with Singh noting that Head Teachers in lower-performing schools face more difficulties. However, Khanal and Ghimire (2024) also emphasized the importance of effective leadership in achieving high student performance, suggesting that successful community school headteachers play a crucial role in this regard. This is further supported by Devonish (2019), who highlighted the significance of evidence-based resource management in education, a practice likely employed by successful headteachers.

Strategic Collaboration

Effective resource management in schools involves collaborative decision-making processes that engage stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local communities. Research suggests that such collaboration leads to more efficient resource allocation and utilization, ultimately benefiting the school community (Lunenburg, 2010).

Involving stakeholders in resource-related decisions allows for a comprehensive understanding of the school's needs and priorities. By actively engaging teachers, who have firsthand knowledge of classroom requirements, FHTs can gain insights into specific resource needs and make informed decisions regarding resource allocation. This participatory approach ensures that resources are directed where they are most needed, maximizing their impact on student learning and school improvement.

Moreover, research emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in resource management. A study by Epstein (2018) highlights that when parents are

engaged in decision-making processes, they bring valuable perspectives and insights regarding their children's educational needs. Collaborating with parents allows FHTs to align resource allocation with the aspirations and expectations of the school community, fostering a sense of ownership and commitment to the educational process.

Furthermore, involving local communities in resource management can have significant benefits. Community partnerships can provide additional resources, such as volunteers, donations, or access to facilities, which can augment the school's existing resources. Collaborative efforts between FHTs and community members enhance resource allocation and utilization, ensuring that resources are effectively directed toward meeting the diverse needs of the school and its surrounding community.

In brief, effective resource management in schools requires collaboration with stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and local communities. Research supports the notion that involving these stakeholders in decision-making processes leads to more efficient resource allocation and utilization. By actively engaging teachers, parents, and community members, FHTs can ensure that resources are directed where they are most needed, ultimately enhancing student learning and overall school performance.

Innovative Practices

To effectively manage limited resources, FHTs can employ innovative practices that have been shown to yield positive outcomes. Research suggests that implementing innovative resource management strategies, such as sharing resources between schools, leveraging community partnerships, and utilizing technology for cost-effective solutions, can lead to improved educational outcomes (Buheji et al., 2019; Fisher, 2020). As one of the FHTs specified,

“In our school, we faced a significant challenge where the school ground was frequently occupied by local club members, political

community leaders, and others for various activities such as meetings, parties, and sports. This situation caused numerous issues for our school and students. To address this issue, we took the initiative to engage in a series of meetings, discussions, debates, and negotiations. After multiple rounds of deliberation, we were successful in conveying the importance of prioritizing the needs of our school and children. Together with other stakeholders, we reached an agreement that established a clear understanding and a new approach to utilizing the school grounds. As a result, we decided that during school hours, the ground would be exclusively reserved for school-related activities. In the early morning and evening, when the school was not in session, the ground could be shared with external parties. However, we also established the requirement for prior notice to the school in case of any urgent requirements.”

Female Head Teachers (FHTs) demonstrate their commitment to prioritizing students' educational needs through proactive leadership and effective resource management. By fostering open communication and setting clear guidelines with external parties, they ensure that school resources, including physical spaces, are primarily used to support educational activities. For example, when introducing Grades 11 and 12, FHTs held multiple rounds of meetings with teachers, parents, and community members, aligning educational goals with stakeholders' expectations and ensuring curriculum relevance. These efforts, along with promoting student enrollment, parental participation, and co-curricular activities, created a collaborative atmosphere where decisions balanced the needs of the school and students with those of external stakeholders.

Sharing resources between schools is another effective strategy used by FHTs to maximize resource allocation. Collaborating with neighboring schools to share textbooks, laboratory equipment, and other facilities benefits a larger student population (Fisher, 2020). This approach not only optimizes resources but also fosters cooperation and knowledge sharing among schools, creating a supportive educational network.

FHTs also establish valuable partnerships with the local community. These collaborations provide access to additional resources like mentors, volunteers, or funding opportunities, which enhance the limited resources of the school (Buheji et al., 2019). By tapping into the expertise and resources available in the community, FHTs expand educational opportunities for students.

Leveraging technology offers cost-effective solutions for managing resources. Research shows that integrating digital platforms and online resources reduces reliance on traditional materials, such as textbooks, while providing personalized learning experiences (Buheji et al., 2019a). By embracing technology, FHTs enhance both resource allocation and educational practices.

One example of innovative resource management is School B's response to an earthquake that damaged their building. The FHT collaborated with a nearby school and the community to use their facilities, ensuring uninterrupted education during repairs. This demonstrates how FHTs manage crises by sharing resources, fostering partnerships, and utilizing technology to maintain educational continuity and improve outcomes.

Investing in the capacity building of FHTs, particularly in financial management and strategic planning, enhances their ability to make informed decisions about resource allocation (Afonso & Almeida, 2019). The resource-based view theory further supports this by emphasizing strategic resource utilization to achieve sustainable

competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). FHTs leverage their knowledge, skills, and social networks to navigate challenges and optimize resource use, thereby improving school performance.

In Nepal, FHTs have effectively managed resources despite constraints. For example, in School B, FHTs sought support from NGOs to establish a computer lab and secure financial aid for educational materials, helping economically disadvantaged students. By demonstrating financial transparency and building trust with donors, they ensured equitable access to education, empowering marginalized students to thrive academically and socially (Yasin & Mokhtar, 2022).

Research supports these strategies, showing that effective resource allocation leads to improved educational outcomes. Studies by Miles and Darling-Hammond (1998) and Henry (2019) highlight the importance of strategic resource allocation, professional development, and community engagement. The OECD's Reviews of School Resources also emphasize the importance of effective governance in resource management to improve the quality and efficiency of education (Nusche et al., 2016).

Stakeholder engagement is crucial in collaborative resource management. FHTs navigate political complexities and conflicting interests by fostering inclusive decision-making and promoting transparency. By actively involving teachers, parents, community leaders, and government bodies, they enhance resource management practices and contribute to the overall success of the school. Theories like stakeholder theory and co-management emphasize the importance of shared responsibilities and participatory approaches for achieving sustainable outcomes (Bouamrane et al., 2016; Stave, 2010; Villamor et al., 2014). Despite challenges such as power dynamics, FHTs play a pivotal role in ensuring meaningful stakeholder engagement and fostering long-term sustainability within their schools. Integrating Financial and Human Capital

The FHT from School C explained that their school struggles with finances because the budget sanctioned for various expenses is small. The small budget made it difficult to hire and keep qualified staff. Additionally, the government funding provided for teachers' salaries, particularly for permanent teachers under the '*Darbandi*' system, was inadequate to meet the overall financial needs of the school. To cover operational expenses and ensure the smooth functioning of the school, the FHTs implemented various strategies.

One approach by the FHTs was to charge a small monthly fee to students. This fee helps cover the school's regular expenses, including administrative costs, infrastructure maintenance, and other related costs. As the FHT of School C said, "*By charging a fee, we aim to cover financial gaps and ensure we have the resources needed to provide quality education.*" Furthermore, the FHTs actively sought financial support from external sources such as NGOs and other organizations. By reaching out to such organizations, they hoped to get additional financial support to help with the limited government funding. Working with NGOs and organizations focused on education helped the FHTs gain extra resources and support for school programs and initiatives. It is important to note that the financial challenges faced by FHTs highlight the need for alternative funding options beyond government allocations. The reliance on fees and external funding sources reflects the resourcefulness and determination of the FHTs in ensuring the availability of necessary finances for school operations. Despite the limitations and constraints, the FHTs strive to provide quality education by exploring various avenues to secure the required financial support.

The FHTs face financial constraints due to limited government funding for administrative expenses and non-permanent teachers. Female head teachers employ strategies to address these challenges, such as charging nominal fees, seeking assistance

from other organizations, and exploring alternative funding sources. For example, at School A, a female head teacher generated additional funds by renting out school space for commercial purposes. These funds provided free lunches to marginalized students, motivating them to attend school regularly and reducing dropout rates. In addition, other schools implemented marginal fees to hire additional teachers (under Niji Shrot) and support staff, such as cleaners, peons, and doormen (Pale), for the security of the school and the students to meet educational and operational needs not covered by government allocations.

This proactive financial management highlights the innovative strategies FHTs employ to enhance educational outcomes and ensure smooth school operations despite limited governmental support. Lunches. These approaches demonstrate their commitment to overcoming financial obstacles and ensuring the smooth functioning of the school. Insufficient budget allocation for administrative work, salaries for administrative staff, and inadequate government funding for teachers' salaries pose obstacles to effective resource management.

From a theoretical perspective, this case can be analyzed through the lens of resource scarcity and resource dependence theories. Resource scarcity theory suggests that limited resources necessitate careful allocation and utilization (Foss, 2012). In this case, the limited budget allocation forces FHTs to prioritize and find alternative funding options. Resource dependence theory, on the other hand, focuses on organizations' reliance on external sources to acquire necessary resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). FHTs' engagement with NGOs and organizations reflects their reliance on external financial support to bridge the funding gap.

Research findings support the challenges faced by FHTs in resource management. Studies have shown that inadequate financial resources in schools can

hinder the provision of quality education and lead to suboptimal resource allocation (Leithwood et al., 2004). Insufficient budgets for administrative work and staff salaries can hinder the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, negatively impacting the overall functioning of the school (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Additionally, limited government funding for non-permanent teachers may result in difficulties in meeting the educational needs of students (Samad & Lashari, 2022).

The strategies implemented by FHTs in Nepal, such as charging nominal fees and seeking external financial support, align with research and best practices. Studies have emphasized the importance of diversified funding sources for schools to overcome financial constraints (Fusarelli & Fusarelli, 2018). Charging nominal fees can help generate additional revenue to cover operational expenses and ensure the provision of essential resources (Marzano, 2010). Collaborating with NGOs and organizations can provide access to additional funds and resources, supporting the implementation of programs and initiatives within the school (Afonso & Almeida, 2019). These approaches are being adopted by all three FHTs in their respective schools.

While the strategies employed by FHTs demonstrate their resourcefulness and commitment to providing quality education, it is essential to address the underlying issue of inadequate government funding. Advocating for increased government allocations for administrative expenses and non-permanent teachers' salaries can help alleviate the financial burden on FHTs and enhance resource management effectiveness.

The case of financial challenges faced by FHTs underscores the importance of effective resource management in schools. Theoretical frameworks and research findings provide insights into the implications of limited financial resources and the strategies employed by FHTs. By charging nominal fees, seeking external financial

support, and engaging in resourceful practices, FHTs strive to overcome financial obstacles and ensure the smooth functioning of their schools. However, addressing the root causes of inadequate government funding remains crucial for sustainable resource management in education.

Effective Human Resource Management

Effective Human Resource Management (HRM) is vital for the staffing and development of educational institutions. Schools face a range of challenges, including teacher shortages, limited '*Darbandi*' allocations, increasing student enrollment, a lack of extracurricular activity (ECA) teachers and other assistants, and the absence of essential non-teaching staff. This review explores these challenges and discusses HRM strategies and theories that can help ensure quality education by addressing these staffing issues.

A major challenge in schools is teacher shortages, especially within the constraints of the '*Darbandi*' system. Research by Ingersoll and Strong (2011) highlights the negative impact of such shortages on student learning outcomes and overall educational effectiveness. Addressing this requires proactive HRM strategies focused on recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. Flexible and holistic teaching models, combined with effective HR management by Female Head Teachers (FHTs), have been successful in mitigating staffing gaps in some schools.

Another key issue is the lack of ECA teachers and support staff, which hampers the holistic development of students. Fredricks & Eccles (2006) emphasize that extracurricular activities are crucial for improving academic performance, social skills, and overall student well-being. To address this, the government needs to prioritize the recruitment and development of ECA teachers and staff. The current practice of hiring through the '*Niji Srot*' system is unsustainable in the long term. Government

intervention is needed to provide schools with adequate resources for recruiting qualified ECA teachers and assistants. FHTs, with their proven track record in HR management, can play a key role in developing strategies to overcome these staffing challenges and optimize resources for extracurricular and support roles.

In addition to the shortage of teachers, the absence of non-teaching staff—such as administrative personnel, librarians, and support staff—further complicates school operations. This challenge is exacerbated by limited resources and budget constraints. Effective HRM practices are essential for optimizing existing resources and ensuring that non-teaching roles are adequately managed. FHTs can utilize their expertise to allocate available staff effectively, ensuring that administrative tasks and student support services are adequately handled, despite resource limitations.

Continuous professional development is another crucial aspect of effective HRM in schools. Programs that enhance the skills and knowledge of teachers and staff are essential for maintaining a high standard of education (Khattak et al., 2018). However, financial constraints and resource limitations often make it difficult for schools to implement these programs. FHTs have demonstrated strong leadership in identifying and prioritizing professional development opportunities that meet the specific needs of their staff. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, FHTs used their networks to engage IT professionals and government trainers to improve teachers' proficiency in online teaching. This not only supported staff during a challenging time but also reinforced the commitment of FHTs to fostering continuous improvement in educational practices.

In summary, effective HRM practices are essential for addressing staffing challenges in schools, including teacher shortages, limited *'Darbandi'*, rising student enrollment, and the lack of ECA teachers and support staff. Key strategies include

government intervention, strategic recruitment, continuous professional development, resource optimization, and the active role of FHTs in HR management. By implementing sustainable HRM approaches and leveraging the expertise of FHTs, schools can ensure a sufficient and competent workforce, ultimately benefiting students and improving the education system.

Infrastructure and Facilities Management

Infrastructure and facilities management in schools can pose significant challenges for FHTs, as observed in two schools located in Kathmandu and Bhaktapur. Following the earthquake, one of the schools had a completely collapsed building and was forced to continue classes under temporary tin roofs. This temporary setup led to extreme heat in the summer and inadequate protection during bad weather. Similarly, the Kathmandu school faced overcrowded classrooms and lacked the necessary retrofitting measures recommended after the earthquake. However, the government did not initiate any action to address these critical issues, placing a tremendous burden on the Head Teachers (Shrestha, 2017).

In terms of facilities, the schools struggled with inadequate resources and inappropriate infrastructure. Essential amenities such as toilets, kitchen for canteen facilities, library, and halls were managed with limited and ineffective resources. The Head Teachers had to make do with the available facilities, which were insufficient and not up to standard (Shrestha, 2017). This situation highlights the challenges faced by FHTs in managing the facilities within their schools.

The difficulties encountered by FHTs in managing infrastructure and facilities align with the theory of organizational support. As per Eisenberger et al. (2001), organizational support refers to the extent to which an organization values an employee's contributions and well-being. In the context of schools, providing adequate

infrastructure and facilities can be seen as a form of organizational support for Head Teachers. When the government fails to take the initiative and address the infrastructure and facilities challenges, it can undermine the overall support provided to FHTs, hindering their ability to effectively manage these aspects (Eisenberger et al., 2001).

It is worth acknowledging the efforts of the Head Teachers in managing these challenging circumstances with the limited resources at their disposal. However, it is important to emphasize that the resolution of these infrastructure and facilities issues requires the involvement and action of the government. The problems faced by the Head Teachers in these schools cannot be solved solely by their efforts. The government should take the necessary initiatives to address these challenges and provide adequate infrastructure, including safe and suitable classrooms, well-equipped libraries, functional sanitation facilities, and other essential amenities. Only through the government's support and commitment to improving infrastructure and facilities can these schools provide a conducive learning environment for their students.

Instructional Management in Schools

Female Head Teachers (FHTs) demonstrated exceptional leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic by effectively managing instructional resources and integrating technology into education. Despite limited resources, they organized Information and Communication Technology (ICT) training sessions for teachers and facilitated online classes with the support of their staff. In cases where students lacked access to devices, FHTs made innovative use of the school's ICT lab, arranging in-person study sessions. These efforts had a significant positive impact on student retention and academic performance, reflecting the FHTs' commitment to ensuring education continued despite the challenges.

The FHT of School A shared her experience during this time,

“During COVID-19, we trained our teachers for online teaching and learning, but only about 40% of our students could access it due to financial conditions. Many couldn't afford the necessary devices, and as a result, the dropout rate started to increase. After six months, we called back the students who were willing to return to school, provided them with lunch, and offered face-to-face teaching. This motivated them to continue their education and helped us retain more students in school.”

Similarly, the FHT from School C explained that they continued with both online and face-to-face teaching to manage the increasing dropout rates. By providing a hybrid model of learning, the school was able to accommodate students who had limited access to online resources while ensuring the safety and continuity of education. This approach demonstrated a flexible and inclusive strategy to address the diverse needs of students, helping to keep them engaged and enrolled.

The FHTs' success in integrating technology into instruction aligns with the theory of technology integration, which emphasizes the importance of incorporating digital tools into the curriculum to enhance learning outcomes. By ensuring teachers were equipped with the necessary ICT skills, FHTs enabled a smooth transition to online learning. This proactive approach demonstrates how leadership in education can effectively use technology to overcome barriers and improve student engagement and retention.

An FHT from School B said on the impact of these efforts, saying:

“Implementing ICT training for teachers and launching online classes significantly enhanced student retention and learning outcomes, especially during the COVID-19 period. The impact of technology in

education is evident, and its integration into daily teaching continues to benefit students today.”

During the pandemic, Female Head Teachers (FHTs) demonstrated transformational leadership by inspiring and supporting teachers to adapt to new instructional methods. They prioritized the needs of students, especially those facing financial and technological barriers, and effectively used technology to enhance learning. Their leadership was pivotal in maintaining student engagement and academic progress.

The theory of technology integration emphasizes the importance of incorporating technology into curriculum and instructional practices to boost student outcomes. FHTs applied this principle through ICT training programs and the strategic use of technology, resulting in notable improvements in student retention and performance (Mishra, 2017).

FHTs' commitment to both students and teachers showcased the vital role of instructional management. Their proactive approach during the crisis not only addressed immediate challenges but also established a foundation for future success, illustrating how effective leadership can transform difficulties into opportunities for growth in education.

Time Management

The effectiveness of FHTs in managing their professional responsibilities while juggling household responsibilities is a testament to their dedication and commitment. Their ability to optimize productivity and efficiency is crucial in maintaining a work-life balance. By prioritizing tasks and investing additional time, they demonstrate their effectiveness in providing quality education and leadership within their schools.

The Female Head Teacher of School A shared:

“I often work late and for a very few times it was very late 10 PM to complete the various responsibilities of my role. The challenges are significant, but my dedication to my duties drives me to address them promptly and thoroughly. Balancing these responsibilities with my personal life is not easy, but my commitment to improving our school keeps me focused and determined.”

Similarly, the Female Head Teacher of School B stated:

“I often work late, sometimes until 7 PM, to manage my tasks effectively. Despite the high demands and balancing work with caring for my young daughters, my dedication drives me to tackle these challenges with urgency and commitment.”

The Female Head Teacher of School C said:

“Being a head teacher is demanding, and I often work late to get everything done. Balancing this with my family—my husband, two sons, and in-laws—is tough, but I stay dedicated to providing the best for our school and students.”

FHTs face unique challenges in managing their time and responsibilities.

However, their willingness to work late and their sense of urgency in addressing their duties underscore their commitment to their work. This level of dedication deserves recognition, considering the additional demands they face in their personal lives.

While being late home may pose personal challenges, it reflects the professional commitment and sense of responsibility demonstrated by FHTs. Their ability to effectively manage their time showcases their determination to fulfil their responsibilities and optimize their productivity. By employing time management

techniques, such as prioritization and effective delegation, they ensure that important tasks are accomplished efficiently.

Educational institutions need to acknowledge and support the efforts of FHTs in achieving a work-life balance. By providing appropriate resources, training, and support, institutions can create an enabling environment that empowers FHTs to excel in their roles. Recognizing their challenges and offering flexible arrangements can further enhance their effectiveness and well-being.

In essence, the effectiveness of FHTs in optimizing productivity and efficiency while managing their professional and personal responsibilities is commendable. Their dedication and commitment contribute significantly to the success of educational institutions. By recognizing their challenges and providing support, institutions can foster an environment that allows FHTs to continue making valuable contributions to the field of education.

FHTs play a vital role in promoting sustainability practices that encompass both environmental and economic considerations. This section examines the connection between the effective time management of FHTs and their ability to contribute to sustainability practices within educational institutions, linking it with relevant theories and studies.

Effective time management enables FHTs to allocate resources efficiently, which in turn supports sustainability practices. The theory of resource-based view suggests that the effective allocation and management of resources are essential for achieving sustainable outcomes (Barney, 1991). By optimizing their time, FHTs can make informed decisions regarding resource allocation, ensuring that environmental and economic considerations are taken into account.

FHTs, through efficient time management, can promote sustainable initiatives in educational institutions. They raise awareness about paper usage, reuse, and waste reduction, contributing to environmental conservation and economic savings, and fostering a culture of environmental responsibility. By raising awareness among staff and students about the importance of sustainable actions, such as using less paper for notices, promoting the reuse of papers, and implementing a "best out of waste" strategy, FHTs contribute to environmental conservation while also realizing economic savings. Their leadership and efficient time management enable them to effectively advocate for these sustainable practices, fostering a culture of environmental responsibility within educational institutions.

Moreover, sustainable practices often involve incorporating environmental education into the curriculum. FHTs, through effective time management, can allocate sufficient time and resources for environmental education initiatives, promoting awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility among students. This aligns with the theory of transformative learning, which emphasizes the role of education in promoting sustainability and environmental consciousness (Sterling, 2007).

Effective time management empowers FHTs to collaborate with various stakeholders, including students, teachers, and the community, in developing and implementing sustainability initiatives. This aligns with the theory of stakeholder engagement, which emphasizes the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes to achieve sustainable outcomes (Freeman, et al., 2010). By actively engaging stakeholders and encouraging their participation, FHTs foster a culture of sustainability within the school community. This collaborative approach leads to satisfied parents, happy students, and improved school performance. It also enhances the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives by leveraging the knowledge,

skills, and resources of all stakeholders, resulting in a more comprehensive and impactful approach to environmental conservation and economic savings. Through their adept time management skills, FHTs effectively engage with stakeholders, promote sustainable practices, and cultivate a sense of environmental responsibility among all members of the school community.

In understanding, effective time management skills of FHTs contribute to sustainability practices by considering environmental and economic aspects. Their ability to allocate resources efficiently, incorporate environmental education, and engage stakeholders enhances sustainability efforts in educational institutions. This promotes environmental conservation and economic savings, leading to a more sustainable future.

Inventory Management

Procurement and inventory management are critical aspects of effective school leadership, and FHTs have demonstrated exceptional performance in these areas. Their emphasis on transparency in procurement processes aligns with the theory of ethical leadership, which emphasizes fairness and openness in decision-making (Brown et al., 2005). By ensuring that procurement decisions are made with integrity and involving stakeholders, FHTs foster trust and promote a culture of transparency within the school community.

Furthermore, trust of FHTs in the employees' ability to manage inventory aligns with the theory of transformational leadership. Transformational leaders empower their followers, delegate responsibilities, and trust their expertise (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By entrusting inventory management to their staff, FHTs not only demonstrate confidence in their team but also create opportunities for professional growth and development.

While trusting the staff is crucial, FHTs recognize the importance of regular inventory checks. This practice aligns with the theory of effective leadership, which emphasizes accountability and performance monitoring. By conducting regular inventory checks, FHTs ensure accuracy, prevent losses, and hold individuals accountable for their responsibilities.

The combination of transparency in procurement, trust in staff, and regular inventory checks exemplifies the effective procurement and inventory management practices of FHTs. Their leadership approach aligns with ethical, transformational, and effective leadership theories, contributing to a positive and efficient school environment.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of effective leadership, and female leaders have shown great proficiency in ensuring the efficient utilization of resources. Their emphasis on monitoring and evaluating resource allocation aligns with the theory of strategic leadership, which emphasizes the need for systematic assessment and adjustment of organizational resources (Robinson, et al., 2007). By implementing monitoring and evaluation processes, female leaders can track the utilization of resources, identify inefficiencies, and make data-driven decisions to optimize resource allocation.

School A FHT said,

“For effective monitoring and evaluation, I trust and empower my staff to continuously improve our resource management and maintain high educational standards.”

School B FHT said,

“I prioritize staff and student needs through regular feedback and transparent communication, ensuring our resources support their growth and align with our educational goals.”

School C FHT said,

“In my school, I approach monitoring and evaluation with a strategic mindset, emphasizing the integration of technology to enhance our resource management.”

Female leaders' effectiveness in monitoring and evaluation can be attributed to their transformational leadership style. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers, encouraging them to go beyond their self-interests and strive for organizational success (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Through their effective communication and guidance, female leaders create a supportive environment where individuals are encouraged to contribute their best efforts and continuously improve resource utilization.

In addition, female leaders' effectiveness in monitoring and evaluation aligns with the theory of servant leadership. Servant leaders prioritize the needs of their followers, empower them, and support their personal and professional growth (Russell & Stone, 2002). By monitoring resource utilization and evaluating its impact, female leaders ensure that resources are effectively meeting the needs of the organization and its members.

The combination of strategic leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership theories showcases the effectiveness of female leaders in monitoring and evaluating for resource utilization. Their leadership approach emphasizes data-driven decision-making, employee empowerment, and the overall well-being of the organization.

Infrastructure and facilities management are recognized as key areas where FHTs excel. Their effective leadership ensures the creation of conducive learning environments that optimize the use of resources, contributing to enhanced educational experiences for students.

Moreover, the chapter highlights the integration of technology as a key factor in resource optimization, where FHTs demonstrate proficiency in leveraging technology to enhance efficiency and effectiveness across various resource management domains.

Stakeholder engagement, time management, sustainability practices, procurement and inventory management, and monitoring and evaluation are all areas where the strong leadership skills of FHTs are evident. Their transparent and collaborative approach fosters stakeholder engagement, promotes productivity and efficiency, prioritizes environmental considerations, ensures effective procurement and inventory management, and enables data-driven decision-making for continuous improvement.

The visionary leadership of the FHTs within education is often equated with unique qualities such as empathy, collaboration, and a forward-looking vision, which significantly impact resource management and overall school administration. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, FHTs make strategic decisions, engage stakeholders, and inspire a shared vision for educational excellence. Through a synthesis of research and references, it is evident that FHTs play a vital role in optimizing resource allocation, fostering sustainability, and enhancing school management. In conclusion, FHTs' visionary leadership qualities contribute substantially to effective resource management and the broader success of educational institutions, emphasizing the significance of visionary leadership in education.

Case I (School A)

The story of School A is one filled with conflict, confrontation, and numerous obstacles. It serves as a reminder that changing a school's culture and leadership style takes time. Despite being urged by the teachers to make changes in the school, the FHT faced numerous hindrances that made it difficult for her to achieve her goals and move forward with the shared vision of the school staff.

One of the SMC members even went so far as to express doubt about the FHT's ability to lead the school, stating that she is female and very young and cannot run the school. However, the SMC Chairperson, who happened to be the son of the school's founder, had confidence in the FHT and supported her appointment as Head Teacher. She started her journey as,

“I joined the school as a passionate science teacher, eager to help students grow in their understanding of the world. The idea of becoming the Head Teacher wasn't something I had considered at all. My main focus was on furthering my studies for my M.Phil. However, the school's respected chairperson asked me to take on the role, and I couldn't say no, even though many disagreed with the decision. Despite the challenges, I stayed determined and eventually became the Headteacher, a position I now hold with pride.”

Furthermore, she added,

“I was determined to lead the school as I stepped into this new role, ready to face whatever came my way. The journey was tough, and I could hear doubts from others. But I didn't waver in my dedication. As time went on, I learned how to handle the challenges and grew stronger. Now, I'm proud to be the Headteacher. I took on this role with humility, a strong will, and a deep desire to shape. Moreover, this school used to

be highly esteemed in the past. However, due to various reasons that I won't detail here, the school's reputation plummeted, and the local community stopped enrolling their children. This ongoing trend posed a significant challenge. Thankfully, the situation has transformed now."

The leadership approach adopted by the FHT closely aligns with Bass and Avolio (2001) in Transformational Leadership theory, as evidenced by her fervent efforts to inspire and motivate her staff towards a shared goal of school improvement. Her emphasis on transparency, team cohesion, and effective communication mirrors the tenets outlined by Northouse (2018) in leadership theory and practice, where these components are integral to fostering trust and collaborative engagement among team members.

However, the FHTs' experience also serves as an embodiment of the challenges elucidated by Fullan (2006) in Change Leadership theory. Operating within a hierarchical educational system, her endeavor to instigate change encounters resistance from the school secretary, resembling the type of opposition anticipated in contexts characterized by established power dynamics and cultural norms.

The narrative of School A stands as an illuminating case study, underscoring the importance of persistence, collaboration, and skillful leadership in reshaping institutional culture. By drawing from the principles of transformational leadership, as outlined by Givens (2008) and by integrating insights by Fullan (2006) in the Change Leadership framework, the journey of the FHT becomes an embodiment of how educators and leaders can realize these theories to bring about positive transformation within educational establishments and their surrounding communities. This process is comprehensively explored and documented in the work of Al-Aghbar et al. (2019) as cited by Northouse (2018) in leadership theory and practice.

Case II (School B)

The experience of this school is unique but filled with hostility and political influence. It highlights the fact that transforming a school's culture and leadership style can be a time-consuming process. Despite facing opposition from some members of the SMC, male teachers, and the existing Headteacher and Assistant Head Teacher, the remaining teachers supported the FHT's efforts to bring about change. However, it took a long time to overcome the complications and settle into her role as Head Teacher. The FHT faced many challenges and obstacles in the beginning phase of her tenure, as she was not fully aware of the diversity of SMC members and the types of challenges, she would encounter in school operations. Nonetheless, she proved to be remarkably effective in her work. The FHT said,

“When I became the head teacher, the school's financial situation was unclear. Even though I was inexperienced and unaware of the challenges that came with the job, some teachers encouraged me to take on the role. However, only a few teachers were supportive.”

She also described the process of becoming a head teacher as a challenging experience.

“I faced numerous challenges on my journey to becoming a head teacher. It was not an easy path, as I had to approach the District Education Office multiple times and go through meetings and interviews with the SMC. However, my persistence and determination paid off, and I was eventually selected as the head teacher of the school. This journey taught me the value of perseverance and commitment to my role as an educational leader.”

Analyzing the leadership style of the Female Head Teacher (FHT) in School B through the lens of transformational leadership theory, as mentioned earlier, demonstrates her commitment to empowerment and inspiration in achieving a shared vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Despite facing challenges such as hostility and political influence, the FHT's collaborative approach with supportive teachers (creating a culture of collaboration, and providing support for their professional growth inspire teachers to be supportive) aligns with the principles of transformational leadership, emphasizing the importance of teamwork and motivation for creating positive change in the educational context (Leithwood et al., 2004).

However, it is crucial to consider the broader context of women's experiences in leadership roles, as highlighted by Schuster (1993). Her research emphasizes the significant impact of gender role socialization and discrimination on the lives of women. In this context, women often face unique challenges, including societal structures that do not readily support them in balancing multiple career and family roles. These challenges can manifest as limitations in career choices and feelings of disenfranchisement (Schuster, 1993).

The story of School B and FHT's journey underscores the interconnectedness of leadership, gender-related challenges, and the importance of adaptive and collaborative leadership styles. It sheds light on the complexities and obstacles that women in leadership positions may encounter and the need for a supportive and equitable societal framework.

Case III (School C)

This school's story is one of resilience and dedication. It exemplifies the challenges faced by educational institutions serving underprivileged populations and underscores the need for more robust support systems. The school's ability to provide

quality education despite financial and structural limitations speaks to the determination and commitment of its leadership and staff. It highlights the critical role of community schools in promoting educational equity and social upliftment, emphasizing the importance of investing in educational infrastructure and resources to support future generations.

The FHT had to face several obstacles and issues during the initial phase of her tenure. Despite being a skilled educator, she was not familiar with school management and was unaware of the difficulties that lay ahead. The FHT explained,

“I became the Head Teacher of the school despite being a teacher with no prior experience, due to the circumstances at the school. The ten teachers at the school convinced me to take on the role, and I was unaware of the challenges I would face.”

Furthermore, she added,

“When I first became the school Head Teacher, the local community, SMC chairperson, members, and the ward member did not support me. However, the DEO (District Education Officer) supported me to take over the position after becoming aware of the fraudulent activities of the previous Head Teacher.”

She further added,

“I became the head teacher despite lacking support from parents and the community, which highlighted the challenges I faced initially. Effective leadership requires dedication, confidence, and the ability to foster teamwork and transparency. Developing strong management skills is crucial for promoting efficient communication and decision-making, which contributes to a positive learning environment.”

Initially, I was hesitant due to family responsibilities and my lack of experience in tasks like writing applications or taking meeting minutes, relying on my husband's assistance and feeling nervous during my first SMC meeting.”

The story of the Head Teacher is testimony to the importance of adaptability, determination, and the value of teamwork in achieving success. Despite facing several challenges and obstacles, the FHT was able to take on the role of Head Teacher with the support of her colleagues and the district education officer. Her experience highlights the need for educators to continuously develop management skills and work collaboratively with the school community to create a positive learning environment for all. Furthermore, the FHT's admission of feeling apprehensive and uncertain in the beginning shows the human side of leadership and the importance of seeking support and guidance when faced with new challenges. Ultimately, the FHT's dedication to her role and her willingness to learn and improve serves as an inspiration to educators and leaders alike.

The story of the Head Teacher also links to various leadership styles that can be observed in her approach to managing the school. Her emphasis on teamwork, transparency, and effective communication reflects a democratic leadership style, where she values the input and participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process. Furthermore, her focus on self-confidence, perseverance, and adaptability suggests a transformational leadership style, where she inspires and motivates her colleagues to achieve their full potential despite facing challenges. The FHT's willingness to learn and seek support also highlights the importance of a servant leadership style, where leaders prioritize the needs of their followers and strive to support and develop their abilities. Overall, the FHT's story showcases the importance

of developing a multifaceted leadership approach that adapts to the changing needs of the school and its community.

Promoting a Positive School Culture

Within the domain of educational leadership, the task of promoting a positive school culture emerges as a pivotal challenge, particularly when undertaken by new Female head teachers entering schools characterized by an absence of any discernible cultural framework. As these nascent leaders embark on their journeys, they are met with formidable obstacles in the form of prevalent negativity among parents, teachers, and the local community, thus presenting them with a complex labyrinth of challenges.

Being newcomers to their positions, these head teachers are tasked with the daunting responsibility of reshaping ingrained mindsets and dismantling barriers rooted in traditional paradigms. What distinguishes them is their unwavering commitment to learning and a firm determination to overcome these hurdles. By embracing the unfamiliar with inflexible resilience, these leaders do not merely adapt to their circumstances; they flourish. Their narratives of accomplishment underscore the indispensable significance of cultivating a positive school culture, a task that extends beyond their personal growth and encompasses the comprehensive development of the entire school community.

When asked to reflect on their roles as a Female Head Teacher (FHT), the participants were asked about their vision, values, management and leadership skills, and the challenges they faced in fulfilling their responsibilities. In addition, one of the FHTs mentioned,

“Education should be a joyful experience for students and teachers, where everyone recognizes the significance of attending school with a sense of purpose.”

All the school leaders shared a common vision of creating the best possible learning environment for their students, where they could be happy and excited about learning. To understand their vision, the Female Head Teacher (FHT) emphasized the importance of teamwork within the school community. They stated that by working together, they could create a positive and supportive environment for both students and teachers. Despite their shared vision and collaborative efforts, the FHT also acknowledged that there were many other challenges that they came across in their roles. However, they did not provide further details about these difficulties.

One of them added, as follows:

“I achieve my vision of creating the best learning environment for the children by meeting regularly with the school management team. We develop year plans, curricular plans, and development plans on a yearly and term basis, and work together as a team to assess the improvement of the children. To maintain best practices, we consult with experts, invite teachers and trainers, and inquire about new educational developments. Additionally, we arrange in-house teacher training to ensure that our staff is equipped with the necessary skills to provide the best possible education for our students.”

To review Head Teachership, FHTs were asked about their vision, values, management, and leadership skills as well as the challenges they face. All the interviewed FHTs highlighted the importance of creating a welcoming learning atmosphere for students and ensuring that children come to school as happy and engaged learners. This is in line with research that suggests that a positive school climate and culture can enhance student achievement and well-being (Leithwood et al., 2004). One FHT mentioned the importance of teamwork in achieving their vision. This

is consistent with studies which highlight the significance of collaboration and distributed leadership in promoting effective school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood et al., 2020; Spillane, 2008).

Another FHT mentioned their use of regular meetings with the school management team, curricular plans, and teacher training to maintain best practices and stay up-to-date with new educational developments. This reflects the importance of ongoing professional development for school leaders to enhance their management and leadership skills.

However, FHTs also mentioned challenges they faced, such as limited resources, non-cooperative parents and bureaucratic obstacles, which can hinder their efforts to create a positive learning environment. This highlights the importance of policymakers and education authorities providing adequate support and resources to school leaders to ensure effective school improvement (Spillane, 2008).

The review of Head Teachership highlights the importance of connection between a positive school culture and effective leadership skills in promoting student achievement and well-being. Collaboration, ongoing professional development, and adequate support and resources are also critical factors for enhanced learning and positive school improvement.

Values are important for a school because they provide a shared understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that guide decision-making and actions within the school community. As a Head Teacher, it is crucial to promote and reinforce these values to create a positive and supportive school culture. When everyone, including students, teachers, and staff, shares and upholds these values, it creates a sense of belonging, trust, and respect. It also helps to establish a clear vision for the school, fosters collaboration and teamwork, and ultimately leads to improved student outcomes.

The FHTs in three schools emphasized the values of collegiality, trust, transparency, fairness, dedication, openness, and respect in both educational and managerial practices. These values are integrated into their school's culture to create a positive and collaborative learning environment for all students and staff members. One of them stated,

“As a head teacher, I prioritize values such as collegiality, trust, transparency, fairness, dedication, openness, and respect in promoting effective teaching and learning in my school. I believe that creating a positive work environment is essential for fostering collaboration and encouraging teachers to work together towards a common goal. That's why I ensure that there is collegiality and friendship at our school, and we have a transparent process that allows people to easily visit each other. I firmly believe that fairness and transparency are crucial in creating a harmonious work environment where everyone feels valued and respected.”

The other FHT expressed her educational values as: *“I believe in upholding high standards, implementing effective teaching methodologies, demonstrating commitment and hard work, promoting inclusiveness, and striving for excellence in learning and teaching.”*

She went on to emphasize the importance of collaboration and inclusivity in the decision-making and planning processes. Another FHT emphasized the importance of social connections and relationships in creating a positive school environment. She stated, *“Building social capital and relationships with parents and the wider community is key to our school's success.”*

The FHTs place great emphasis on educational and managerial values such as collegiality, trust, transparency, fairness, dedication, openness, and respect. According to Dhakal (2019), creating a positive and supportive work environment is key to achieving effective teaching and learning outcomes. This is reflected in the values cited by the FHTs, who stress the importance of collegiality and friendship in the workplace.

Transparency and fairness in decision-making processes are also highly valued by FHTs. In their study of FHTs in Nepal, Dhakal (2019) found that FHTs place great importance on maintaining a transparent process in their schools. This is echoed by the FHT quoted above, which highlights the importance of transparency and fairness in the workplace.

In addition to these values, FHTs also prioritize inclusivity and collaboration. According to Chapagain and Adhikari (2020), a transformational leadership style characterized by these values is most effective in promoting teacher development and student learning outcomes. FHTs who adopt a transformational leadership style are more likely to encourage participation in planning and decision-making processes and promote collaboration among staff.

Overall, the values cited by FHTs are key to creating a positive work environment that fosters effective teaching and learning outcomes. These values are reflected in the leadership styles and practices of FHTs as well as the organizational culture of their schools.

Resource Management

Good management is crucial for the effective functioning of a school. Effective school management involves setting clear goals and objectives, establishing effective communication channels, managing resources effectively, and providing strong leadership. Research has shown that effective management leads to better academic

achievement, increased student attendance, and improved teacher retention (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). It also plays a critical role in creating a positive school culture, where teachers and students feel supported and valued (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003). To achieve this, school leaders need to have a deep understanding of management principles and practices, and they must be willing to continually reflect on and improve their leadership skills (Fullan, 2006).

Effective resource management is crucial for schools to ensure that they are providing quality education to their students. A study by Hewett et al. (2018) emphasized that schools should have a systematic approach to resource management, which involves identifying the school's resource needs, setting priorities, and allocating resources accordingly.

One effective strategy for resource management is to establish a budget that aligns with the school's goals and objectives. This involves analyzing the school's revenue and expenses, identifying areas where expenses can be reduced, and prioritizing expenditures based on their importance (Lunenburg, 2010).

Another important consideration in resource management is the use of technology. The integration of technology in the classroom has become increasingly important for schools to remain competitive and provide quality education to their students. This can include the use of interactive whiteboards, tablets, and online learning platforms (Chen, 2019).

Moreover, schools can also consider collaborations with local businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to access additional resources and funding. Such collaborations can help schools acquire additional resources to support academic programs, infrastructure development, and other related initiatives.

Regarding resource management, two FHTs mentioned that they charge students fees that vary based on their grade level. The reason for this is that their budget is not enough to cover all school expenses. Among them one of the FHTs stated,

“The school budget that we receive from the government only covers the salaries of permanent teachers and the head teacher. However, there are additional teachers and staff that the school hires for teaching and administrative work, which are not financially supported by the government. To meet the regular expenses and pay these staff members, we charge a nominal fee to parents. This is the only way we can manage our resources effectively.”

In the realm of educational leadership, efficient resource management emerges as a cornerstone of success. This holds especially true when we consider the significant challenges faced by new Female head teachers in charge of schools dealing with severe resource limitations. Female leaders in institutions face challenges due to limited resources, inadequate facilities, and student population. Despite these problems, they remain committed to improving educational outcomes and creating a conducive learning environment.

What adds to the complexity is that these head teachers often encounter a palpable lack of enthusiasm and support from parents, teachers, and the local community. This collective resistance presents a formidable challenge. As newcomers to the educational leadership sphere, they shoulder the weighty responsibility of reshaping deeply ingrained traditions within the school system. Nevertheless, their strength comes from their commitment to adapting and continuously seeking knowledge. These qualities drive them to succeed.

These narratives of resolute head teachers not only underscore the intrinsic importance of adept resource management but also shed light on the profound influence it wields over the broader educational landscape. Even in the face of daunting resource constraints, they don't merely survive; they thrive, transforming their schools into vibrant centers of learning against all odds. Their journeys serve as a resounding testament to the might of resourceful leadership, offering inspiration to all who encounter their stories.

The educators' emphasis on creating a positive and happy learning environment for students aligns with research showing that positive school climates are associated with improved academic achievement and social-emotional development (Thapa, 2019b; Zullig, et al., 2010). Additionally, the educators' shared vision of creating a supportive learning environment is consistent with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of leaders inspiring and motivating their followers toward a shared vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The values emphasized by the educators, such as collegiality, trust, and transparency, are also consistent with research showing that strong school leadership is associated with positive school outcomes, including teacher job satisfaction and student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2006; Waters, et al., 2003). Additionally, the educators' emphasis on inclusivity and collaboration aligns with research showing that effective leadership involves empowering others and fostering a sense of shared responsibility (Bryman, 1992).

Regarding management, the educators' personalized approach to staff members is consistent with research showing that effective leaders tailor their leadership style to the needs of their followers (Northouse, 2018). Additionally, the educators' resource

management practices highlight the importance of financial sustainability in schools, which is a key factor in ensuring long-term success (Fullan, 2006).

Effective school management is key for the success of schools, involving clear goals, effective communication, efficient resource management, and strong leadership. This research study aligns with theories and research findings on effective school leadership, positive school climates, and financial sustainability. Schools should focus on clear goal-setting, robust communication, efficient resource management, and strong leadership to create a supportive environment that enhances student learning and engagement. This multifaceted approach is necessary for creating a sustainable and positive educational environment, ensuring a supportive and nurturing environment for students.

Their emphasis on creating a supportive learning environment and fostering collegiality and inclusivity highlights the importance of strong school leadership in promoting positive school outcomes. Their personalized approach to staff management and resource management practices further underscores the importance of tailoring leadership strategies to the unique needs of schools and their communities. By adopting such practices, schools can improve academic achievement, increase student attendance, and improve teacher retention, ultimately creating a positive school culture where teachers and students feel supported and valued.

Effective school management, as supported by the above analysis, includes setting clear goals, effective communication, managing resources, and strong leadership. Effective management has something to do with achieving better academic achievement, student attendance, teacher retention, a positive school climate, and financial sustainability.

Crafting Instructional Management

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the pivotal role of Female head teachers (FHTs) in elevating the quality of teaching and learning within community schools in Nepal. Dhakal's study in (2019), emphasized the significance of regular staff meetings and monthly assemblies as tools employed by FHTs to promote effective teaching and learning. Despite these initiatives, FHTs deal with a set of complex challenges, including the bureaucratic and political obstacles outlined in Dhakal's (2019) research. These issues may hinder the implementation of their innovative teaching strategies, yet FHTs persevere, resolutely committed to cultivating a positive learning environment and consistently seeking new avenues to enhance teaching practices.

Research has underscored the substantial impact of FHT leadership styles on the effectiveness of teaching and learning within schools. The study conducted by Chapagain and Adhikari (2020) demonstrated that FHTs embracing a transformational leadership style, characterized by visionary outlooks, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, are notably more effective in promoting teacher development and augmenting student learning outcomes.

As the transition of FHTs from classroom educators to educational leaders, they confront a multifaceted journey, marked by a delicate balance between instructional management and administrative responsibilities. This metamorphosis necessitates a shift in mindset, a transformation from a teaching-centric perspective to a leadership role. Consequently, these leaders must craft strategic plans for curriculum development, integrate innovative instructional methods, and rigorously assess teaching quality. Alongside these responsibilities, FHTs are entrusted with the crucial task of designing and implementing professional development programs to empower their teaching staff.

This progression exemplifies their unwavering commitment to nurturing a conducive learning environment that fosters quality education.

In addition to the strategies mentioned earlier, FHTs are instrumental in building relationships and partnerships with the community, a role that fosters shared ownership and accountability for the school's overall success. Joshi (2018), study offers insights into the positive outcomes of FHTs who maintain robust relationships with parents and the community. These strong connections are key drivers of student achievement and comprehensive school improvement.

Furthermore, FHTs hold a vital role in promoting inclusive and equitable education, striving to ensure that all students, irrespective of their gender, socio-economic background, or individual characteristics, have access to quality education. Research has consistently shown that female school leaders are more likely to champion gender equality and empower girls to reach their full potential, aligning with UNESCO's (2017) findings.

To reiterate, the pivotal role of FHTs in promoting effective teaching and learning in community schools in Nepal cannot be overstated. Through their transformative leadership, FHTs foster a positive learning environment, empower teachers, engage parents and the community, and work ardently towards inclusive and equitable education. By adroitly embracing effective leadership styles and leveraging a diverse array of pedagogical approaches, FHTs consistently enhance learning outcomes for their students and contribute substantively to overall school improvement. Their resolute commitment to overcoming challenges and fostering a culture of education is a testament to their unwavering dedication to the future of Nepal's students and schools.

Nurturing Interpersonal Relationships

Within the domain of educational leadership, the position of a female head teacher within a community school is marked by its complexity and dynamism. It necessitates not only a strong foundation in administrative and pedagogical competencies but also a profound recognition of the pivotal role played by interpersonal skills. In conversations with all three Female head teachers (FHTs) from the respective schools, a unanimous consensus emerged regarding the paramount importance of interpersonal skills, especially for individuals in leadership roles. One FHT shedding light on the indispensable nature of effective interpersonal relations for achieving success as a school leader stated,

“As a head teacher at a community school, I understand the critical role those effective interpersonal skills play in educational leadership. I believe that building trust, motivating both students and staff, resolving conflicts, managing resistance to change, and fostering creativity are essential aspects of my responsibilities. I strive to embody qualities such as tolerance, empathy, and control in my interactions with students, teachers, parents, and the community. By maintaining strong interpersonal relationships, I aim to create a positive and collaborative school environment that supports the educational growth and well-being of all stakeholders.”

Similarly, another FHT said,

“Over time, I've understood the significance of forming strong connections with people. It is like having friends at work. We rely on and support one another, and this harmony is vital for students, teachers, parents, and our entire community. I try to be empathetic, approachable, and calm during our interactions. This approach fosters excellent

teamwork, making our school a joyful environment for everyone. This positive atmosphere enhances our learning and personal growth experiences.”

Another FHT expressed a similar sentiment, highlighting the importance of nurturing connections in their role. It is like nurturing friendships within the school community. Creating trust and solidarity among students, teachers, parents, and the community is instrumental in making our school a thriving centre for education.

When asked about their friendly relationship with the teachers, two FHTs stressed the importance of understanding the background of their staff and adopting a tailored approach for everyone. they said, *“To effectively work with people, it is important to understand their backgrounds and workloads. This requires clear communication and setting expectations”*.

As stated by one FHT,

“You need to take a different approach to work with each of those people. You need to know their background, what they do, you need to know their workload, and you need to know what is expected...So we need to be very clear on what is expected. We suppose we must try and communicate, clearly and efficiently.”

Another FHT said:

“I believe in talking to teachers one-on-one because I think personal and professional skills are interconnected. So, I try to get to know them better. By doing this, I can delegate significant responsibilities to them and work collaboratively with them.”

Building upon Azzari's (1988) emphasis on the importance of interpersonal skills in effective school administration, it is evident that these skills play a pivotal role

in the context of educational leadership. The study conducted by Singh (2016) further underlines the significance of effective school leadership, particularly in schools with varying levels of academic performance. They explored various dimensions of effective leadership, including vision building, cultivating a positive school culture, supporting teachers and students, fostering leadership among staff, resource management, and leading for continuous improvement.

When examining the findings of Singh's (2016), study in conjunction with Azzari's insights on interpersonal skills, a critical analysis reveals that effective interpersonal skills are integral to the successful execution of these leadership dimensions. Transformational leadership theory, which is often associated with effective educational leadership, provides a framework that aligns with these findings.

Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their team members, emphasizing a shared vision, fostering innovation, and nurturing a positive organizational culture. These leaders possess strong interpersonal skills, including effective communication, empathy, and the ability to build trust. Here, the role of the female head teacher at a community school becomes particularly relevant.

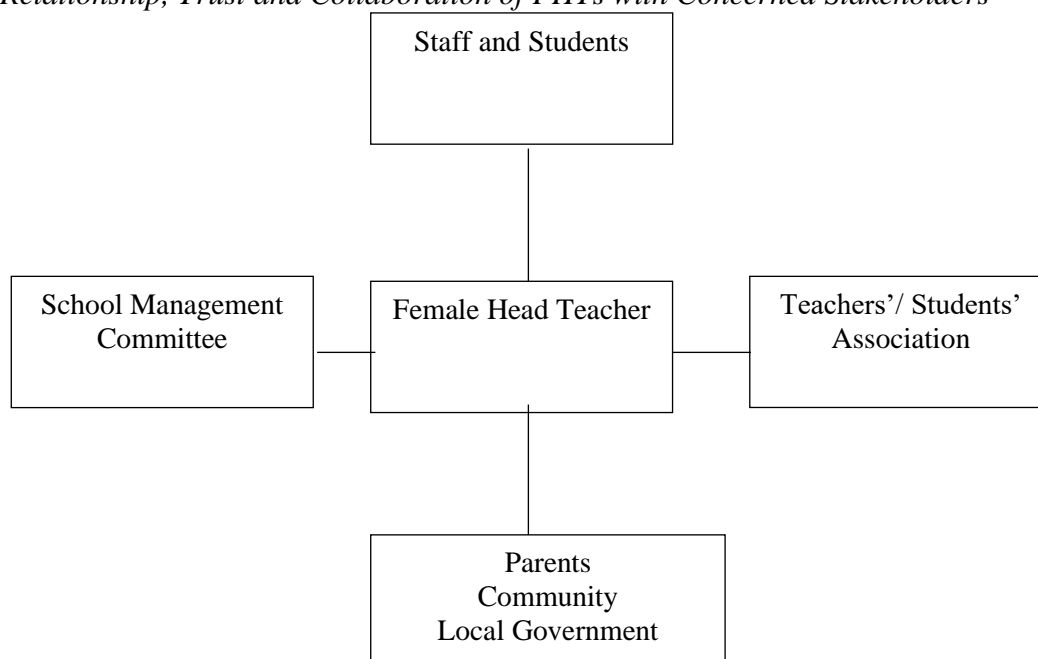
Female head teachers, as seen in the study by Singh (2016), often face multiple challenges in their roles. However, their adeptness in interpersonal relations, as suggested by Azzari (1988), can contribute significantly to overcoming these challenges. Female leaders, known for their empathetic and inclusive approach, are well-suited to fostering a positive school culture, building trust among stakeholders, and motivating both staff and students. Effective leadership as transformational leadership provides the visionary direction, support, and resource management required for school improvement.

The above critical analysis reveals the intertwined relationship between interpersonal skills, transformational leadership theory, and effective educational leadership. Female head teachers exemplify the potential to apply these principles effectively, fostering a positive school environment and driving improved educational outcomes. This synergy between interpersonal skills and transformational leadership theory underscores the importance of nurturing these qualities in educational leaders to facilitate positive change in schools.

Figure four depicts how Female head teachers (FHTs) promote collaboration in the educational settings of the schools. It highlights their interactions with school staff, students, parents, the community, and local government, emphasizing their role in fostering inclusive learning environments and promoting sustainable school development. Through trust-building, transparent communication, and advocacy for supportive policies, FHTs demonstrate a commitment to achieving educational excellence and holistic community development.

Figure 4

Relationship, Trust and Collaboration of FHTs with Concerned Stakeholders



Source: Literature study

Figure four illustrates the pivotal role of Female head teachers (FHTs) in nurturing collaborative relationships within school communities, thereby enhancing holistic education and well-being across various stakeholders.

FHTs engage closely with school staff and students, providing visionary leadership that supports educational initiatives and prioritizes student welfare. This collaboration ensures effective governance and alignment with educational policies, fostering a conducive learning environment.

Building trust with parents involves fostering transparent communication and addressing concerns related to student development and academic progress. FHTs extend their influence into the broader community through partnerships with local organizations and community leaders, promoting educational equity and community engagement.

Collaboration with local government authorities is essential for advocating educational policies, securing resources for school improvement projects, and ensuring compliance with educational standards. This strategic partnership enhances the implementation of effective educational strategies and supports sustainable school development.

The figure underscores the importance of trust, transparency, and collaborative leadership in achieving educational excellence. By leveraging their expertise and fostering meaningful partnerships, FHTs empower stakeholders and create inclusive learning environments that foster educational outcomes and community well-being.

This version succinctly explains how Female head teachers (FHTs) play a crucial role in fostering collaborative relationships and leadership within educational settings, emphasizing their impact on educational outcomes and community engagement.

Promoting Public Relations

The issue of public relations and the role of Female head teachers in community schools is a multifaceted and critical one, deserving a thorough analysis. Community schools often serve as the bedrock of local education, connecting students, parents, teachers, and the broader community. Female head teachers (FHTs) in these schools play a pivotal role in shaping the school's image and maintaining its relationships with various stakeholders.

The communication styles of FHTs, as revealed by studies like the one conducted by Tench, et al. (2017), challenge conventional gender norms. These findings show that women in leadership positions, including FHTs, often prefer non-personal methods of communication over more personal forms. Due to time constraints, they frequently utilize platforms such as messenger groups, WhatsApp groups, Facebook, and email for their communication. This contradiction to common stereotypes is significant, as it underscores the diversity of leadership styles among women.

Furthermore, (Topić, 2021) provides insights into the disparities and challenges faced by women in public relations, which are relevant to FHTs in community schools. Issues such as the glass ceiling, pay disparities, and negative labels are barriers that many female leaders, including FHTs, face. The call for inclusive leadership and diversity recognition resonates with FHTs, particularly those of diverse backgrounds, who may experience dual discrimination based on gender and race.

When asked to FHTs about their public relation in the early stage of their leadership, one of the FHTs shared her experience,

“In the beginning, societal norms and deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs created a barrier of distrust around my role as a female head teacher.

However, through unwavering commitment and persistent effort, I gradually managed to break down these barriers. As I demonstrated my dedication and competence, the community began to recognize the value I brought to the school. Over time, their perception transformed, and they found it comfortable to share their problems and seek guidance. It is truly heartening to witness this shift, where parents, teachers, and community members now actively approach me for ideas and suggestions, fostering a collaborative environment that benefits our school immensely.”

A similar experience was shared by another FHT,

“At first, gaining trust was tough due to old beliefs, but my commitment showed results. People now trust us enough to share their problems and seek our advice, which is great.”

On the other hand, another female head teacher shared her experience, shedding light on society's perception of being single (unmarried woman).

“In my journey as a female head teacher, building effective public relations had its unique challenges. One significant barrier was the societal norm that questioned whether I was mature and capable of leadership due to being single(unmarried). This scepticism about my ability to lead hindered trust in my leadership. People hesitated to contact me and engage in conversations, fearing I might not be able to handle their issues or meet their expectations. Overcoming these doubts and proving that being single doesn't impact my leadership competence required persistent efforts and a commitment to breaking stereotypes. It

was essential to demonstrate that leadership is not determined by marital status but by one's skills, dedication, and vision for the school.”

The shared experiences of Female head teachers (FHTs) vividly depict the evolution of their roles in public relations and the hurdles they've overcome. In the early stages of their leadership, one FHT faced the challenge of societal norms and deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs that cast doubts on her capabilities. However, her persistent dedication and unwavering commitment gradually dismantled these barriers. As she demonstrated competence and commitment, the community's perception transformed. Trust grew, and stakeholders began actively seeking her advice, fostering a collaborative environment.

Another FHT's account echoes a similar journey. Initially, trust was hard to come by due to old beliefs, but her commitment ultimately yielded results. People now trust her enough to engage in conversations and share their problems, reflecting positive progress in their perception of her leadership.

Conversely, a different FHT shared her unique challenge in the form of societal norms surrounding singleness. Her leadership abilities were questioned due to her non-marital status, hindering trust in her capacity to lead. This scepticism created hesitancy among the community to engage with her and share their concerns. Overcoming these doubts demanded persistent efforts and a commitment to shattering stereotypes, emphasizing that leadership is determined by skills, dedication, and vision rather than marital status.

As above discussion highlights the importance of continued support, recognition, and research tailored to the unique challenges and contributions of FHTs in community schools. This journey challenges preconceived notions, emphasizing the significance of

diverse leadership styles and the need for inclusive environments. It applauds the resilience of women who navigate the complex landscape of public education, underscoring their transformative potential in shaping the future of community schools and the broader educational field.

Gender Trends in School Leadership

According to a study conducted by the National Education Accounts and Financing (NEAF) in Nepal in 2019, only 23% of school Head Teachers in Nepal are females (NEAF, 2019). In India, a survey conducted by the Ministry of Human Resources in 2018 revealed that only 42% of schools had FHTs (Ministry of Education, 2018). In China, a study by Li (2016) found that only 17.5% of school Head Teachers were females. Similarly, in South Korea, only 23.4% of school Head Teachers were females in 2020. In the USA, the percentage of female school Head Teachers has increased over the years, and they make up 54% of public-school Head Teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

Various studies have shown that female school Head Teachers are more effective in managing school resources and ensuring student academic performance. In Nepal, Adhikari (2019a) and Sharma (2021) found that female school Head Teachers had a more positive impact on the overall school performance than male school Head Teachers. In India, a study by Mythili (2019) explored how women school leaders in India established legitimacy by adopting gender perspectives, building trust with the community, and employing promotion-focused and prevention-focused leadership behaviors, effectively navigating gendered notions and addressing challenges to establish their legitimacy in the field of school education. The study found that female school Head Teachers were more effective in promoting academic excellence and implementing innovative practices. In China, a study by Tsang et al. (2021), revealed

that female school Head Teachers were more effective in promoting teacher development and improving school performance.

The under-representation of female school Head Teachers in the education sector is a global issue. However, the effectiveness of female school Head Teachers in promoting better educational outcomes and overall school performance has been widely recognized. Therefore, it is crucial to promote gender equity in education leadership and support the development of female leaders in the education sector.

Gender representation and the performance of female school Head Teachers are important considerations in the education sector, not just in one country but globally. In China, a study by Lie (2021), found that female school Head Teachers were more effective in promoting school harmony and improving student academic achievement. In India, a study by Singh (2019) revealed that female school Head Teachers were more effective in implementing school reforms and promoting teacher development. In South Korea, a study by Kim and Chun (2019) showed that female school Head Teachers were more effective in creating a positive school climate and enhancing teacher job satisfaction. In the USA, a study by Longman and Anderson (2016) found that female school Head Teachers were more effective in fostering collaborative relationships with teachers and promoting student achievement.

The above studies highlighted the potential benefits of promoting gender equity in educational leadership across different countries and contexts. By supporting the development of female leaders and increasing their representation as school Head Teachers, educational outcomes and overall school performance can be improved. Promoting gender equity in education leadership and supporting the development of female leaders can lead to better educational outcomes and overall school performance.

These findings have highlighted the potential benefits of having more female school Head Teachers globally-locally.

Female school Head Teachers in Thailand have been successful in improving the performance of their schools. Kulophas and Hallinger (2020) conducted a study in Thailand which found that FHTs were more effective than their male counterparts in enhancing academic performance and increasing teacher satisfaction and retention rates. In a similar study female school Head Teachers were shown to be more effective in implementing democratic leadership practices, resulting in better teacher job satisfaction and improved student academic performance.

The findings of Kulophas and Hallinger (2020) align with previous research by confirming the substantial influence of principal leadership on teacher professional learning. The study emphasizes the critical role played by effective leadership in cultivating a positive school culture and fostering academic optimism. It further establishes Academic Optimism as a mediator, providing insight into how school leadership directly supports and influences Teacher Professional Learning. These findings underscore the significance of strong leadership in creating an environment that facilitates continuous teacher development.

Cheaupalakit (2014) identifies the factors contributing to the glass ceiling for Thai women in educational leadership. The study emphasizes the need for equal opportunities in recruitment and provides recommendations to overcome barriers and promote gender equality. Practical suggestions are given to aspiring female leaders. The paper underscores the importance of inclusivity in the education sector for fostering gender parity in leadership.

Figure five outlines the six essential characteristics of effective change leadership: relational skills, effective communication, trust-building, deep

understanding of challenges, providing support, and fostering a culture conducive to change.

Figure 5

Effective Leaders of Change



Source: Christopher Branson (2018)

Figure five defines the six crucial characteristics essential for effective change leadership: relational skills, effective communication, trust-building, deep understanding of challenges, providing support, and fostering a culture conducive to change. These traits, while individually distinct, operate synergistically in practical application. The framework emphasizes the pivotal role of leaders in cultivating strong relationships, beginning with empathetic engagement to grasp teachers' concerns

(Carlyon & Branson, 2018). This approach fosters an environment of trust, enabling open dialogue and empowering teachers to innovate without fear of criticism.

Moreover, effective leadership involves a proactive stance in understanding and addressing the challenges that arise during periods of change, offering the necessary support to navigate transitions successfully. Proficiency in communication further enhances leadership efficacy, facilitating clear guidance and alignment of goals. Lastly, nurturing a culture that embraces and adapts to change is integral, ensuring sustained progress and resilience within the educational context.

Transformative Practices of Female Head Teachers

Studies on female head teachers in Kenyan schools revealed challenges they face, such as lack of promotion, unequal advancement opportunities, and family responsibilities. Despite these obstacles, they were generally perceived positively and performed effectively. Recommendations included providing mentorship, encouraging more female leadership appointments, and incorporating leadership skills in teacher education. These findings contributed to understanding female head teachers' impact on school performance (Chikwature & Oyedele, 2018).

Effective school Head Teachers, as emphasized by Halawah, (2005), play a pivotal role in shaping successful learning environments, extending their influence on student learning outcomes, fostering a positive school climate, and establishing high expectations for both themselves and the broader school community. This transformative leadership not only focuses on academic improvement but also emphasizes genuine care for students and the cultivation of joyful learning experiences. Furthermore, the promotion of effective communication and shared values contributes significantly to positive school discipline.

Recognizing collaborative environments and open communication as crucial components for successful school improvement, secondary school Head Teachers are acknowledged for their essential role in enhancing internal efficiency, fostering curriculum understanding, and motivating teachers. Professional development in leadership, curriculum, and management, as underscored by Yunas (2014), becomes imperative for these leaders to elevate the overall quality of education.

Aligned with the principles of transformative leadership, the creation of a positive school climate necessitates Head Teachers possessing effective communication skills and a willingness to actively listen to the concerns and perspectives of others. The representation and performance of Female head teachers (FHTs) emerge as critical research areas in education. This study undertakes a comparative analysis, examining the proportion of female school head teachers and assessing their effectiveness in promoting school performance and student success across diverse countries, including Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA.

Adding depth to the research, insights from two out of three FHTs offer nuanced perspectives into their leadership experiences. These revelations highlighted the obstacles that women often encountered and the insufficient encouragement to pursue their dreams. The FHTs stressed the importance of judging achievements based on merit rather than gender. This valuable information provides insight into how FHTs perceive their roles, offering a nuanced understanding of how leadership experiences may vary based on contextual factors within the school. Only two of the three FHTs provided more in-depth insights into their leadership experiences and perceptions, revealing their belief that women often face obstacles and are not sufficiently encouraged to pursue their dreams. They highlighted that gender should not be a factor in judging one's achievements and emphasized the importance of focusing on

accomplishments instead. This information sheds light on how FHTs perceive their roles and is crucial for understanding how leadership experiences may vary depending on the context and tasks at hand within a school.

Being truthful, honest, fair, approachable, transparent, accountable, collaborative, hardworking, and supportive are top priorities for all three FHTs.

According to one of the FHTs:

“As a leader, I believe that it is essential to prioritize truthfulness, honesty, and fairness. It is important to have a clear vision and mission for the team while being aware of their capabilities. Fairness should be extended to everyone, and confidentiality and transparency should be maintained at all times. Additionally, being approachable is crucial for effective leadership.”

When asked about how they assist their staff in taking on leadership roles, all of the FHTs mentioned that they offered their teachers and staff opportunities and encouraged them to lead. They also emphasized the importance of encouraging teachers and staff to take the initiative and lead on various projects.

“During staff meetings, there are usually teachers who are enthusiastic about leading projects and programs. However, there have been instances where no one wanted to take the lead, and we had to encourage them. We believe that it is important to give people the freedom to make their own decisions and take initiative, as it can help us move forward and achieve our goals.”

Another FHT stated that because different people have distinct capabilities and not everyone can perform specific work, she encourages her team with their ability. She further added,

“To ensure the smooth functioning of the school, it is important to involve people and give them the opportunity to lead. Building trust in individuals and providing them with support, except in cases of major mistakes, can help develop leadership skills. Encouraging individuals to improve, expressing appreciation for completed tasks, and offering constructive feedback is crucial in fostering growth and development among the teaching and non-teaching staff.”

This approach aligns with the situational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of adapting leadership style to the needs of individuals based on their competence and commitment levels. By providing support and guidance, leaders can help individuals develop the skills and confidence necessary to take on leadership roles and contribute to the success of the school. Overall, effective leadership involves empowering individuals, building trust, and providing support and feedback to promote growth and development.

Transformational leadership can be an effective approach to ensuring the smooth functioning of a school. By involving people and giving them opportunities to lead, leaders can build trust and develop the leadership skills of their team members. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate individuals to improve and reach their full potential. This involves providing support and constructive feedback, as well as expressing appreciation for tasks completed.

Encouraging individuals to take on leadership roles and providing the necessary support can foster growth and development within the school. This aligns with the transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of empowering individuals and promoting a shared vision. By building trust and fostering a positive

school culture, transformational leaders can inspire their team members to work towards common goals and achieve better outcomes.

Overall, transformational leadership involves empowering individuals, promoting growth and development, and inspiring others to work towards a shared vision. By using this approach, leaders can create a positive and productive school environment that supports the success of both students and staff.

When it comes to leadership in schools, it is important to recognize that women may have different approaches than men. As a female leader myself, I have learned through meetings, discussions, and personal experience that men and women tend to lead differently. Women bring unique qualities to the table, such as empathy, emotional openness, and expressiveness, which can be particularly beneficial in fostering a positive social climate in schools.

Research by Nowak et al. (2015) has also found a natural predisposition in women's biology towards leadership. While this study does not suggest that all women have the same psychological perspective or biological tendencies, it highlights the potential benefits of female leaders who tend to be more emotionally expressive and empathetic in social interactions.

In schools, a calm social climate is essential for promoting positive interactions among teachers and students. Women leaders, who tend to focus on participatory approaches and student-oriented leadership, can contribute to the social-emotional development of students and mobilize teachers and staff towards achieving the school's educational goals.

Precisely, recognizing and valuing the unique contributions of female leaders can lead to a more collaborative and supportive school environment. By leveraging the

strengths of both male and female leaders, schools can create a well-rounded leadership team that effectively meets the needs of students and staff.

During my experience as a female leader and in line with the findings of the research, I also believe that establishing strong relationships with staff, team members, and students within and outside of the school is crucial. This is an approach that many female school leaders adopt, as witnessed by the researchers during the study. Two of the FHTs stated,

“As educational leader, we make a conscious effort to build positive relationships by showing empathy, expressing appreciation for students and teachers’ contributions, and providing constructive feedback. By doing so, we have found that staff, team members, and students feel valued, heard, and motivated to work towards the school's goals.”

It is not surprising that the FHTs in the study agreed on the importance of building relationships. Female leaders tended to be more sociable and emotionally expressive, which can contribute to creating a pleasant and collaborative school environment. Overall, establishing good relationships is an essential aspect of transformational leadership and can lead to improved outcomes for both individuals and the school.

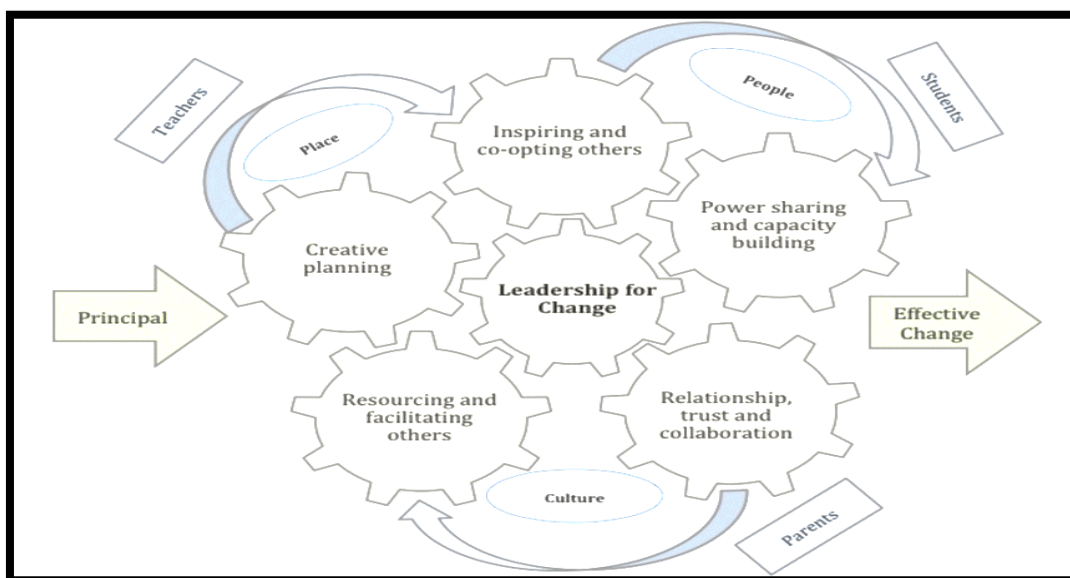
The FHTs shared the view that they must treat their staff well to enable them to perform at their best. Giving personal attention to individuals, particularly students who may be struggling with personal or academic challenges such as a lack of focus, low confidence, or poor academic performance, is a priority for them. According to the findings, there is a clear positive correlation between the leadership style of FHTs and student outcomes across all schools. skills, teamwork, and commitment. In educational vision, they ensure that students feel valued and confident in their school environment.

This approach to leadership aligns with the transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes the importance of empowering and motivating individuals to work towards a common goal. By delivering inspiring speeches and providing mentorship to students, FHTs can create a sense of shared purpose and foster a positive school culture that promotes academic success. Overall, this leadership approach is a powerful tool for achieving better educational outcomes and improving student well-being.

Figure six below illustrates a model of "Leadership for Change," highlighting the central role of leadership in educational transformation (Salahuddin, 2016). It consists of key components such as inspiring others, power sharing, relationship building, resource facilitation, and creative planning, all interconnected to foster effective change. Stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the principal, work collaboratively within the context of their environment, culture, and relationships. The ultimate goal is achieving effective and sustainable change through strong leadership and collaboration (Salahuddin, 2016).

Figure 6

Leadership Mechanism for Change



(Source: Salahuddin, 2016)

Salahuddin's (2016) model of "Leadership for Change" in education emphasizes the interconnected roles of various components and stakeholders in driving effective change. This model is further supported by Peer and Webster (2016), who underscores the role of community, group, and individual values in the change process. Cochren (1992) and Gregory (1996) both highlight the critical role of effective leadership in managing change, with Cochren identifying it as the most important component and Gregory (1996) advocating for a distributed leadership model. Connolly et al. (2000) add to this by discussing the changing nature of leadership in the journey of organizational change, emphasizing the need for diverse leadership approaches in different stages of the change process.

Chapter Five

Issues and Challenges Faced by Female Head Teachers

Throughout history, women have faced significant challenges in attaining educational leadership positions, particularly in school administration and Head Teachership roles. Despite representing the majority in the teaching profession and school administration graduate programs, women remain underrepresented in top administrative positions (Byrd-Blake, 2017). This gender gap persists due to societal norms, gender stereotypes, and barriers such as lack of encouragement, sex stereotyping, and family responsibilities (Pirouznia, 2013). Research indicates that schools administered by women often perform better than those managed by men (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). However, the disparity between male and female representation in educational administration remains one of education's most challenging issues (Noel-Batiste, 2009). To address this imbalance, it is crucial to understand the obstacles women face and develop strategies to overcome them, potentially leading to better representation of women in educational leadership positions and improved institutional performance. Tyler (2005) highlighted Simone de Beauvoir's feminist ideals, advocating for gender equality and equal opportunities for women. This perspective holds significant relevance for Female head teachers in patriarchal societies, underscoring the importance of overcoming gender biases and ensuring equal access to education. De Beauvoir's insights emphasize the necessity of challenging traditional gender norms and striving for genuine gender equality, particularly in leadership roles. Even in societies where women have made strides in other professions, such as Turkey, they continue to encounter challenges in accessing Head Teachership positions due to societal norms favouring male leaders (Sağlam, et al., 2018).

Nepal has made significant strides in promoting inclusive education, with a particular focus on advancing gender justice. While the progress is evident, not all initiatives have been equally successful, highlighting a need for ongoing efforts to achieve true gender equity. The journey towards gender equity in educational leadership involves more than just policy changes; it requires a concerted effort to challenge entrenched stereotypes and provide meaningful opportunities for women.

Historically, Nepal's approach to gender equity in education has evolved from basic literacy programs to more comprehensive strategies. The Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) of 1955 began by focusing on improving women's literacy and access to primary education. Subsequent policies, such as the National Education System Plan (NESP) of the 1970s and the National Higher Level Education Committee (NHLEC) in 1992, expanded this focus to address broader educational disparities and promote female participation in teacher training. The Education for All (EFA) policy (2002–2015) and the School Sector Development (SSD) Program (2016–2022) further advanced gender inclusion, integrating gender equity within the broader educational framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Despite these policy advancements, female head teachers in community schools within the Kathmandu Valley face persistent challenges. Political interference, unstable government policies, limited resources, and resistance from unprofessional teaching staff and disengaged parents create a complex environment for female leaders. These obstacles underscore the need for continued development and effective implementation of supportive policies to foster a more equitable environment for women in educational leadership.

Addressing these challenges requires not only the enforcement of existing policies but also a broader transformation of societal norms and attitudes. By examining the historical context and societal barriers that have impeded women's advancement, we gain valuable insights into the ongoing issues and opportunities in pursuing gender equity in educational leadership. As Nepal continues to build on its efforts to enhance female leadership in schools, it is crucial to recognize and address these systemic issues to ensure that women can thrive and excel in educational leadership roles.

Linking Policy Evolution to Challenges

The progression of educational policies in Nepal illustrates a growing commitment to gender equity. Starting with the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) in 1955, which focused on improving women's skills through adult literacy programs, and advancing to the comprehensive School Sector Development (SSD) Program (2016–2022) aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nepal has shown a significant shift towards addressing educational disparities and promoting gender inclusion (Ghimire, 2023).

Despite these policy advancements, female head teachers in community schools within the Kathmandu Valley face persistent challenges. These obstacles include political interference, inadequate resources, and societal resistance, which hinder their effectiveness and potential in leadership roles (Bhandari, 2019). The gap between policy goals and real-world outcomes highlights ongoing barriers to achieving gender equity in educational leadership.

This issue of gender disparity in leadership is not confined to Nepal. For example, in India, women remain underrepresented in STEM fields at elite institutions like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), underscoring the need for gender-sensitive affirmative action policies (Amirtham & Kumar, 2023). Conversely, South

Korea promotes teaching as an ideal profession for women and has implemented a 50% female quota in the Korean Teachers Union. However, cultural norms and family ideologies continue to challenge female teachers' advancement (Lee, 2006).

Comparative studies reveal that state policies significantly impact gender equity, with China making notable progress compared to South Korea (Gupta, 2000). Additionally, generational and cultural factors in India and Korea affect women's leadership opportunities, with younger women increasingly seeking professional development and work-life balance (Chaudhuri et al., 2019).

Historically, the optimism expressed by the first female superintendent of Chicago schools in 1909 about women's leadership potential reflects a longstanding aspiration for gender equality. In African universities, where women hold the majority of teaching positions, there is a different dynamic compared to other regions.

Nonetheless, challenges related to leadership effectiveness, charisma, and staff motivation still reveal discrepancies between female and male leaders (Dean, 2009).

To address these challenges effectively, Nepal needs to focus on both policy implementation and broader societal changes. This involves not only applying supportive policies but also promoting cultural and social shifts. Initiatives should include public awareness programs to challenge traditional gender roles, educational curricula that incorporate gender equity from an early age, and mentorship programs to support aspiring female leaders. Additionally, legal and policy reforms are crucial to combat patriarchal structures and enhance women's leadership opportunities (Dean, 2009; Shah & Shah, 2012).

Implementing and enforcing gender quotas in leadership positions within educational institutions is one effective strategy. Strengthening and enforcing anti-discrimination laws can also help create a more equitable environment. Furthermore,

providing gender sensitization training for both men and women in educational institutions can foster a supportive atmosphere. Policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours and parental leave, are also crucial in promoting women's participation in leadership (Heath, 2012).

Supportive policies and programs are necessary to ensure women have the resources they need to succeed. Leadership training programs tailored to women and continuous professional development opportunities can build the necessary skills for leadership roles. Financial support in the form of scholarships and grants for women pursuing higher education and leadership training is also essential. Incentives for educational institutions that actively promote women to leadership positions can further encourage gender equity. Creating networks and forums for women in leadership to share experiences and strategies can provide additional support and collaboration opportunities (List & Sorcinelli, 2018).

Community and family support plays a vital role in promoting gender equity. Parental awareness programs can educate parents about the importance of supporting their daughters' aspirations. Providing resources and support for families to enable them to support women's participation in leadership roles is also important. Strengthening local women's groups and cooperatives can offer mutual support and advocacy for gender equity. Community-based childcare centres can alleviate domestic responsibilities, allowing women to focus on leadership roles (Bracken, et al., 2023).

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of these initiatives. Collecting and analyzing gender-disaggregated data on representation in educational leadership can help identify gaps and track progress. Regular impact assessments of policies and programs aimed at promoting gender equity can ensure they are effective and allow for necessary adjustments. Through these comprehensive

strategies, Nepal can make significant strides towards achieving gender equity in educational leadership, benefiting the entire educational system and society as a whole (Dahal, et al., 2023; Shrestha, 2012).

Key challenges

Female head teachers (FHTs) face numerous challenges in community schools across different countries. In Nepal, FHTs encounter cultural, economic, and social obstacles, often being perceived as inferior to their male counterparts (Ghimire, 2023). Similarly, in England and Wales, women aspiring to educational leadership positions face persistent discrimination and underrepresentation (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Balancing career and family responsibilities is a significant issue for FHTs, with concerns about credibility and management styles (Pounder & Coleman, 2002). Despite these challenges, successful FHTs in Nepal demonstrate effective leadership through a range of styles and strategies, along with a strong commitment to their role (Khanal et al., 2023). Common themes across studies include gender bias, societal perceptions, and institutional barriers. To address these issues, schools and policymakers need to provide better career support, offer appropriate role models, and create family-friendly work environments for aspiring female leaders in education (Coleman, 2000). The main issues and challenges faced by FHTs are discussed below.

Gender Bias and Stereotypes

Gender bias in leadership roles presents a significant challenge in Nepalese academia, where women encounter various personal, social, and organizational barriers to attaining senior management positions. Career advancement often follows traditional male models, creating gatekeeping mechanisms that limit opportunities for women (White et al., 2010). Organizational cultures in Nepalese universities remain largely gender-exclusive, with leadership often perceived as a masculine domain. This

perception aligns leadership traits such as competitiveness, aggression, and stress with masculinity, creating additional challenges for women who defy patriarchal socio-cultural norms (Morley & Crossouard, 2016).

Cultural expectations and traditional gender roles in Nepal further undermine the authority and leadership capabilities of female head teachers (FHTs). For instance, one FHT faced skepticism and resistance from male colleagues who questioned her leadership due to entrenched gender norms. This issue mirrors similar experiences in South Asian contexts like South Korea and China (Ghimire, 2023; Kohli et al., 2021), highlighting the need for policies that address both direct and indirect discrimination against women in academia (White et al., 2010).

Gender bias and stereotypes continue to impact FHTs, leading to under-representation and limited opportunities for career advancement. In Nepal, only 22% of school heads are women (World Bank, 2018). Women who assume leadership roles often face criticism, with their qualifications and competence being questioned (Dorji, 2019). This discrimination can affect FHTs' leadership style, promotion, and salary. Similarly, a study in Ghana by Mfum-Mensah and Ekeanyanwu (2019) found that gender discrimination and stereotyping contributed to the low representation of women in educational leadership.

The qualitative study by K. C. (2013) sheds light on the formidable challenges confronting female school head teachers in Nepal. Their work uncovers the unsettling reality of gender-based discrimination, which permeates not only Nepalese society but also the very households these women lead. This deeply ingrained bias acts as a substantial impediment to their leadership roles, highlighting the persistent struggles faced by female educational leaders in Nepal.

Bhandari (2019) studies gender disparities in educational leadership, attributing these differences to a complex interplay of gender-based behaviours, societal orientations, and cultural education. The analysis underscores gender discrimination, bias, and stereotyping roles, reinforced by a patriarchal structure and male-dominated culture. Symbolic interactionism highlights how these symbols shape perceptions, affecting personalities and work styles. The study reveals challenges for female leaders adopting masculine roles and performing dual responsibilities in a male-centric environment. It advocates gender empowerment, starting at the family level and pushing beyond comfort zones for equitable development. The study emphasizes reshaping societal norms for a balanced and inclusive leadership landscape.

Similarly, Poudel (2019) reveals the enduring gender disparities in career advancement, income, and family duties in various sectors in Nepal, including civil service, teaching, and business. The findings suggest that, in Nepal, women, particularly those in professional roles, face a significant gender bias. They are often evaluated primarily based on their gender, overshadowing their professional achievements. This underscores the existence of a deeply entrenched and restrictive societal role for women in the country.

The studies by Bhandari (2023), and Poudel et al. (2023), underscore the pervasive gender biases and stereotypes that impede female educational leaders' progress in Nepal. Gender discrimination is deeply entrenched in both societal and household domains, adversely affecting these women's leadership roles, career growth, and earnings. They are often criticized for challenging traditional gender norms and face barriers rooted in a patriarchal structure. The studies emphasize the urgent need to reshape societal norms and encourage gender empowerment, starting within families, to foster a more equitable and inclusive leadership landscape in Nepal. This work sheds

light on the substantial challenges confronting female educational leaders in the country.

The urgent need to reshape societal norms and empower women in Nepal is underscored by a range of studies. Cooper and Fletcher, (2013) and Kohli et al. (2021) both highlight the potential of social norms to drive behaviour change and improve outcomes for girls, with Kohli et al. (2021) realist evaluation of the Girls' Holistic Development program in Senegal providing a particularly relevant model for Nepal. However, Riley (2022), points out the need for a more robust measurement of social norms, a gap that could be addressed through the use of entertainment education programs, as suggested by Riley (2022). These insights, combined with field data and literature from Nepal, could inform the development of effective strategies to reshape societal norms and promote gender empowerment in the country.

Work-life balance

Balancing work and family responsibilities can be challenging for FHTs. They may face difficulties in taking time off to care for their families, leading to additional stress and burnout. FHTs often face difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance due to the demands of their leadership positions. The job of a Head Teacher is challenging, requiring long hours and a high level of commitment, which can make it challenging for FHTs to manage their personal and professional responsibilities. In some cases, the pressure can be so great that women may choose to leave their jobs and seek alternative employment (Kumar, 2020).

The qualitative study by K. C. (2013) reveals that female school head teachers in Nepal struggle with a significant issue of time management. Despite the limited opportunities for women in school leadership, they persevere in their roles, even though the challenges they face often lead to frustration and contemplation of stepping down.

Poudel (2019) explores gender inequality in the workplace focusing on educated women in Kathmandu, Nepal. The research emphasizes the influence of gender assumptions on women's work experiences, especially the difficulties they encounter in maintaining work-life balance due to factors such as age, marital status, social class, and organizational policies.

The above literature highlights the critical challenges faced by female educational leaders (FHTs) in balancing their professional and personal lives. The demanding nature of their roles leads to stress and potential burnout, often resulting in women leaving their positions. The study of K. C. (2013) in Nepal reveals the central issue of time management, causing frustration and consideration of stepping down. Poudel (2019) researched in Kathmandu emphasizing the intricate influences on the work-life balance of FHTs, shaped by gender assumptions, age, marital status, social class, and organizational policies. These studies collectively underscore the need for support and policy changes to achieve a more equitable work-life balance for FHTs.

Inadequate support

Female head teachers often lack support from their colleagues, school management, and education authorities. They may face additional challenges in gaining the trust of their subordinates, and they may not receive the same level of support as their male counterparts. According to a study by Mishra, (2017), FHTs in India faced a lack of support from school management, which made it difficult for them to lead effectively.

Howe-Walsh, et al. (2016) underscore the substantial career challenges confronted by women, particularly in leadership roles. They emphasize the combined impact of organizational and individual factors. Organizational challenges encompass temporary work arrangements, male-dominated networks, and instances of intimidation

and harassment. These factors collectively contribute to a hostile environment, impeding the career advancement of women in leadership positions. Moreover, individual factors, notably a lack of confidence, further exacerbate the hurdles faced by women in these roles. This research illuminates the intricate and multifaceted nature of gender disparities and the insufficient support for female leaders.

In Nepal, Female head teachers (FHTs) have reported that, during their initial stages, they often receive inadequate support not only from their male counterparts but also from School Management Committees (SMC), local government, and their families. This lack of support is attributed to deeply ingrained gender biases. Moreover, some female leaders may encounter resistance and insufficient support from their families as well (Poudel, 2019).

Access to Resources

Limited access to resources is a significant challenge for Female head teachers (FHTs) in community schools. They often face constraints in obtaining the necessary funding, training, and support to effectively implement policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing educational quality and overall school performance. In Nepal, where many community schools suffer from resource shortages, including essential materials like textbooks and teaching aids, this scarcity can pose a significant obstacle for Head Teachers, particularly female ones (Ghosh, 2020). The lack of resources not only affects the school's ability to provide quality education but also places additional burdens on female leaders striving to overcome these challenges.

Parajuli and Das's (2013) macro analysis underscores the educational challenges faced by Nepal. However, despite significant budgetary allocations, particularly towards community schools, they continue to underperform. The study identifies various contributing factors, including inadequate infrastructure, textbook shortages, a

centralized curriculum, monolingual teaching methods, a lack of effective pedagogical strategies, and the pervasive influence of poverty and social exclusion. These findings accentuate the critical need for comprehensive reforms to enhance Nepal's education quality.

Female head teachers in Nepal's community schools face a significant challenge in the form of limited access to crucial resources like funding and training. These constraints hinder their ability to implement policies and initiatives aimed at improving education quality. Moreover, the broader resource shortages in community schools, including textbooks and teaching materials, exacerbate the situation, adding to the burden on these female leaders. Parajuli & Das (2013) analysis emphasizes the pressing need for comprehensive educational reforms to address this challenge and enhance Nepal's education quality. In summary, the thoughtful issue facing Female head teachers in community schools is limited resource access, which affects their efforts to enhance education quality within broader systemic challenges.

Cultural and Social Barriers

Cultural barriers and beliefs may hinder the progress of FHTs, especially in developing countries. FHTs face cultural and social barriers in some parts of the world, which can limit their ability to lead effectively. In some communities, women are not considered suitable for leadership positions, and their voices are often silenced. In Nepal, where patriarchal values and norms are prevalent, FHTs may face opposition from their families and communities, who may not approve of their leadership positions (Dorji et al., 2019). Besides, according to a study by Ahmed and Chauhan (2018), FHTs in Pakistan faced cultural barriers that limited their leadership effectiveness.

Cultural barriers to women's leadership include traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and bias. The lack of female role models and conservative societal values

hinder women's progress. Implicit gender discrimination and patriarchal structures limit women's influence. Cultural expectations of domestic roles clash with leadership commitments. Social norms and religious beliefs may restrict women's opportunities. Perceptions of femininity often conflict with leadership qualities. Overcoming these barriers requires cultural shifts and policy changes promoting gender equality.

Cultural expectations that prioritize family obligations over professional duties can also limit the opportunities for FHTs to lead effectively in the United States, as reported in a study by The Center for American Progress (2014). The study also found that gender biases and cultural stereotypes that question women's leadership abilities continue to be prevalent in the United States.

To address these challenges, the United States has implemented policies and initiatives to promote gender equality and diversity in the workplace. For instance, the US Department of Education's Equity Assistance Centers provide resources and assistance to address issues of gender and racial disparities in education. This emphasizes the pressing need for comprehensive efforts to address these complex challenges within women's leadership.

Nepal has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, particularly in education, healthcare, and political participation (Rana & Koirala, 2021). However, women continue to face discrimination and violence and are underrepresented in global mental health research (Gurung, et al., 2021). The country's progress in achieving gender equality is also explored in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on the need for unified efforts to address gender gaps (Pokharel, 2024). The government has implemented a reservation policy to increase women's representation in the public service, and development agencies and INGOs have

developed workforce diversity policies to enhance women's visibility and voice in the formal employment sector (Khadka, 2018).

In South Korea and China, FHTs face several challenges and issues that can hinder their leadership effectiveness. Despite efforts to promote gender equality and diversity in the workplace, women in leadership roles still face gender biases and cultural barriers that limit their opportunities to lead effectively.

Cultural barriers significantly impact Female head teachers (FHTs) in various countries, including Nepal, Pakistan, the United States, South Korea, and China. These barriers are rooted in traditional gender roles, societal values, and patriarchal structures, often restricting women's leadership potential. FHTs face opposition from their families and communities due to cultural norms, which can hinder their effectiveness as leaders. In the United States, despite policy initiatives promoting gender equality, gender biases and stereotypes persist and challenge women in leadership roles. The need for comprehensive efforts to address these multifaceted challenges is evident, emphasizing the importance of cultural shifts and policy changes to advance gender equality. These issues transcend borders, demanding global recognition and action.

Likewise, Female head teachers (FHTs) grapple with the challenge of inadequate representation in leadership roles in South Korea and China. Although there has been a gradual increase in the number of women in leadership positions, FHTs remain a minority among school Head Teachers and other key leadership roles. This underrepresentation poses difficulties for FHTs in garnering support from colleagues and subordinates, and it may hinder their capacity to establish robust professional networks.

The study underscored the common challenges experienced by Female Head Teachers (FHTs) in South Korea, India, and China, revealing cultural barriers that may

hinder their effectiveness in leadership roles. (FHTs) in South Korea, India, and China, reflecting the presence of cultural barriers that can hamper their effectiveness in leadership. These barriers often lead to difficulties in gaining support and respect from male colleagues and subordinates. In summary, FHTs in these countries encounter various challenges, including cultural expectations, a lack of representation in leadership positions, and gender biases and discrimination. Addressing these issues necessitates efforts to advance gender equality, provide support for female leaders, and challenge limiting cultural beliefs.

Challenges and Opportunities for FHTs in Nepal

Female head teachers (FHTs) in Nepal encounter significant challenges similar to their counterparts in South Korea, India, and China. These challenges stem from cultural norms, gender biases, and structural barriers that impede their effectiveness in leadership roles. The experiences of three FHTs in Kathmandu Valley provide insights into these challenges.

Representation and Support Networks

Another significant challenge for FHTs in Nepal is the lack of representation in leadership positions and the consequent absence of supportive networks. Many FHTs find it difficult to establish robust professional connections and mentorship opportunities. This limitation inhibits their professional growth and hampers their ability to navigate challenges effectively. Similar barriers are observed in India and South Korea, where female leaders are underrepresented in educational leadership roles, limiting their access to mentoring and career advancement opportunities (Lb, 2013; Bhandari, 2019).

Intersectionality of Gender with Social Factors

The intersectionality of gender with other social factors such as poverty, casteism, and disability further complicates the challenges faced by FHTs in Nepal. Women from marginalized communities often face compounded discrimination and limited access to educational resources and career opportunities. For instance, an FHT from a lower caste might encounter both gender bias and caste-based discrimination, impacting her ability to assert authority and implement effective leadership strategies within her school community.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, community engagement, and targeted support initiatives:

Policy Reforms: Implementing gender-sensitive policies and affirmative action measures to increase the representation of women in leadership roles.

Community Engagement: Conduct awareness campaigns and dialogues to challenge stereotypes and promote the benefits of gender equality in education.

Support Initiatives: Establish mentorship programs and professional networks specifically tailored to support female leaders in overcoming barriers and enhancing their leadership skills.

The experiences of FHTs in Nepal underscore the urgent need for systemic changes to promote gender equity and support female leaders in educational settings. By addressing cultural barriers, gender biases, and intersectional challenges, Nepal can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in leadership. Learning from international experiences and leveraging local insights, Nepal has the opportunity to empower FHTs and advance towards more equitable educational leadership practices.

Furthermore, Islam et al. (2023) uncovered distinct barriers faced by female dean's vis-a-vis gender and leadership in public higher education across South Asia. In

Bangladesh, personal barriers related to family duties, time management, and spousal support were prominent, while Malaysian female deans experienced relatively fewer socio-cultural hurdles. The study also identified organizational obstacles encountered by female deans in public universities. Additionally, Female head teachers in Pakistan reported gender discrimination and bias from their male colleagues and subordinates. These findings hold considerable significance for the development of organizational practices and policies aimed at fostering gender inclusion in leadership roles.

Jahan (2022) identifies in Pakistan socio-cultural, religious, and political challenges faced by female government college Head Teachers and vice Head Teachers, hindering their professional growth. However, the study underscores the positive influence of supportive families on job satisfaction. To enhance women's leadership and education in Pakistan, the study recommends granting authority and cultivating a supportive environment for female leaders, ultimately advancing the quality of education.

Conversely, research indicates that Female head teachers (FHTs) in the United States confront obstacles that curtail their leadership capabilities, including limited representation in leadership roles, cultural barriers, gender biases, stereotypes, and the gender wage gap. Therefore, fostering gender equity and providing essential support to female leaders require the continued development and expansion of policies and initiatives in the nation (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2014).

Walker (2013) delves into the experiences of female high school Head Teachers in the United States, uncovering their challenges, career paths, and leadership qualities. The research highlights the barriers faced by these Head Teachers, including under-representation, cultural obstacles, and the gender pay gap, echoing the broader challenges encountered by female educational leaders globally. The studies analyzed in

this context collectively emphasize the pressing need for proactive measures, encompassing robust policies, support systems, and efforts to challenge entrenched cultural norms. These initiatives can create empowering environments, ensure equitable opportunities, and foster a truly inclusive educational landscape, unlocking the full potential of female school leaders.

A range of proactive measures are needed to support and empower female school leaders, as highlighted by a body of research. Wang & Dapat, (2024) underscores the importance of teacher training, resource allocation, and curriculum adaptability to promote inclusivity. Sperandio (2010) emphasizes the need for context-specific frameworks and models to guide women's paths to educational leadership. Ng'ambi, (2015) and Moyo, et al. (2020) both stress the significance of challenging cultural norms and stereotypes, with Ng'ambi (2015) specifically calling for more opportunities for women to apply for leadership positions. These studies collectively underscore the need for robust policies, support systems, and efforts to challenge entrenched cultural norms to create empowering environments and ensure equitable opportunities for female school leaders.

Stakeholder Perspectives on the Performance of FHTs

The stakeholders' positive perspective on FHTs' performance stands as a growing recognition of the importance of female leadership in education, and many studies have highlighted the positive impact of FHTs in improving academic outcomes, promoting gender equity, and enhancing the overall quality of education. However, women in leadership positions in Nepal, particularly in the public sector, still face many challenges due to gender discrimination and cultural biases.

Nandwani and Jain (2022), argue that educational leadership requires adaptability and responsiveness to situational needs and follower readiness. They

propose a fourth-dimensional leadership behavioral pattern that offers sixteen different situational leadership behavioral patterns to address gaps and mismatches between situational needs, teacher demands, and student development. This multi-dimensional approach promotes leadership elasticity and equilibrium to effectively address immediate variations within and outside educational settings. Therefore, they conclude that educational leadership readiness for flexibility and mobility is essential for effective leadership in educational settings.

Beyers (2023) asserts that educational leadership has a crucial role in promoting social justice and caring for all stakeholders in the school environment. They propose a relational and caring leadership approach that models positive behavior to address bullying. They stress the need for further empirical studies to explore the potential of this approach. The authors emphasize the importance of a caring and interactional approach to promoting social justice and mitigating bullying in schools.

One study conducted in Nepal by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in 2018 found that FHTs face several barriers in their professional lives, including limited access to training and professional development opportunities, a lack of support from male colleagues, and inadequate resources and infrastructure. The study also noted that FHTs often face societal pressures and expectations that conflict with their professional responsibilities, such as family and household obligations.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the performance status of FHTs in Nepal, it is important to gather reflective opinions from various stakeholders, including schoolteachers, school non-teaching staff, parents, SMC chairperson, community leaders, SMC members, education officers from local municipalities, and students. These stakeholders can provide valuable insights into the challenges and

successes of FHTs and offer recommendations for improving their performance and increasing their representation in leadership positions. The following is a critical assessment of their performance based on stakeholders' reflective opinions.

School Teachers and non-teaching staff: Teachers within the school environment not only recognize the pivotal role of female leadership in education but also affirm the positive influence Female head teachers (FHTs) have on various aspects of the academic landscape. They attribute this impact to improvements in academic outcomes, student motivation, and the promotion of gender equity within educational settings. FHTs are perceived as essential contributors to a more inclusive and high-achieving academic environment.

However, this recognition of FHTs' significance is balanced by the sobering acknowledgment of the considerable barriers they face. These barriers are multi-faceted, encompassing challenges related to professional development, resource allocation, and societal expectations. Specifically, FHTs confront limited access to training and professional development opportunities, which can hinder their ability to stay updated with the latest educational practices and strategies. Moreover, there is a shortage of essential resources and infrastructure, which is essential for the effective management of schools and the delivery of quality education.

Perhaps one of the most critical challenges highlighted by teachers is the conflict between the professional responsibilities of FHTs and societal expectations. While FHTs strive to lead and manage schools effectively, they also grapple with societal norms and roles that might prescribe different roles for women. These expectations can result in additional burdens and conflict as FHTs navigate their leadership roles while also adhering to traditional gender roles.

In a parallel vein, the non-teaching staff within the school setting also resonate with the challenges faced by FHTs. They acknowledge the burdens shouldered by FHTs and advocate for a more robust support system and the allocation of appropriate resources. It is not just about recognizing these challenges; it is about actively advocating for measures to alleviate them.

The staff members of all three schools, underline that FHTs often bear a significant load of supplementary responsibilities, ranging from managing internal and external conflicts to handling various administrative tasks.

School A

One of the old teachers from school A expressed,

“One of the most admirable qualities of our Female Head Teacher is her ability to maintain a balance between being approachable and assertive. She listens to our concerns and actively seeks solutions that benefit both teachers and students, which was not sensed in the past. Her leadership style fosters a collaborative environment where everyone feels valued.”

And one of the staff said,

“Our FHT is incredibly organized and efficient. She oversees not just the academic side but also ensures that the students and staff do not have any problems and that the school runs smoothly and administratively. Her attention to detail and proactive approach make a significant difference in how smoothly our daily operations run.”

School B

One of the teachers from school B shared,

“Our Female Head Teacher is a visionary leader who constantly inspires us to innovate in our teaching methods. She encourages professional development and creates opportunities for us to grow as educators. Her support and guidance have been instrumental in improving our teaching practices.”

And supportive staff said,

“Our FHT is not just a leader but also a mentor. She invests time in understanding the challenges we face in the school and provides constructive feedback. Her inclusive leadership style promotes a positive work environment and motivates us to strive for excellence.”

School C

One of the teachers from the high school shared,

“Our FHT is a strong advocate for both students and teachers. She advocates for resources and support that benefit our students' learning outcomes. Her dedication to educational equity and ensuring every student's success is truly inspiring.”

Another staff said,

“Our Female Head Teacher embodies resilience and empathy in her leadership. She handles difficult situations with grace and ensures that everyone feels heard and respected. Her commitment to fostering a supportive school culture is evident in everything she does.”

The above perspectives illustrate the diverse ways in which Female head teachers are perceived and valued by teachers and staff across different schools. They highlight qualities such as leadership, empathy, advocacy, and organizational skills that contribute to their effectiveness in educational leadership roles.

Additionally, addressing the diverse expectations of the community and parents is another layer of complexity that FHTs must navigate. This underscores the pivotal role of FHTs in not only managing the educational aspects but also acting as a bridge between the school and the community it serves.

The above findings provide a holistic perspective on the role and challenges of FHTs within the school ecosystem. They emphasize that while female leadership is highly valued and impactful, it is equally important to address the hurdles and challenges that can impede FHTs from fulfilling their roles effectively. This recognition from both teaching and non-teaching staff signifies the need for a comprehensive approach to enhance the working environment and leadership effectiveness of FHTs.

Parents :The study by Davy & Cordoba (2020) underscores the substantial support that Female head teachers (FHTs) enjoy from parents as role models, particularly for their daughters. However, it is important to note that concerns do exist among some parents regarding the ability of FHTs to effectively address disciplinary issues and efficiently manage school resources.

Bullying has emerged as a significant hindrance to the educational process, requiring school Head Teachers to prioritize the creation of a safe and uninterrupted learning environment. Siddiqui, et al. (2021) highlight the importance of adopting a caring and interactive approach to promote social justice and effectively address and prevent bullying incidents in schools. They propose a relational and caring leadership approach that models positive behaviour.

Nevertheless, many parents express a high level of confidence in FHTs and their capabilities. These parents commonly share the sentiment that they are free from worries concerning their children's care and education at school. As one of the parents said, *"I am very much 'dhhukka' sending my child to this school as the head teacher is*

female though she is a bit straight forward but she is very caring.” They appreciate the attentive and nurturing nature of FHTs, who take a personalized approach towards every child in the school.

It is important to acknowledge that parents do have significant concerns about issues like bullying and peer pressure in the school environment. These concerns serve as a reminder that while FHTs play a crucial role in shaping the school's culture, they are not the sole determinants of the student's experiences. Instead, the knowledge and experiences that parents and children bring with them to the school community also influence and interact with school dynamics. This interaction can sometimes challenge gender norms and expectations, particularly regarding who holds the authority to determine gender roles within the school setting.

SMC Members and Community Leaders: SMC members and community leaders recognize the important role that FHTs play in promoting gender equity and improving the overall quality of education. SMC members commend Female head teachers for their dedication, sincerity, honesty, and hard work. SMC members along with local community leaders also appreciate the pleasant personalities and caring nature of FHTs, acknowledging their commitment to their job responsibilities. However, they also note that FHTs face significant societal pressures and expectations that can hinder their professional growth and development. They believe that FHTs need more support from the government and resources to overcome these challenges.

Education Officers from the Local Municipality: Research has shown that female leaders are more effective in areas such as commitment, transparency, fairness, and dedication. Education officers from the local municipality recognize these qualities and believe that promoting female leadership in education is crucial for improving the overall performance of schools. They emphasize the need for providing FHTs with

more support and resources, such as training, professional development opportunities, and financial resources, to ensure they can effectively manage the challenges they face in the present competitive time.

In the study of Mberia (2017), it is evident that women teachers, education offices, trade unionists, and other stakeholders share a common belief in the competence of women Head Teachers as administrators. The participants perceive women leaders to be self-disciplined, efficient in time management, adept at handling financial matters, responsive to parents' concerns, and skilled in fostering positive relationships with the school community. This collective perception highlights a favourable view of women leaders' administrative abilities.

Students: Students generally like FHTs because they are kind and helpful, and they work to make things better for everyone. The students think that FHTs are friendly, caring, and helpful, and they like that FHTs work to make things equal for boys and girls in school, promoting gender equity. However, some students' express concerns about the lack of appropriate resources and infrastructure in their schools, which they believe affects the overall performance of FHTs and the school. Nepali Students also mentioned that they miss school when it is closed for the holidays, and they appreciate the advice FHTs give them about their future careers. Finally, students feel comfortable talking to FHTs about their problems, which makes them feel better about school overall.

Student interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) significantly enhance their school experience, particularly for girls who often find FHTs approachable and empathetic, making them comfortable discussing personal issues, including feelings of safety. For instance, in one school, a girl reported feeling unsafe when outsiders attempted to abuse her outside school premises. She promptly informed the FHT, who

took immediate action. This incident underscores FHTs' role in ensuring students' safety and well-being, fostering a secure environment where girls feel protected and supported (Kohli, et al., 2021; Choden, 2020).

Boys also benefit from FHTs' supportive presence, viewing them as figures who provide motherly care and understanding. They too report safety concerns to FHTs, recognizing their role in maintaining a safe school environment for all students. These interactions motivate students, especially girls, to engage actively in school activities and aspire to leadership roles, underscoring the pivotal role of FHTs in promoting a nurturing and inclusive educational atmosphere.

In the realm of educational leadership, Female head teachers (FHTs) are often perceived by students as embodying qualities of kindness, helpfulness, and a strong commitment to promoting gender equity within schools. These attributes are underpinned by various factors that shape their leadership approach. Culturally, societal expectations often emphasize nurturing and supportive roles for women, which may influence FHTs to prioritize empathy and inclusivity in their interactions with students and staff (Ghimire, 2023). Moreover, personal experiences and professional motivations drive many FHTs to advocate for gender equity, aiming to create a fair and empowering educational environment where all students, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed (Choden, 2020).

The literature on educational leadership underscores several distinctive qualities associated with women leaders, including transformational leadership styles that inspire and motivate others towards shared goals (Ghimire, 2022). Additionally, collaborative decision-making processes and high emotional intelligence are commonly cited attributes that contribute to the effectiveness of women in leadership roles (Bhandari, 2019; Kohli, et al., 2021). These qualities align closely with the perceptions held by

students towards FHTs, who appreciate their approachability and efforts to ensure fairness and support within the school community.

The recurring pattern of kindness, helpfulness, and a commitment to gender equity among FHTs reflects a cohesive blend of cultural expectations, personal motivations, and professional development. By embodying these qualities, FHTs not only foster a positive school climate but also contribute to the broader goals of educational equity and inclusivity. This alignment between perceived leadership attributes and effective educational outcomes underscores the significance of nurturing leadership qualities in promoting a supportive and empowering learning environment for all students.

Educational leadership, as emphasized by Nandwani and Jain (2022), necessitates adaptability and responsiveness to diverse situational needs and follower readiness. Their proposed fourth-dimensional leadership model, integrating situational needs and follower readiness, offers a nuanced approach to leadership. This multifaceted strategy promotes leadership flexibility and stability, enabling effective responses to the dynamic challenges within and outside educational settings. Siddiqui, et al. (2021) further underline the significance of a caring and interactive leadership style in addressing bullying issues and fostering social justice in schools. Their proposal advocates modelling positive behaviour through a relational and caring approach, indicating the potential effectiveness of such strategies.

In the context of community schools in Nepal, Female head teachers (FHTs) face notable challenges. However, there is a growing acknowledgement of their pivotal role in promoting gender equity and enhancing education quality. Female head teachers wield significant influence in promoting gender equity and improving education quality through strategic initiatives. Unterhalter (2012), underscores their role in enhancing

teacher training to elevate subject knowledge and foster gender sensitivity among educators. This training is crucial in combating gender biases in teaching practices and curriculum development, thereby ensuring a fair and inclusive educational experience for all students. Moreover, Steyn (2018) and Mollel and Tshabangu, (2014) emphasize the symbolic importance of female leadership in schools, as Female head teachers serve as role models who challenge stereotypes and inspire girls to pursue leadership roles. Their presence contributes to a more diverse and inclusive educational environment that values gender equality.

Furthermore, Opeyemi and Folakemi, (2011) highlight how Female head teachers drive educational change by advocating for policies that support gender equity. They implement initiatives such as promoting girls' education and advocating for inclusive policies that address gender disparities. Through their leadership, Female head teachers create supportive school environments where both boys and girls have equal opportunities for academic and personal development. Overall, their proactive efforts in promoting gender equity and inclusive education policies significantly contribute to fostering a more equitable and empowering educational experience for all students (Mollel & Tshabangu, 2014; Opeyemi & Folakemi, 2011; Steyn, 2018; Unterhalter, 2012).

To enhance their performance, it is imperative to provide comprehensive support and resources to FHTs. This includes facilitating their access to training and professional development opportunities and empowering them to navigate the complexities of educational leadership effectively. Moreover, addressing societal expectations and discriminatory practices is crucial to fostering an environment conducive to the professional growth and development of FHTs. The adoption of caring and interactive leadership styles, as suggested by Siddiqui et al. (2021), could be

instrumental in mitigating these challenges and empowering FHTs to excel in their roles as educational leaders.

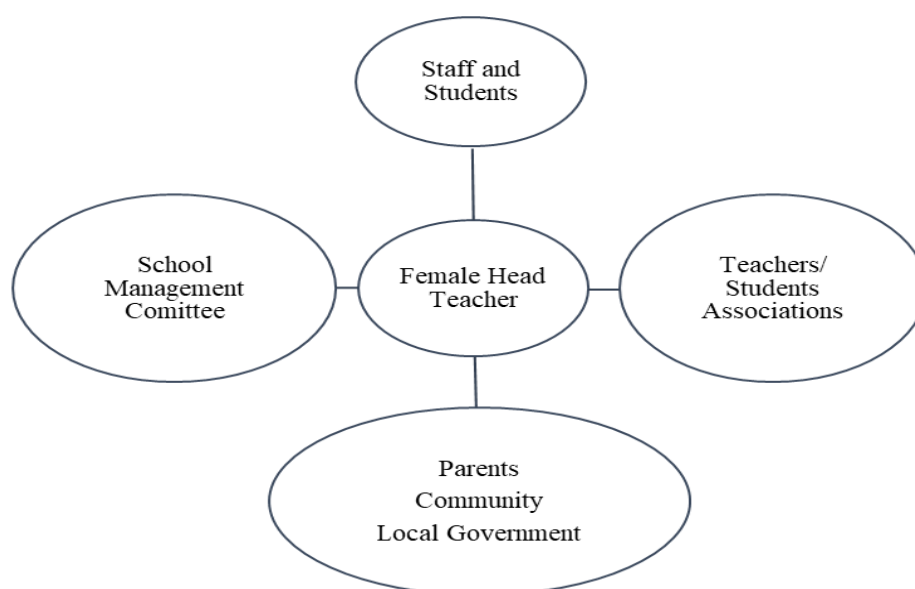
The studies reviewed shed light on the multifaceted challenges and opportunities faced by Female head teachers (FHTs) in Nepal's community schools. Recognizing the pivotal role of female leadership in education, these studies highlight the positive impact of FHTs on academic outcomes, student motivation, and gender equity. However, FHTs grapple with significant barriers, including limited access to training, resource scarcity, societal expectations, and discriminatory practices. The research emphasizes the need for adaptive leadership, as advocated by Nandwani and Jain (2022), to address diverse situational needs and foster a caring, interactive environment, as proposed by Siddiqui et al. (2021), promoting social justice and mitigating bullying. The studies underscore the urgency of comprehensive support systems, professional development opportunities, and challenging societal norms to empower FHTs effectively. These findings necessitate policy interventions and resource allocations, fostering an enabling environment for FHTs to excel as educational leaders (Siddiqui et al., 2021; Nandwani & Jain, 2022).

The above studies indicate their alignment with the principles of transformational leadership theory, emphasizing the need for Female head teachers (FHTs) in Nepal to exhibit adaptive and responsive leadership. As per Nandwani & Jain (2022), transformative leadership qualities are essential in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by FHTs. Furthermore, echoing transformational leadership principles, the research underscores the significance of cultivating a supportive environment with a caring and interactive leadership approach, following Siddiqui et al. (2021), recommendations.

Figure seven below illustrates the ‘Relationship, Trust, and Collaboration’ of Female head teachers with key stakeholders, including the parent community, local government, school management committee, teacher-student associations, and both students and staff. This model emphasizes the importance of building strong partnerships to enhance educational outcomes, foster a supportive school environment, and positively impact overall school functioning and image.

Figure 7

Relationship, Trust, and Collaboration of FHTs with others concerned



Relationships, Trust, and Collaboration of Female head teachers (FHTs) with stakeholders are critical aspects of effective educational leadership. Research consistently highlights the importance of trust and collaboration in educational settings (Azari, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). FHTs, known for their collaborative and people-oriented management style, play a significant role in promoting academic achievement and fostering respect among all stakeholders (Coleman, 2016). Their ability to build relational trust enhances school enrollment and contributes to a positive

school culture (Shibuya, 2022). This underscores the essential role of FHTs in cultivating a supportive and inclusive educational environment, reinforcing their relevance in the broader narrative of educational leadership.

Chapter Six

Contextual Realities and Analysis

This chapter explores the performance of female head teachers in community schools in the Kathmandu Valley, examining their leadership performance alongside the contextual realities and discussions that shape them. It focuses on specific contextual elements such as challenges, opportunities, and the socio-cultural dynamics of the communities where these schools are situated, all of which influence their leadership effectiveness. A comprehensive understanding of how local circumstances impact the roles and performances of FHTs is necessary to gather insights that can inform the development of tailored strategies and support mechanisms to enhance both the professional experiences and outcomes of female school leaders in this setting.

Leadership makes a significant difference to overall school performance and student learning outcomes, and there is increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders. The captured pictures from the research field revealed that my study on FHTs' performance tended to be transformational and had to largely practice participative and distributed leadership styles. Nevertheless, my understanding is subjective given the nature of this study, which is qualitative and entirely built upon the unique views, beliefs, and perceptions of all the research participants.

The data analysis shows that the reasons for becoming a head teacher are similar, by and large. The FHTs wanted to become head teachers to have power and also because they believed they could manage the school as well as the males since they had the required qualifications, skills, and confidence to take up the challenge. However, they initially had no professional training available to assume the role of head teacher.

Nepal's education system faces challenges in gender equality and inclusion. Cultural and geographical factors influence enrollment, with low secondary-level access for girls (Sibbons, 1998). The government has implemented initiatives to address gender inequalities, including teacher training and participatory workshops (Sibbons, 1998). Community involvement in school management aims to empower marginalized groups, particularly women, but structural and agency-related factors can constrain their participation (Sijapati, 2019). Nepal's diverse, caste-based society presents barriers to education across socioeconomic groups (Neupane, 2020). To address these challenges, a five-step approach for education policy formulation and implementation has been proposed, emphasizing in-depth analysis and outcome assessments (Neupane, 2020). This approach aligns with Nepal's new constitution, which mandates local government management of school education, enabling local institutions to design and implement pragmatic provisions for education development (Neupane, 2020).

In terms of school leadership, my study of FHTs demonstrated that they were honest, supportive, respectful, collaborative, and accessible. They delegated responsibility to other teachers and had friendly communication. This enabled them to achieve effective teaching and learning. However, FHTs complained that bureaucratic interventions and regular administrative work did not allow them to do much for pedagogical aspects. Their educational and managerial values include being democratic, collegial, a team worker, fair, transparent, and respectful. Even at times, they experienced difficulties putting the values of fair and transparent teamwork into practice. The FHTs revealed that they had tough times dealing with 'difficult stakeholders. Finally, they all found the head teachership challenging yet enjoyable.

My study FHTs shared the challenges they faced, such as a lack of physical facilities, a very high student-teacher ratio, a lack of funds, political pressure, and

unethical recommendations. They unhesitatingly confessed that one of the major leadership goals for them as head teachers was to achieve good results in public board examinations.

In Nepal, there are not many opportunities to encourage the development of effective teaching-learning techniques. The head teachers do not have the funding to provide teachers with financial incentives. High-achieving schools employ a variety of techniques to raise their resources so they can give teachers access to additional facilities like free snacks, supplementary administrative stipends, flexible work hours, etc. One of the important elements contributing to schools receiving better grades is the provision of additional facilities.

Most advanced countries, such as the USA, South Korea, and China, have distinct models of professional learning for preparing new Head Teachers, and there are also extensive ongoing professional learning models that recognize that leaders continue to need support to develop as more effective leaders (Caldwell et al., 2003; Daresh & Male, 2000, as cited by Salahuddin, 2012). In Nepal, to be a head teacher, the normal requirement is to have several years of teaching experience, but it is between government and private schools. Private schools require many years of experience besides the aptitude to lead; government schools ask for only a few years of teaching experience and a Master's degree in education, preferably.

Nepal's secondary schools need more professional training programs on principal leadership incorporating contextual factors needed for the effective and sustainable development of community schools. The government has started the journey to develop school leadership but needs to check the incorporation of local factors. One of the FHTs in this study received professional leadership training from the government only once, which is a good initiative.

FHTs can identify and overcome challenges to make their schools effective.

One of the study schools has a large number of students, which is much more than their allocated seats. Controlling the ratio is difficult for FHT because the number of teachers in a school is not allocated in terms of enrolment size. Whereas in other schools, the teacher-student ratio is between 1:5 and 1:10. FHTs play their role in solving the challenges that come from outside the school, such as administrative staff, parents, community members, other external forces, and special interest groups. The FHTs try to provide facilities for teachers and tend to overcome challenges, though they have limited finances and resources. This echoes the political, economic, social, and other leadership challenges facing community school head teachers in Nepal.

The shift from federal government administration to local governance in Nepal's education system has been influenced by historical, democratic, and international factors (Khanal, 2013). However, this transition has brought about a range of challenges, including the lack of competent educational particularly administrators at the local level (Kharel, 2017). The decentralization process has led to increased community ownership of schools but has also highlighted the need for capacity building and empowerment at the local level (Kharel, 2017). The existing teacher management system, which involves both a centralized agency and a decentralized model, has been criticized for its impact on the quality of education (Bhattarai, 2022). Despite these challenges, Nepal has made significant progress in establishing a national education system, with a focus on improving access, equity, and quality (Bhatta & Dahal, 2019). Changing the rules and regulations in school education has become urgent to overcome the colonial legacy. Policymakers and bureaucrats from different fields stand as barriers to these changes being made.

Head Teachers struggle to achieve their school's goals when they lack the autonomy to make decisions at the school level. They attempt to make sound decisions through consultation with stakeholders but are constrained by legal requirements to operate within certain parameters. This exemplifies the historical bureaucratic constraints imposed on school administrators by colonial bureaucracy, which prevented them from establishing successful schools.

The Head Teachers effectively lead and manage their schools to achieve this goal, indicating that they are successful leaders. This study's findings also emphasize a broad view of effective leadership, which includes team building, inspiring, leading, and mentoring teachers. This reflects international literature on how effective school leaders enable others in schools to take on leadership roles, inspiring and guiding them to achieve school objectives. (Salahuddin, 2012).

Performance of Female Head Teachers

The performance of FHTs in community schools is influenced by various factors that can either hinder or enhance their effectiveness as educational leaders. This critical and analytical discussion explores the challenges faced by FHTs and the success factors that contribute to their performance. It highlights the significance of resource management, the lack of support from stakeholders, social and cultural barriers, integrity preservation, gender biases, school culture and transparency, interpersonal relationships, and work-life balance.

Resources Management

Efficiently managing physical, human, and financial resources is crucial for FHTs to provide quality education and implement necessary initiatives (Hoy & Tarter, 2011). Limited resources pose challenges, requiring strategic allocation and prioritization to optimize their utilization and maximize outcomes (Bush & Glover,

2014). To navigate these complexities successfully, FHTs should strongly consider implementing a comprehensive resource management system that integrates real-time monitoring, data-driven decision-making, and collaboration among stakeholders. This approach would empower FHTs to make informed choices, adapt swiftly to changing circumstances, and ensure that every resource is aligned with the overarching goal of enhancing educational quality and impact.

Inadequate support

FHTs often face a lack of support from various stakeholders, including the local community, SMCs, governmental bodies, and parents (Starratt, 2005). This lack of support can limit their decision-making authority, impede the implementation of innovative ideas, and hinder their overall effectiveness as leaders (Hargreaves, 1998). To address this challenge, the FHTs should proactively engage in consistent and transparent communication with stakeholders, fostering a shared understanding of the school's vision, goals, and the rationale behind their decisions. By building strong relationships, involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, and showcasing the positive outcomes of their leadership initiatives, FHTs can cultivate a supportive network that amplifies their impact and advances the school's mission.

Social and Cultural Barriers

Social and cultural barriers can restrict the authority and influence of FHTs within the school and community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Traditional gender roles and stereotypes impact their leadership potential and the perception of their capabilities, creating challenges in attaining equal opportunities for advancement (Pounder, 2010). To overcome these barriers, FHTs should actively champion diversity and inclusivity within the educational environment. By advocating for gender-sensitive policies, promoting women's leadership, and providing mentorship opportunities, FHTs can

create a more equitable landscape that empowers all individuals to realize their leadership potential and contribute effectively to the school's growth and success.

Preserving Integrity

FHTs face the challenge of preserving integrity in the face of nepotism, unhealthy party politics, and impunity (Louis, 2007). Upholding ethical standards and combating corruption are essential for their performance and the overall integrity of the school (Oplatka, 2010). A potent practical step to address this challenge is to establish an independent and confidential reporting mechanism, allowing teachers, staff, and stakeholders to report any suspicions of corruption or unethical conduct anonymously. This empowers individuals to speak up without fear of reprisal, promoting a culture of accountability and ensuring that any concerns are thoroughly investigated and addressed, thus maintaining the school's ethical compass intact.

Gender Biases

Gender biases, including stereotypes and discrimination, undermine the credibility and qualifications of FHTs (Shakeshaft, 2011). Such biases limit their career advancement opportunities and create additional hurdles in their professional journey (Bascia, 1996).

The study by Murakami and Tornsen (2017) demonstrates that despite the success of female school leaders in their school performance, negative evaluations can arise from recruitment, hiring, and evaluation practices that do not fully recognize their contributions and uphold equitable processes in educational leadership.

Kerr et al. (2014) analyzed gender composition in school district positions in their study. Using U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data, the research assessed gender representation and progress in administrative roles. Findings revealed that while women's representation in administrative positions increased over time,

gender parity was not achieved by 2008. Many school districts had no women in administrative roles, and those with male-dominated workforces showed limited progress in achieving gender balance in administrative and principal positions.

To address these persistent gender biases and promote equitable opportunities for FHTs, it is essential to implement comprehensive gender-sensitive training programs. These programs should encompass topics like unconscious bias awareness, inclusive leadership strategies, and promoting gender equity in hiring and evaluation processes. By creating a learning environment that fosters awareness and understanding of gender biases, educational institutions can actively work towards eradicating such biases and ensuring that FHTs, regardless of gender, are evaluated, recognized, and promoted based solely on their skills, performance, and leadership capabilities.

Work-Life Balance

FHTs face the challenge of balancing work and personal life, impacting their overall performance and well-being (Nguni et al., 2006). Striving for work-life balance and addressing the demands of their leadership role are essential for their effectiveness as educational leaders (Portin et al., 2010).

Addressing the challenges faced by FHTs and embracing the success factors discussed can create a supportive environment that enhances their performance and promotes gender equality in educational leadership. Recognizing the importance of resource management, stakeholder support, overcoming social and cultural barriers, preserving integrity, combating gender biases, fostering a positive school culture, building interpersonal relationships, and achieving work-life balance are crucial steps towards empowering and enabling the success of FHTs in community schools.

To practically address the challenge of work-life balance for FHTs, educational institutions should implement a flexible scheduling policy that accommodates both

professional responsibilities and personal needs. This policy could include options for remote work, compressed workweeks, or flexible hours, allowing FHTs to better manage their time and commitments. Additionally, recognizing the unique needs of FHTs who are new parents, schools can consider establishing on-site childcare facilities, such as a children's care room, in cases of post-delivery. This would provide a supportive environment for FHTs to continue their leadership roles while tending to their parenting responsibilities during the crucial initial months. By fostering a culture that values work-life balance and offering concrete measures like flexible scheduling and childcare support, educational institutions can empower FHTs to thrive in their leadership roles, contributing to a more equitable and sustainable educational leadership landscape.

Head Teachership in Terms of Values, Visions, and Managerial Skills

The Head Teachership is a crucial position in educational institutions, and effective Head Teachers (HTs) must possess a combination of values, visions, and managerial skills to ensure successful outcomes. This study aims to review the Head Teachership in terms of these three components in the context of five different countries, namely Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA.

In Nepal, Head Teachers are expected to demonstrate strong ethical values and adhere to the cultural norms of the community (Shrestha, 2017). Similarly, in India, Head Teachers are expected to be role models and demonstrate values such as honesty, transparency, and accountability (Kaur, 2021). In China, Head Teachers are expected to prioritize social harmony, equality, and justice (Wang & Liu, 2021). In South Korea, Head Teachers are expected to have a strong sense of social responsibility and promote civic values (Lee, 2021). In the USA, Head Teachers are expected to uphold democratic

values, promote diversity and inclusion, and ensure the protection of students' rights (Lopez, 2021).

Head Teachers in Nepal are expected to have a vision of providing quality education to all students, regardless of their social status (Kandel, 2019). In India, Head Teachers are expected to have a vision of holistic education that promotes students' physical, emotional, and intellectual development (Sharma, 2021). In China, Head Teachers are expected to have a vision of innovation, excellence, and global competitiveness (Zhang & Shen, 2021). In South Korea, Head Teachers are expected to have a vision of promoting creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among students (Park, 2021). In the USA, Head Teachers are expected to have a vision of preparing students for a diverse, interconnected, and rapidly changing world (Thompson & Stokes, 2024).

Managerial skills refer to the ability to plan, organize, coordinate, and control the resources of the school to achieve the desired goals. Head Teachers must have strong managerial skills to ensure efficient and effective operations at the school. In Nepal, Head Teachers are expected to have good financial management skills and ensure proper utilization of resources (Bhandari, 2021). In India, Head Teachers are expected to have strong administrative skills and ensure compliance with regulations and policies (Jain, 2021). In China, Head Teachers are expected to have excellent human resource management skills and promote teacher development and well-being (Wang & Liu, 2021). In South Korea, Head Teachers are expected to have strong instructional leadership skills and ensure high-quality teaching and learning (Kim & Lee, 2020). In the USA, Head Teachers are expected to have strong leadership and communication skills, build a collaborative school culture, and use data to make informed decisions (Frazier & Sayles, 2021).

Effective Head Teachership requires a combination of values, visions, and managerial skills. The context of Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA demonstrates that while there may be some similarities, there are also significant differences in the expectations of Head Teachers in each country. Head Teachers must be aware of these contextual factors and adapt their leadership approach accordingly to ensure successful outcomes.

The examination of Head Teachership in Nepal, India, China, South Korea, and the USA reveals the critical role of values, visions, and managerial skills in the effectiveness of educational leaders. This study aligns with existing leadership theories, particularly transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders' values, inspirational visions, and strong managerial skills. The significance of values such as integrity, transparency, and empathy echoes the ethical leadership framework, which underscores the role of moral principles in building trust and relationships with stakeholders (Treviño & Brown, 2007). Additionally, the articulation of clear visions for education resonates with visionary leadership theory, emphasizing the importance of long-term goals and aspirations in motivating and inspiring stakeholders (Avolio & Bass, 2001). The need for strong managerial skills aligns with the managerial leadership perspective, highlighting the role of efficient resource management and administrative capabilities in effective leadership (Yukl, 2006). Furthermore, the contextual differences among the five countries underscore the importance of adaptive leadership, where leaders must consider the unique cultural and social norms of their settings to be effective (Northouse, 2018). In summary, this study reinforces the multifaceted nature of educational leadership and its alignment with various leadership theories, emphasizing the need for Head Teachers to possess a combination of values, visions, and managerial skills while adapting their leadership style to specific contexts.

Interpersonal Relations and Performance

According to a growing body of research, female leaders have been found to excel in the areas of performance and interpersonal relations. Several studies have revealed that companies with a higher percentage of women in leadership positions tend to perform better than those with fewer women in leadership roles (Hunt & Prince, 2020; Carter et al., 2020).

One of the key factors contributing to the success of female leaders is their ability to build strong relationships with their team members. Female leaders have been found to possess excellent communication skills and empathy towards their employees. By creating a sense of community within the workplace, female leaders can lead to higher levels of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and productivity (Eagly & Carli, 2021).

Research has also shown that female leaders tend to adopt a more collaborative and inclusive leadership style compared to their male counterparts. Female leaders are more receptive to diverse perspectives and ideas and are more likely to seek out and value the input of their team members. This leads to better decision-making and fosters a more innovative and creative workplace culture (Carter et al., 2020).

Female school leaders can be effective in community schools. Dotzler (1993) argues for greater visibility of women in school leadership, highlighting their valuable contributions to the education community. Benn et al. (2014) explore the role of female education leaders in disadvantaged rural schools, emphasising their efforts to promote social redress. Mulawarman and Komariyah (2021) examine women's roles and leadership styles in school management, finding that female Head Teachers adopt a democratic leadership style. Muzvidziwa (2014) discusses how women school leaders create socially just educational environments through creativity and transformational

approaches. These papers indicate that female school leaders can make positive contributions to community schools by addressing social injustices and promoting inclusive leadership practices.

Moreover, studies have suggested that organisations with more women in leadership positions tend to perform better financially. This could be attributed to the fact that female leaders prioritise the long-term sustainability of the business over short-term gains. In addition, their collaborative and inclusive leadership style leads to more effective problem-solving and decision-making, which ultimately drives business success (Henderson, 2020).

It is important to note that not all female leaders exhibit the same strengths and skills. However, overall, the research suggests that female leaders can be highly effective in terms of performance and interpersonal relations. By bringing a collaborative and inclusive leadership style to the table, female leaders can help create a more productive, engaged, and innovative workplace culture that benefits both employees and the bottom line.

Shaping School Culture and Collaboration

Collaborative decision-making practices are critical for effective leadership, and this is particularly true for female leaders in educational settings. Women have been socialized to be more collaborative and inclusive, and these traits can translate into successful collaborative leadership practices. Collaborative decision-making allows for diverse perspectives to be heard, which can lead to more creative and innovative solutions, as well as a greater sense of ownership and commitment among team members. This is especially important in schools, where collaboration can help to improve student outcomes and foster a positive school culture.

One of the FHTs mentioned,

“My approach to decision-making involves holding a meeting with all parties involved to gather their opinions and views. I believe that it is important to prioritize the happiness and satisfaction of the individuals within the institution and organization, which is why I encourage everyone to express their feelings. I value the opinions of all staff members, regardless of their level within the institution and organization. In some cases, power struggles may arise during the decision-making process. However, I make sure to handle these situations carefully. I sometimes involve students in the decision-making process because they are the ones that the organization ultimately serves. This not only gives them a sense of involvement but also leads to better ideas for the organization.”

The above reflection aligns with the principles of transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders seek to involve their subordinates in decision-making processes and empower them to express their opinions and ideas. By holding meetings and seeking input from all levels of staff, the leader in the text is creating a collaborative and inclusive work environment. In addition, by involving students in the decision-making process, the leader is exemplifying the transformational leadership practice of considering the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders.

Research has consistently shown that female school leaders are more collaborative and inclusive in their leadership practices than their male counterparts (Chesley et al., 2020; Kramarae et al., 2007). Female school leaders tend to use more participatory and collaborative leadership styles, which are conducive to collaborative decision-making. In one study, for example, FHTs in rural schools were found to be

more collaborative and inclusive in their decision-making practices, leading to greater job satisfaction and motivation among teachers (Chesley et al., 2020).

Transformational leadership theory is a suitable leadership theory for understanding the role of female school leaders in collaborative decision-making practices. This theory emphasizes the importance of leaders inspiring and motivating their followers to achieve collective goals. Transformational leaders are also known for their abilities to empower and develop their followers, which can facilitate collaborative decision-making practices. Female school leaders who utilize transformational leadership are more likely to build trust and respect among their staff, which can lead to greater commitment and motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

In addition to transformational leadership theory, the change theory of Lewin's model can also be linked to female school leaders and their collaborative decision-making practices. Lewin's model emphasizes the importance of collaboration and participation in the change process to facilitate successful change. Female school leaders, who are often more likely to use collaborative decision-making practices, can be particularly effective at implementing and managing change in their schools as discussed by Cummings et al. (2016) linking change theory to Lewin's.

Research studies conducted by various researchers have consistently shown that Female head teachers can significantly influence and promote positive school culture. Ngonyani (2017) found that Female Heads of secondary schools employed common leadership practices such as effective communication, teamwork, and being role models, which were perceived positively by teachers and students. Kimuya, (2021) also found that Female head teachers were positively viewed by teachers and students, and they encouraged goal attainment in schools. However, cultural and social barriers were identified as challenges for Female Heads of schools (Kimuya et al., 2021). Coleman

(2000) reported that Female head teachers in England and Wales often used a collaborative and people-oriented management style, and they were seen as approachable by girls, mothers, and female teachers. Overall, these findings suggest that Female head teachers can effectively contribute to school culture, but they may face challenges related to cultural and social barriers.

Female school leaders can be effective at implementing collaborative decision-making practices, which are critical for improving student outcomes and fostering a positive school culture. Transformational leadership theory and Lewin's change theory can both be linked to the role of female school leaders in facilitating collaborative decision-making practices. By leveraging these practices, female school leaders can inspire and empower their staff, leading to greater innovation, commitment, and success.

Transformative Leadership and Change Management

Effective control mechanisms are crucial for ensuring the smooth functioning of schools. With many stakeholders, such as students, parents, teachers, and administrators, schools must manage various resources, including financial, physical, and human resources, in a manner that promotes efficiency and effectiveness. In this context, the transformational theory and the change theory offer valuable insights into the role of effective control mechanisms in schools.

The transformational theory emphasizes the importance of leaders in transforming organizational culture and achieving excellence. According to this theory, transformational leaders inspire and motivate their followers to achieve higher levels of performance by fostering an environment of innovation, creativity, and collaboration. Transformational leaders are passionate about their vision, and they communicate this vision to their followers in a way that inspires them to strive for excellence. They also

empower their followers by providing them with the necessary resources, support, and autonomy to achieve their goals. In the context of schools, transformational leaders are those who inspire their teachers, staff, and students to work together to achieve a shared vision of excellence (Adhikari, 2019b; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016). The change theory, on the other hand, focuses on the process of change in organizations. It highlights the need for effective change management strategies that can help organizations navigate the complexities of change Jansson, (2013). Change is an inevitable part of organizational life, and schools are no exception. Schools need to constantly adapt and evolve to keep up with the changing needs of their stakeholders, such as new curriculum requirements, changing student demographics, and emerging technologies. Effective control mechanisms are essential in managing these changes in a way that promotes the interests of all stakeholders Nitta et al, (2009).

Effective control mechanisms can help schools achieve the goals of the transformational theory and the change theory by providing a structured and systematic approach to managing resources and processes. In this context, effective control mechanisms can be broadly classified into two categories: internal control mechanisms and external control mechanisms. Internal control mechanisms within schools manage resources effectively, including financial and operational controls. They help identify inefficiencies and correct them, promoting continuous improvement and innovation. External control mechanisms, such as accreditation standards and government regulations, ensure high standards of quality and accountability. These mechanisms promote trust and confidence among stakeholders, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.

Effective control mechanisms are crucial for ensuring the smooth functioning of schools. They provide a structured and systematic approach to managing resources and

processes, which is essential for promoting efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. The transformational theory and the change theory offer valuable insights into the role of effective control mechanisms in schools, highlighting the importance of leadership, innovation, and continuous improvement. By incorporating these theories into their control mechanisms, schools can promote a culture of excellence and innovation that benefits all stakeholders.

The challenges faced by FHTs, including resource constraints, lack of stakeholder support, social and gender biases, integrity preservation, and work-life balance, are well-linked to leadership principles (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Louis & Murphy, 2017; Mitchell & Tarter, 2011; Nguni et al., 2006).

Resource management, a fundamental aspect of effective leadership (Mitchell & Tarter, 2011), is highlighted to address resource constraints. The importance of stakeholder support corresponds with transformational leadership theory, emphasizing relationship-building and inspiring teams (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Overcoming social and gender biases aligns with contemporary research findings (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010), emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive training programs.

Preserving integrity underlines ethical leadership (Louis & Murphy, 2017) as essential, particularly in the face of challenges like nepotism and corruption. Addressing work-life balance, with suggestions like flexible scheduling and on-site childcare, aligns with leadership theories emphasizing leader well-being and empowerment (Nguni et al., 2006).

The positive impact of female leaders on school performance and interpersonal relations aligns with research emphasizing diverse leadership (Hunt & Prince, 2020). Control mechanisms are discussed, drawing from transformational and change theories to highlight their role in resource management and adaptation (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

The challenges faced by Female head teachers are multifaceted, encompassing cultural, economic, and social factors (Ghimire, 2023; Oyeniran, 2020; Shava, 2022). These challenges include gender biases, work-life balance issues, and resource management obstacles (Ghimire, 2023; Oyeniran, 2020). Despite these barriers, Female head teachers demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptability, fostering strong interpersonal relationships and enhancing collaboration within their schools (Ghimire, 2023; Oyeniran, 2020).

To empower these leaders, targeted support and policy interventions are crucial (Ghimire, 2023; Oyeniran, 2020). In conclusion, the performance of Female head teachers is shaped by a variety of factors, each influencing their ability to lead effectively. Cultural barriers can restrict their authority and acceptance within the community, while effective resource management is essential for providing the necessary tools and materials to support educational and administrative tasks. Gender biases persist in educational settings, undermining the credibility and confidence of female leaders. Additionally, balancing professional responsibilities with personal commitments remains a significant challenge, often leading to stress and burnout.

The strength of interpersonal relationships and the capacity to foster collaboration often distinguish successful Female head teachers from others. By nurturing a positive school culture and building strong partnerships with stakeholders, they create an inclusive and supportive environment that enhances educational outcomes. These factors highlight the complexity of their role and underscore the need for targeted interventions and support systems. Addressing these challenges holistically is essential for fostering an equitable and effective educational leadership landscape.

Female head teachers are fraught with multifaceted challenges stemming from cultural, economic, and social factors. These challenges include gender biases, work-

life balance issues, and resource management obstacles, which collectively shape their leadership experiences. Despite these barriers, Female head teachers exhibit remarkable resilience, leveraging strong interpersonal skills and fostering collaboration to enhance school environments. To empower these leaders effectively, targeted support and policy interventions are critical. By addressing cultural barriers, promoting equitable resource allocation, and combating gender biases, educational institutions can create an environment where Female head teachers thrive. Ultimately, nurturing inclusive school cultures and building robust partnerships are pivotal in supporting their ability to lead effectively and drive positive educational outcomes.

Chapter Seven

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

This chapter delves deeper into the insights gleaned from the preceding discussions and analyses. It discusses the key findings and explores their significance in the broader context of the study. Through reflection on the data, conclusions drawn, and implications identified, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the study's outcomes with their potential impact on performance of female headteachers in the educational institutions.

Discussion

Effective school leadership hinges on fostering positive interactions among Head Teachers, students, teachers, parents, and the wider community. Studies consistently demonstrate that high-quality school leadership can significantly enhance student learning and other key outcomes. However, the journey to becoming a School Head Teacher is fraught with challenges that render impact on personal lives of the school heads. Establishing strong relationships with students' families, teachers, and stakeholders, as well as engaging with colleagues and understanding the local community, is vital because these interactions, combined with hands-on experience and adaptation to workplace norms, are essential for developing the confidence and expertise required for effective leadership.

The global nature of the challenges faced by School Head Teachers, with a specific focus on Female Head Teachers (FHTs) in this study, is evident. FHTs bring unique approaches to school management, driven by their belief in their capabilities and their vision for creating optimal learning environment. Despite facing systemic and political challenges, FHTs have demonstrated unwavering commitment to improving

student outcomes. Their leadership is shaped by a dedication to fairness and professionalism, although they often encounter obstacles and must make compromises.

In the context of Nepal, FHTs play a pivotal role in shaping the educational landscape. Their effectiveness as leaders has significant implications for school performance, student outcomes, and overall educational quality. This research underscores the need for policies and strategies that support FHTs, ensuring they have the resources and authority to lead effectively and achieve the intended outcomes comparable to their male counterparts. Addressing these needs is crucial for fostering an environment where FHTs can thrive and make a meaningful impact on education of community schools.

Female Head Teachers (FHTs) significantly enhance school performance as indicated by research (Khanal et al., 2023). It reveals that schools led by FHTs achieve higher academic results, improved teaching practices, and better management. Their role in projects with organizations like the British Council highlighted their effectiveness in elevating educational standards through specialized training and mentoring with impact on both teacher instruction and student learning environments.

FHTs also advance gender equality in education as they challenge traditional gender roles and serve as role models for female students, inspiring them to consider leadership roles themselves. Their advocacy for gender-responsive policies—such as inclusive curricula and gender-sensitive teaching methods—addresses barriers to girls' education (Bhandari & Koirala, 2017; Karki, 2019). FHTs contribute to a culture of gender equality by promoting initiatives against gender-based violence and ensuring equitable resource allocation.

However, FHTs face significant challenges that affect their effectiveness: inadequate infrastructure, limited funding, and entrenched gender biases (Koirala &

Budhathoki, 2020; Prasad, 2021). Cultural norms and biases often undermine their authority and influence. Research indicates that female leaders navigate a mix of masculine and feminine traits to counteract stereotypes (Bhatti & Ali, 2021; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). Overcoming these obstacles requires targeted policies and societal changes to support FHTs and enhance their leadership.

Professional development is crucial for FHTs to improve their leadership skills. Training in areas such as instructional leadership, management, and pedagogy equips them to effectively manage schools and support teachers. Continuous professional growth helps them stay updated with educational trends and leadership strategies (Gyawali, 2021). Yet, barriers such as geographical and economic constraints can limit access to development opportunities (Khanal & Regmi, 2024). Addressing these barriers and providing tailored development programs, along with ongoing mentorship and networking, are essential for maximizing FHTs' impact.

Educational policies must focus on gender-responsive practices and inclusive hiring to support FHTs (Bhattarai, 2018b; Khanal & Regmi, 2024). Despite progress, implementation gaps and cultural norms still pose challenges (Khanal & Regmi, 2024). Policymakers need to address these issues by enforcing policies and promoting a supportive environment for FHTs. Reforms such as affirmative action and mentorship programs are vital for improving female representation and support in leadership roles (Kadel et al., 2019).

Engaging stakeholders, including government bodies, School Management Committees (SMCs), parents, and local communities, is crucial for strengthening the role of FHTs. Effective stakeholder engagement can facilitate resource mobilization, garner community support, and ensure alignment with local needs (Shakya, 2020). Addressing issues like insufficient infrastructure and limited decision-making authority

requires collaborative efforts and supportive training programs (Bajracharya et al., 2022).

FHTs in Kathmandu face challenges related to gender biases, cultural norms, lack of adequate support, and work-life balance. Overcoming these requires challenging societal attitudes and implementing supportive policies (Bhatt & Dahal, 2020; Dhakal, 2019). Improvements in infrastructure, support systems, and work-life balance are crucial for enhancing FHTs' effectiveness (Gyawali, 2021; Malla, 2017). Increasing female representation in governance and promoting gender equality through targeted interventions can drive broader societal progress (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021; Joshi et al., 2022).

Effectiveness of FHTs is contingent on professional development, supportive policies, and effective stakeholder engagement. Addressing their challenges and promoting gender equity is expected to contribute to a more inclusive and high-quality education system in Nepal.

Transformative Impact of Female Head Teachers: Gender equality in educational leadership significantly enhances decision-making and improves outcomes. Female head teachers play a pivotal role in this by challenging gender stereotypes and serving as role models, thereby creating a more inclusive educational environment. Despite facing considerable challenges such as gender biases, cultural norms, and inadequate support in Nepal (Bhandari, 2019; Ghimire, 2023), FHTs positively impact academic performance, especially for female students in fields like Science and Nepali (Joshi et al., 2022). Addressing these barriers through targeted interventions such as gender awareness training and policy reforms is essential for advancing gender equality in education.

FHTs are central to shaping community schools, implementing effective management strategies, fostering positive learning environments, and addressing local needs. Their effectiveness is often hindered by limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and societal biases. To ensure their long-term impact, it is crucial to focus on enhancing their professional development, improving resource access, and addressing gender biases. These measures will empower FHTs to overcome obstacles and maximize their positive influence on both schools and the education system.

The success of FHT-led schools in reducing dropout rates, increasing enrollment, enhancing academic performance, and improving teacher efficacy is notable. This success stems from the FHTs' adeptness in overcoming challenges, managing resources efficiently, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Promoting collaboration and networking among FHTs can amplify these achievements by enabling them to share effective practices and support one another, thereby enhancing their leadership capabilities and contributing to overall school improvement.

Effective monitoring and evaluation are vital for assessing FHTs' performance and impact. Regular assessments provide insights into strengths and areas needing improvement, ensuring that FHTs receive ongoing support to boost their effectiveness. Additionally, involving parents and the wider community in school activities enhances the quality of education, fostering and creating an inclusive culture, and supportive environment.

Despite their contributions, FHTs face challenges related to resource limitations and societal biases. Addressing these challenges through professional development and support strategies is crucial. FHTs bring valuable strengths—empathy, collaboration, and communication—that are critical for effective leadership. Focusing on these areas

will help ensure their continued success and the sustainability of community schools in Nepal.

The research underscores that FHTs in the Kathmandu Valley are transformative leaders who drive educational excellence and social progress. Their leadership, characterized by transparency, honesty, teamwork, and commitment, fosters inclusive and supportive environments. By challenging traditional gender norms and promoting a culture of inclusivity, they inspire students to increase learning outcome and advocate for equity.

Continuous professional development is essential for the sustained effectiveness of FHTs. Targeted training equips them with the skills and confidence needed to navigate school management complexities and drive educational innovations. Their dedication to self-improvement correlates with enhanced school performance as they apply new strategies to achieve academic excellence.

In instructional leadership and resource management, FHTs have demonstrated exceptional skills. Their approach to curriculum development and pedagogy, combined with strategic resource management, addresses the constraints faced by community schools. Their collaborative and inclusive leadership has significantly contributed to their schools' success.

In summary, Female Head Teachers are reshaping educational leadership in Nepal. By challenging gender issues, advocating for equity, and leading with vision and empathy, FHTs have improved educational outcomes and driven broader societal change towards gender equality and social justice. Their leadership is a transformative force within the educational system and beyond.

Interpersonal Relationships

Future research should investigate how female head teachers develop and maintain relationships with key stakeholders such as parents, local communities, School Management Committees (SMCs), and governmental bodies. Examining the methods FHTs use to engage these groups will provide insights into how they build trust and collaboration for making a meaningful partnership. This knowledge is essential for creating inclusive educational environments, meeting diverse student needs, and boosting community participation in school activities.

Leadership Styles

Future research should include a comparative analysis of leadership styles between male and female school leaders in Nepal. This study should investigate how various leadership approaches—such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership—impact key educational outcomes, including academic performance, student engagement, and school climate. By examining the unique contributions of female leaders, this research can contribute to enhance our understanding of gender dynamics in educational leadership and highlight how female head teachers influence educational experiences and outcomes.

School Culture

It is expected that future research should rigorously investigate how female head teachers influence school culture and climate. Studies should explore how FHTs foster positive, collaborative, and inclusive environments that enhance academic excellence. Additionally, research should examine the relationship between FHTs' leadership styles and the resulting school culture, focusing on how these factors impact student achievement, teacher morale, and community involvement. Understanding these dynamics will be crucial for enhancing the overall effectiveness of community schools.

Gender Stereotypes and Bias

Future research should investigate how gender stereotypes and societal biases affect the leadership experiences of Female Head Teachers. Specifically, it should examine how cultural expectations and entrenched prejudices shape perceptions of female leadership, hinder their effectiveness, and impact their career progression. Additionally, the research should explore strategies to challenge and overcome these biases, promoting a more equitable and inclusive approach to educational leadership. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing interventions that support gender equality in education and create a supportive environment for both female leaders and students.

Resource Allocation

It is equally important to explore how resource allocation influences the effectiveness of Female Head Teachers in delivering quality education. This includes examining how funding, infrastructure, and essential resources affect FHTs' ability to manage schools. The study should focus on the challenges posed by resource constraints, such as limited financial support, inadequate facilities, and restricted autonomy in decision-making and teacher appointments. Understanding these challenges will provide insights into how equitable resource distribution can empower female leaders to improve school performance.

Exploring these future research areas is crucial for understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by female head teachers in Nepal. Investigating how FHTs build relationships with stakeholders, comparing leadership styles, examining the impact on school culture and climate, addressing gender stereotypes, and analyzing resource allocation are expected to provide valuable insights.

Limitations

This study adopted a case study method to investigate the performance behaviors and practices of FHTs in community schools of the three districts of

Kathmandu Valley. However, due to the small sample size and the specificity of the setting, the findings may not be widely generalizable to other school settings where male Head Teachers are present. Nonetheless, the study confirmed the presence of transformational leadership in FHTs which could provide insights to inform further research on different types or styles of leadership.

While quantitative research aims to produce generalizable findings, case studies are primarily generalizable to theory rather than other populations (Marshall & Gretchen, 2006; Silva, 2008). The limitations of this study were partly due to its methodology. The original survey seeking participants was tailored to community school female leadership, thereby excluding perspectives from male leadership in the community school setting. The use of unstructured in-depth interviews with a small sample meant that some topics related to the five performance components were covered more extensively than others, and different themes might have emerged if all participants were asked identical questions. Furthermore, the interviews and focus groups involved individuals who could take the time to participate, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives.

I used a somewhat narrative inquiry, more of an approach to gathering detailed stories and descriptions of FHTs' experiences, showcasing both their successes and challenges. However, the lack of tough questions may have limited the depth of responses and made the respondents uncomfortable, which is another limitation of the study.

Future Research

To advance our understanding of the effectiveness of female head teachers in Nepal, this critical analysis has identified key areas for future research. By addressing these gaps, we aim to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and provide insights

that can inform educational policies and practices to support the effectiveness of FHTs in Nepal.

Conclusion

This study explored the performance of Female Head Teachers in community schools in Kathmandu Valley, focusing on their leadership practices, the school environments they create, and the challenges they face. The crucial roles of FHTs in promoting educational success through inclusive decision-making, building trust, and supporting professional development along with their transformational leadership style to foster collaboration, open communication, and provide personal support, positively impact both teachers and students.

FHT's dedication to achieving excellence, setting high standards, and cultivating a culture of ongoing improvement enhances inclusivity, well-being, and a sense of belonging, while challenging traditional gender roles and advancing gender-responsive practices in schools.

FHTs have encountered persistent challenges such as societal resistance, gender bias, limited resources, and political interference. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to implement leadership development programs that build confidence, improve decision-making, and enhance resource management. Additionally, strong community engagement and partnerships are necessary to provide support, foster collaboration, and mobilize resources.

FHTs are instrumental in transforming educational leadership creating positive school cultures and improving student learning outcomes. Addressing their challenges through targeted development programs and supportive policies is vital to maximizing their effectiveness. This study has provided valuable insights into the impact of FHTs, offering strategies to promote equity and improve leadership effectiveness. Future

research should further explore gender dynamics in educational leadership to inform policy and support a more inclusive education system.

My Reflection

In my study, Female Head Teachers (FHTs) are recognized as transformative leaders with a clear vision for the development of their schools. Their leadership transcends administrative duties, reflecting a profound commitment to holistic development and inclusivity in education. Driven by a strong sense of ownership, FHTs respond to challenges with resilience and a readiness to learn from conflicts, showcasing their capability as deserving leaders.

FHTs excel in cultivating inclusive school cultures by incorporating extracurricular and co-curricular activities that celebrate diversity and support student growth. Their leadership is marked by robust interpersonal relationships and a participatory decision-making approach, ensuring that the voices of teachers, students, and parents are valued within the school community.

Moreover, FHTs demonstrate innovation through the effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in teaching, creating interactive and engaging learning experiences. Their forward-thinking approach in integrating modern educational tools underscores their commitment to enhancing student learning outcomes.

Despite facing significant financial and infrastructural constraints, FHTs have managed the wise use of limited resources with exceptional skill. Their ability to optimize available assets highlights their resourcefulness and determination to improve the quality of School education.

Summarily speaking, female head teachers stand out for their visionary leadership, marked by a deep sense of ownership and remarkable resilience in

overcoming challenges. Their dedication to fostering inclusivity, implementing innovative educational practices, and managing resources efficiently is transformative for School education in the Kathmandu Valley. Their leadership not only elevates school performance but also sets a powerful example of progressive and effective educational practices.

To achieve meaningful and lasting school improvement in Nepal, it is imperative to actively support and advocate for female head teachers. Empowering these leaders through targeted training and strategic resource allocation is essential for driving robust school management, promoting gender equality in educational leadership, and creating high-quality, inclusive learning environments. This support will harness the full potential of female head teachers, ensuring they can lead schools effectively and inspire positive change across the educational landscape

Educational Implications

As articulating the practical applications of research is crucial especially in the context of school leadership by the female teachers, its impact is diverse given the substantial relevance for education policymakers, institutions, and various stakeholders.

Firstly, the study offers valuable insights into the essential traits and behaviors that define effective female school leaders in the Kathmandu Valley. This information can serve as a powerful tool for education policymakers to design targeted training programs tailored to develop these specific leadership qualities.

Secondly, identification of the barriers helps develop a comprehensive understanding of the hurdles that need to be overcome to achieve gender equality in leadership roles. This awareness is crucial for education policymakers to formulate policies and take initiatives that break down these barriers and promote a more inclusive and equitable leadership environment.

Thirdly, the research contributes significantly to the existing body of literature on educational leadership in developing countries, with a specific focus on the influence of gender and cultural factors on leadership practices and outcomes.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of raising awareness and fostering dialogue about gender diversity in educational leadership. It underscores the benefits of empowering women to take on leadership roles in the education sector. This message is crucial for policymakers and stakeholders, advocating for the development of a more inclusive and equitable environment in educational leadership.

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Appendices

School Profile

General School Information

School Background

School Type

Community Description

School Leadership and Management

- Leadership Structure
- Decision-Making Process
- Years of Experience as Head Teacher (Overall and at Current School)
- Years as a Subject/Class Teacher Before Becoming a Head Teacher

Financial and Resource Management

- Percentage of Government/Local Body Funding (for Public and Private Schools)
- Number of Staff Currently Employed
- Current School Enrollment (Total Number of Students)

Respondent Information

- Name and Age of the Respondent
- Highest Level of Formal Education Completed

Admission Criteria

- Criteria Considerations for Student Admission
- Key Informant Interview Guidelines for School Leaders

Leadership and Vision

- What is your core educational and managerial values? How do you incorporate these into your daily leadership practices?

- How do you evaluate your effectiveness as a leader and ensure alignment with the school's vision and goals?

Management of School Resources

- How do you manage teachers, staff, and resources to meet the diverse needs of your school community?
- What strategies do you employ for resource allocation and budgeting to support academic and extracurricular programs?

Professional Development and Support

- How do you ensure continuous professional development for your staff? What role do mentorship programs play in this process?
- Can you provide examples of how professional development initiatives have impacted teacher effectiveness and student outcomes?

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication

- How do you interact with and engage stakeholders, including parents, community members, and school management committees?
- What strategies do you use to foster collaboration and communication with various stakeholders to support school improvement?

Student Engagement and Learning

- How do you ensure that teaching methods address the diverse learning needs and styles of students?
- What strategies do you employ to promote active student participation and foster a positive learning environment?

Handling Challenges and Conflicts

- What challenges have you faced as a female Head Teacher/Principal, and how have you addressed them?

- How do you manage conflicts among staff or with stakeholders, and what strategies have you found effective in resolving these issues?

Inclusivity and Diversity

- How do you promote inclusivity and diversity within the school community? Can you provide examples of initiatives or programs aimed at creating a welcoming environment for all students and staff?
- What steps do you take to address and prevent instances of bullying or discrimination?

Strategic Planning and School Improvement

- What are your priorities for the school's improvement over the next three years? How do you plan to achieve these goals?
- How do you use data and feedback to inform your strategic planning and decision-making processes?

Self-awareness and Professional Growth

- How do you focus on your self-awareness and personal growth as a leader?
- What steps do you take to stay updated with educational trends and leadership practices?

Community Relations and Public Engagement

- How do you manage public relations and engage with the wider community to promote a positive image of the school?
- Can you share an example of a successful community engagement initiative and its impact on the school?

- **Interview Guidelines for School Teachers**

Your Name:

Your Job Position:

How long have you been working at this school?

1. School Culture and Leadership

- How does the Female Head Teacher (FHT) shape the school's culture and promote key values among students, staff, and the community?
- Can you provide specific examples of initiatives or actions by the FHT that have positively impacted the school's atmosphere and inclusivity?

2. Instructional Management

- How does the FHT approach instructional management and curriculum development to enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes?
- What are some successful strategies or initiatives implemented by the FHT that have led to improvements in instructional practices within the school?

3. Resource Management

- How does the FHT manage and allocate school resources to ensure they effectively support student needs and institutional goals?
- Can you describe a challenge related to resource management that the FHT faced and how she addressed it to benefit the school?

4. Interpersonal Relations

- How does the FHT foster positive relationships and effective communication among staff, students, and the wider community?
- Can you share an example of how the FHT used her interpersonal skills to resolve a conflict or disagreement within the school?

5. Public Relations

- How does the FHT engage with the community and stakeholders to build a positive image and promote collaboration?
- Describe a public relations initiative led by the FHT that successfully enhanced the school's reputation and relationships with external partners.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guidelines for Teachers

Assessing the Performance of Female Head Teachers (FHTs)

- Promoting School Culture and Values
- Influence on school atmosphere and values.
- Promotion of core values and principles.
- Instructional Management Practices
- Enhancement of instructional practices and curriculum.
- Strategies to address instructional challenges.
- Resource Management and Problem-Solving
- Allocation and utilization of resources.
- Handling of resource management challenges.
- Interpersonal Relations and Communication
- Building and maintaining effective relationships.
- Communication skills and conflict resolution.

Public Relations and Conflict Management

- Engagement with the wider community and stakeholders.
- Management of conflicts and issues involving staff or community.

Observation Checklist for Resources

Name of the School:

Date of observation:

Resource Category	Observation Items	Notes/Comments
Physical Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom facilities - Availability of teaching aids and materials - Classroom seating and other arrangement - Library and reading resources - Availability and condition of laboratory - Personal Hygiene (Availability of clean drinking water, toilets and washing area) - Playground (sports activity) 	
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of teaching staff - Qualifications and experience of staff - Support staff (e.g., administrative staff) - Teacher-student ratio 	
Financial Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budget allocation and utilization - Funding sources (government, grants, etc.) - Transparency in financial management 	
Technology & Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability and condition of ICT lab - Access to the Internet and e-learning tools - Audio-visual equipment 	
Extracurricular Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability of sports equipment - Clubs and activities offered 	
Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involvement of parents and community 	

Observation of School Activities

Activity/Interaction	Observation Criteria	Sources of Verification	Comments/Notes
Classroom Teaching & Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the availability of teaching resources • Support for innovative teaching approaches • Feedback provided to teachers after observation • Support for addressing classroom challenges • Encouragement of student engagement strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented materials • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Notice boards • Display boards • Interactions with Teachers, • Other sources 	
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Punctuality in starting and ending meetings • Effectiveness in leading discussions • Encouragement of participation • Clarity in communicating objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented materials • Meeting minutes • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Other sources 	
Result/Report Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness of report distribution • Accuracy and completeness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) 	

	<p>of reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recorded documents • Overall school environment • Notice boards • Interactions with Teachers, staff, and parents • Additional sources 	
Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization and management of assemblies • Ability to engage and inspire students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Interactions with Teachers, and students • Additional sources 	
Lunch Breaks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervision and order during lunch breaks • Encouragement of a respectful lunch culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Interactions with Teachers, and students • Additional sources 	

Sports Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for sports and extracurricular activities • Involvement in promoting physical education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Interactions with Teachers, and students • Additional sources 	
Admission Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and execution of orientation programs • Clarity of information provided to parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Interactions with Teachers, and students • Additional sources 	
Parents Dealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approachability and availability for parent meetings • Effectiveness in addressing parent concerns • Building positive relationships with parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment • Interactions with Teachers, and students • Additional sources 	

Teachers Dealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration with teachers and staff • Support for teacher professional development • Handling of teacher concerns and issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Recorded documents • Overall school environment • Notice boards • Interactions with Teachers, staff, and parents • Additional sources 	
Students Dealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with students in and out of classrooms • Approachability for student feedback and concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Overall school environment 	
Assessment and Progress Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of student assessment practices • Monitoring of student progress and performance • Support for differentiated instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Teachers, staff, and parents • Additional sources 	
Student Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability and accessibility of support services • Initiatives for addressing students' individual needs • Response to students' 		

	academic challenges		
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and implementation of teacher training • Opportunities for teacher growth and learning • Support for teacher collaboration and sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions with Female head teachers (FHTs) • Recorded documents • Overall school environment • Notice boards • Interactions with Teachers, staff, and parents • Additional sources 	